

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, December 09, 2024

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from Dr. Rai Ragbir, MP, Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, and Ms. Khadijah Ameen, MP, Member for St. Augustine, who have requested leave of absence from today's Sitting of the House. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

PAPERS LAID

1. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Eastern Regional Health Authority for the year ended September 30, 2016. [*The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh)*]
2. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Eastern Regional Health Authority for the year ended September 30, 2017. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
3. Audited Financial Statements of the National Infrastructure Development Company Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2019. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
4. Consolidated Audited Financial Statements of National Flour Mills Limited for the financial year ended December 31, 2023. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
5. Audited Financial Statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance Company Limited for the fiscal year ended December 31, 2023. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]

UNREVISED

6. Audited Financial Statements of Point Lisas Industrial Port Development Corporation Limited (PLIPDECO) for the financial year ended December 31, 2023. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
7. Consolidated Audited Financial Statements of Telecommunications Services of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the financial year ended March 31, 2024. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
8. Audited Financial Statements of the Port of Spain Shopping Complex Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2020. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
9. Audited Financial Statements of the Port of Spain Shopping Complex Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2021. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
10. Audited Financial Statements of the Port of Spain Shopping Complex Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2022. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
Papers 3 to 10 be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.
11. Administrative Report of the National Investment Fund Holding Company Limited as at December 31, 2023. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
12. Report the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Committee for the year ended September 30, 2007. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
Papers 1, 2 and 12 be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.

Mr. Indarsingh: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Member. Member. Please let us start off by complying with the Standing Orders.

13. Annual Administrative Report of the Caribbean Industrial Research Institute for the period October 01, 2019—

Mr. Indarsingh: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, could Couva South please be silent?

Standing Order 53.

Madam Speaker: Okay. So, Member, I hope this will be the last time—and I mean, apparently, the Member for Couva South does not recognize who he is because I see you are looking around—this way. All right? And I think you are being actively encouraged by the Member for Barataria/San Juan. So you will help him, please.

Dr. Moonilal: I will keep an eye on him.

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East, are you also in the—okay, so let us go, please.

13. Annual Administrative Report of the Caribbean Industrial Research Institute for the period October 01, 2019 to September 30, 2020. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
14. Annual Administrative Report of the Caribbean Industrial Research Institute for the period October 01, 2020 to September 30, 2021. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
15. Annual Administrative Report of the Caribbean Industrial Research Institute for the period October 01, 2021 to September 30, 2022. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
16. Annual Report of the Chaguaramas Development Authority for the year 2017. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
17. Annual Report of the Chaguaramas Development Authority for the year 2018. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]

18. Annual Report of the Chaguaramas Development Authority for the year 2021. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
19. Annual Report of the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended September 30, 2022. [*The Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Ayanna Webster-Roy)*]
20. Administrative Report on the Operations of the Fair Trading Commission for the financial year ended September 30, 2020. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
21. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Works and Transport to the Eighteenth Report of the Public Accounts (Enterprise) Committee on an Examination of the Audited Accounts, Balance Sheet and other Financial Statements of the Vehicle Management Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago (VMCOTT) for the financial years 2015 and 2016 and follow up on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Committee's Second Report, 12th Parliament. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
23. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Public Utilities to the Seventeenth Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Examination of the Reports of the Auditor General on the Financial Statements of the Regulated Industries Commission (RIC) for Financial Years 2014 to 2018. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
24. Draft Elections and Boundaries Commission Order, 2024. [*The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley)*]

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

REPORTS

(Presentation)

Dr. Lackram Bodoë (*Fyzabad*): Madam Speaker, I beg to present the following reports:

UNREVISED

National Carnival Commission's Management of Carnival 2023 Activities

Nineteenth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an examination into the role of the National Carnival Commission's management of Carnival 2023 activities and follow-up on the implementation of the recommendations made in the Public Accounts Committee's Twenty-Seventh Report, Eleventh Parliament.

Adequacy of Pharmaceutical and Non-Pharmaceutical and Other Supplies

Twentieth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an examination into the Adequacy of Pharmaceutical and Non-Pharmaceutical and Other Supplies by the Ministry of Health, Twelfth Parliament.

Management and Operations of SRRIC

Twenty-First Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on a follow-up inquiry on the implementation of the recommendations made in the Seventeenth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on the Management and Operations of the Secondary Road Rehabilitation and Improvement Company Limited (SRRIC), Twelfth Parliament.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House.

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you, again, Madam Speaker. There are seven questions for oral answer. We will be answering all. There are three written answers that have already been sent to the Clerk for circulation. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Leader, there are four questions for written answer.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Sorry, four. Sorry, four.

Madam Speaker: And all four have been circulated?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Madam Speaker: Yes. Okay. So, Member for Naparima.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Pharmaceuticals and Non-pharmaceuticals for Public Sector

(Details of Expenditure)

28. Mr. Lackram Bodoë (*Fyzabad*) asked the hon. Minister of Health:

With respect to the Ministry's expenditure on pharmaceuticals and non-pharmaceuticals for the public sector, will the Minister provide the following details for each financial year from 2020 to 2024:

- a) total expenditure;
- b) expenditure incurred for each Regional Health Authority; and
- c) expenditure for the Chronic Disease Assistance Programme (CDAP)?

Legal Fees and Settlements Paid by RHAs

(Details of)

29. Mr. Lackram Bodoë (*Fyzabad*) asked the hon. Minister of Health:

With respect to legal fees and settlements paid by each Regional Health Authority (RHA), will the Minister provide the following details for each financial year from 2020 to 2024:

- a) the number of cases settled along with the value of each settlement;
and
- b) the external legal fees that were paid for each settlement?

Maternal Deaths at Public Hospitals

(Number of)

30. Mr. Lackram Bodoë (*Fyzabad*) asked the hon. Minister of Health:

Will the Minister provide the number of maternal deaths that occurred at each public hospital in Trinidad and Tobago for the period October 1st, 2020 to September 30th, 2024?

Vide end of Sitting for written answers.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Country's Performance in Future Olympics Games

(Plans to Improve)

- 14. Mr. David Lee** (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) on behalf of Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*) asked the hon. Minister of Sport and Community Development: Further to the response provided to the House of Representatives to Question No. 12 on November 10, 2021, regarding the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, and the fact that Trinidad and Tobago did not medal in said games, will the Minister indicate the short, medium and long terms plans that are being put in place to improve this country's performance in future Olympic games?

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Sport and Community Development, the Ministry of Sport and Community Development's responsibility is to provide support to the national governing bodies, NGBs. These independent and autonomous organizations are responsible for the direction of their respective sport as stated in our laws. The Ministry oversees 54 different NGBs. These NGBs are responsible for long-term athlete development; talent identification; welfare strategies; coaching and preparation for local, regional and international competitions. Whether it is the Olympics, qualification tournaments or friendlies, the Ministry of Sport and Community Development, by extension the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, plays the role of facilitator, as we have been doing since the Ministry's inception.

The Ministry of Sport and Community Development's Elite Athlete Assistance Programme and the grant funding programme provide funding directly to athletes, clubs, NGBs and other sport-serving organizations. Athletes and NGBs also access funding through the National Lotteries Control Board, the Prime Minister's Sport and Culture Fund, and the Trinidad and Tobago Olympic Committee, all supported by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Over the years, throughout the tenure of this Government, we have contributed at least \$400 million towards the development of sport, and the advancement of our people through sport. The NGBs managed by the Ministry, which directly received financial support of \$328,494,083.23, include:

- The Amateur Swimming Association of Trinidad and Tobago
- Baseball/Softball Association of Trinidad and Tobago
- Billiards Sports Organization of Trinidad and Tobago
- Deaf Sports Trinidad and Tobago
- Futsal Association of Trinidad and Tobago
- Model Car Association of Trinidad and Tobago
- National Association of Athletics Administrations of Trinidad and Tobago
- National Ballroom Dance Association of Trinidad and Tobago
- National Basketball Federation of Trinidad and Tobago
- National Kickboxing Council of Trinidad and Tobago
- PKATT Sport Martial Arts Association of Trinidad and Tobago
- Special Olympics Trinidad and Tobago
- Surfing Association of Trinidad and Tobago
- Trinidad and Tobago All Fours Federation
- Trinidad and Tobago Sambo and Combat Sambo Federation
- Trinidad and Tobago Automobile Sports Association

- Trinidad and Tobago Blind & Visually Impaired Cricket Association
- Trinidad and Tobago Chess Association
- Trinidad and Tobago Darts Association
- Trinidad and Tobago Dragon Boat Federation
- Trinidad and Tobago Draughts & Checkers Association
- Trinidad and Tobago Game Fishing Association
- Trinidad and Tobago Hockey Board
- Trinidad and Tobago Karate Union
- Trinidad and Tobago Rally Club
- Trinidad and Tobago Rugby Football Union
- Trinidad and Tobago Squash Association

10.15 a.m.

- Tennis Association of Trinidad and Tobago
- Trinbago Muaythai Association
- Trinidad and Tobago Badminton Association
- Trinidad and Tobago Equestrian Association
- Trinidad and Tobago Jump Rope Federation
- Trinidad and Tobago Powerlifting Federation
- Trinidad and Tobago Association of Masters Athletes
- Trinidad and Tobago Bobsleigh and Skeleton Federation
- Trinidad and Tobago Bodybuilders and Fitness Federation
- Trinidad and Tobago Canoeing and Rowing Federation
- Trinidad and Tobago Cheer Federation
- Trinidad and Tobago Cricket Board
- Trinidad and Tobago Cycling Federation

- Trinidad and Tobago Football Association
- Trinidad and Tobago Golf Association
- Trinidad and Tobago Gymnastics Federation
- Trinidad and Tobago Olympic Committee
- Trinidad and Tobago Powerboat Association
- Trinidad and Tobago Rifle Association
- Trinidad and Tobago Scrabble Association
- Trinidad and Tobago Triathlon Association
- Trinidad and Tobago Volleyball Federation
- Trinidad and Tobago Amateur Boxing Association

Fifty-one bodies. For decades, schools and educators have been managing sport in schools on a voluntary basis. This Cabinet took the decision to revitalize sport—

Madam Speaker: Hon.Minister—

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you.

Madam Speaker:—your time is now spent. Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Mr. Minister, I understand the concept of giving funds, but is this funding tied to performance targets aligned to Trinidad's national interest, our Olympic ambitions?

Madam Speaker: Minister.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: If the appropriate question is posed, an answer could be provided through the NGBs.

Rio Claro HDC Developments (Flooding and Inadequate Drainage)

18. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) on behalf of Mr. Rushton Paray (*Mayaro*) asked the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Development:

Will the Minister 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?

Madam Speaker: 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, in Rio Claro there is no HDC housing development named, El Guanapo. The HDC housing development, which exists in Rio Claro, is named, El Guayanapo Housing Development, Rio Claro. Both, the Mora Heights Housing Development and the El Guayanapo Housing Development, were constructed on hillside terrain and are not prone to flooding, contrary to what the Member posited.

The corporation has no record of complaints of flooding. Unusual intense bouts of rainfall are being experienced within recent times. Fortunately, the drainage infrastructure, which has been constructed in these developments, removes water quickly. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mora Heights HDC Housing Development

(Bat Infestation)

19. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) on behalf of Mr. Rushton Paray (*Mayaro*) asked the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Development:

Will the Minister advise what, if any action is being taken by the HDC to address the infestation of bats at Mora Heights, Rio Claro?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Housing and Urban Development.

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you again, Madam Speaker. The Mora Heights Housing

Development, Rio Claro, is a forested area. Homeowners who live in this development signed agreements with the HDC, which specify that upon occupation, it is the responsibility of the homeowner to keep the property in good tenable condition. No action is required by the HDC because the Corporation has no legal responsibility to provide insect or animal vector control.

The HDC maintains that addressing the issue of bat infestation falls solely under the remit of the homeowner. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HDC Developments Rio Claro

(Provision of Deeds & Boundary Demarcations)

20. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) on behalf of Mr. Rushton Paray (*Mayaro*) asked the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Development:

With respect to the Mora Heights and El Guanapo Developments in Rio Claro, will the Minister provide the following:

- a) details of the process, complete with timelines for the delivery of deeds to residents under the “Lease to Own” arrangement;
- b) a detailed timeline for the application and approval of the necessary regulatory and statutory requirements to facilitate the provision of deeds to residents;
- c) details of the actions being taken by the HDC to address the boundary demarcation issues being experienced by residents;
- d) the plans of the HDC to improve its communication and accountability with the residents awaiting deeds and infrastructure maintenance; and
- e) details of the conflict resolution mechanisms that are being utilised by the HDC to address disputes arising between residents as a consequence of uncertain boundary demarcations?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Housing and Urban Development.

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Once again, Madam Speaker, I thank you. Madam Speaker, there is no such housing mechanism called, “lease to own”. The correct nomenclature is, “licence to occupy”. Further, as stated previously, there is no HDC housing development named, El Guanapo. The HDC housing development, which exists in Rio Claro, is named El Guayanapo Housing Development, Rio Claro. The parcel of land on which the existing El Guayanapo Housing Development has been constructed comprises 8.67 hectares, and has a yield of 122 residential units.

The parcel falls under the old common law title 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 the existing El Guayanapo Housing Development who have completed payments for their properties can therefore obtain titles or deeds to their properties. From the 122 residential units, 57 bona fide homeowners have applied for and received their deeds to date.

Madam Speaker, with respect to the Mora Heights Housing Development, Rio Claro, the parcel of land on which the Mora Heights Housing Development has been constructed, falls under the Real Property Act, Chap. 56:02. Under this Act, the process, it must take place before title documents can be provided to bona fide homeowners, involves inter alia, statutory approvals from stakeholders external to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development.

These are: the Town and Country Planning Division, final planning permission is required based on as-built drawings. Completion certificates to be granted by the relevant regional corporation. Duplicate, original, general and portion plans must be approved by the Director of Surveys. Subject to obtaining

items one to three, a memorandum of sublease is to be issued to bona fide homeowners for title, and a boundary demarcation exercise for the individual lots is to be done in the presence of the bona fide homeowner.

A response and final planning permission is expected from the Town and Country Planning Division in December 2024. Once satisfactory, the entire process is scheduled for completion within the next 12 months so that homeowners could obtain title documents and boundary demarcations for their properties. Further, the Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation, Facilities Estate Management Company Limited, better known as FEMCoL, a subsidiary of the HDC, has commenced the engagement of HDC residents through letters and community outreach.

The HDC has and will continue to undertake work on infrastructure and maintenance of drains until this responsibility is transferred to the remit of the regional corporation. The Corporation cannot address requests for boundary demarcations at the Mora Heights Housing Development, until such time that the duplicate, general and portion plans for the development, approved by the Director of Surveys are obtained by the HDC. However, the HDC has not had to utilize conflict resolution mechanisms for this development as there have been no reported disputes. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Govt's Commitment to CARICOM Agri-Food Systems Strategy

(Details of)

22. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) on behalf of Mr. Rushton Paray (*Mayaro*) asked the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries:

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?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries.

The Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Hon. Avinash Singh): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, on behalf of the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, I am pleased to inform this House that significant emphasis have been placed towards the improvement of the agricultural sector through initiatives such as the revitalization and modernization of key subsectors, such as rice, cocoa, coffee, coconut and livestock.

Madam Speaker, some of the actions taken by this Government to meet the regional goal of a 25 per cent reduction in the food imports by 2025 are as follows. One, enhanced production of targeted commodities. Rice: For the first time, through a collaboration with the National Flour Mills, rice farmers are benefiting from provision of contracts and a payment of an additional incentive for grade 1 and grade 2 rice, which has contributed positively to the development of the rice industry. Furthermore, there were improved paddy yields due to the supply of 200,000 pounds of superior, high-yielding, disease-resistant rice seeds, which were distributed to farmers in July 2023. This initiative renewed rice farmers interests

in increasing their production acreages and was a notable outcome of this country's signing of an MOU with Guyana.

In relation to coconut, the Ministry continues to target sector developmental initiatives, such as the surveillance of invasive species and the acquisition and distribution of superior coconut varieties to deal with the impeding threat of the red ring disease and red palm mite.

In relation to livestock, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries provided artificial insemination services and breeding stock to farmers to progress the production of livestock. Training was also conducted to build the capacity of our farmers through improved husbandry practices.

In relation to root crops, the Ministry conserved and improved germplasm plots for root crops, which allow for the distribution of planting material to farmers and research institutions, with the intent of increasing production. Construction drawings are in progress for the establishment of a processing facility for an alternative to wheat flour and pepper mash, which will transform local production into value-added products and promote import substitution.

In relation to vegetables, Madam Speaker, we have distributed over 7,000 pounds of vegetable seeds, which were provided to the farming community to improve production. In relation to fruits, the implementation of a bio-fertilizer and bio-pesticide trial allows for successful mitigation of pests and diseases resulting in increased yield and production. We have also assisted our agricultural community through enhanced infrastructure through the agricultural stimulus package, roads, bridges; agricultural irrigation systems have been developed.

Madam Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago has submitted the requisite reports for the reporting period, January to March, 2024, and April to June, 2024. Unfortunately, the report for the third quarter, July to September, remains

outstanding at this time. Notwithstanding this, increased dialogue and collaboration with the data collection agencies such as the CSO and NAMDEVCO, are ongoing and will allow for the submission of this outstanding report within one month's time.

Further, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries has been working of the enhancement of its data collection capabilities through increased digitalization to support data collection agencies, and ensure timely compliance with further reporting obligations. Madam Speaker, as I conclude, this Government continues to remain committed to achieving food and nutrition security and thereby, lowering the food import bill. Additionally, we will continue to work assiduously to improve the needs of our farming population and transform the sector into one of economic growth. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

10.30 a.m.

Integrated Social Enterprise Management System E-Pass

(Details of)

26. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Thank you again, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Mayaro, asked the hon. Minister of Social Development and Family Services:

With regard to the Integrated Social Enterprise Management System (ISEMS) E-Pass, will the Minister state:

- a) what are the key features of the ISEMS system, and
- b) how will ISEM improve the delivery of social services;
- c) what are the timelines for the full rollout of the ISEMS platform, including all planned functionalities; and
- d) how will the Ministry ensure data security and privacy during the migration process?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Social Development and Family Services.

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Social Development and Family Services, the key functionalities of the Integrated Social Enterprise Management System include:

1. The application, intake or registration process, which will include customizable forms for beneficiary data collection and the generation of unique IDs for applicants.
2. Eligibility assessment will allow for the quick verification of identities, using national databases with customizable eligibility criteria and automated scoring.
The conduct of the investigation and approval process will be supported by a structured approval workflow and the saving of eligible applications for further processing.
3. The benefits administration feature allows for the generation of payment lists based on programme criteria, the ability to impose restrictions, as well as the ability to integrate with third-party payment systems.
4. The case management feature will facilitate the processing of applications for an entire household, as well as process complaints and grievances related to applications and payments in real time.
5. The executive dashboard feature will offer customizable data visualisation and analytics, which will improve decision-making in real time; and
6. Data security which offers advanced user access controls and encryption.

The implementation of this management system will enhance social service delivery by automating and standardizing processes like application intake and eligibility assessments. This will reduce manual errors, improve operational efficiency and provide real-time data for better decision-making. The system's integration capabilities will also support collaboration with other agencies, enhancing service accessibility and data sharing across platforms. The timelines for the full roll out are as follows:

- Finalizing requirements and development of increment four, development of the web portal, reporting services and application programming interface to allow data sharing between Ministries, departments and agencies. This will commence in early January 2025.
- Training, system validation, disaster recovery, testing and user acceptance, between February to May 2025.
- Data migration and training of staff, May to June 2025.
- Trinidad and Tobago Cyber Security Incident Response Team system security review, evaluation and remedial works, June to July 2025.
- The launch of two pilot sites, August 2025.

Full roll out at all local board sites will depend on the outcome of the pilot phase.

Madam Speaker, data security and privacy are afforded top priority throughout the roll out of this system. The Ministry has worked closely with iGovTT, the vendor, Fujitsu Primergy and the Trinidad and Tobago Cyber Security Incident Response Team to implement stringent security measures, including, but not limited to:

- confidentiality clauses with the vendor;
- role-based access controls within the system;

- comprehensive security reviews and corrective actions before data migration; and
- continuous monitoring and support from the Ministry of Digital Transformation.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you Madam Speaker. Note that all seven questions today, came from this side, this side of the House.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Illegal Manufacture and Use of Motor Vehicle Licence Plates (Implementation of Regulations)

27. Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

Will the Minister provide the timeframe for implementation of regulations regarding the illegal manufacture and use of motor vehicle licence plates?

Madam Speaker: The Minister of Works and Transport.

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you, Madam Speaker, as I stand to address a question from on that side of the House.

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

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Works and Transport is in the process of drafting a policy regarding the manufacture and use of motor vehicle—

Madam Speaker: Order. Minister of Works and Transport.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Thank you, again. Madam Speaker, unfortunately, that side of the House is bothering that side of the House.

I start over Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Works and Transport is in the process of drafting a policy regarding the manufacture and use of motor vehicle licence plates, which will lead to the manufacturing of licence plates by authorized entities only. Over the period October 23 to 29, 2024, the Ministry held public consultations to elicit comments and questions to assist in finalizing the policy. By the end of December 2024, the draft policy will be submitted to the Cabinet for approval, after having been placed on the Ministry's website for public comment. Once Cabinet gives the approval, the policy will be submitted to the Chief Parliamentary Counsel at the Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs for preparation of the regulations, which are estimated to be completed within three months. I thank you.

TOBAGO ISLAND GOVERNMENT BILL, 2021

[Second Day]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, you will recall that the Tobago Island Government Bill, 2021, was last before the committee of the whole on June 30th, 2021. The Bill having been carried over to this Fifth session on July 3rd, 2024, the House will now continue the committee stage of the Bill. The Bill has 61 clauses and two Schedules.

House in committee.

[*Chairman: Mrs. Annisette-George*]Clauses 1 to 61.

Question proposed: That clauses 1 to 61 stand part of the Bill.

Madam Chairman: Yes, Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Good morning, Madam Chairman. Madam Chairman, this morning, about an hour ago, we received a correspondence coming out from the Office of the Chief Secretary in Tobago, with a document entitled "Aide-mémoire" that was sent to the Opposition Leader. I believe it was also sent to the Prime Minister; a

press conference was held this morning. Madam Speaker, what is contained in this document is that there is really an issue raised with respect to consultation and further consultation with respect to this Tobago Island Government Bill. In particular, Madam Speaker, what they outlined is basically come clauses in the Bill that may violate core principles of self-determination at the current administration of the THA. Madam Chairman, we have genuine concern with respect to this particular manner in which we are conducting today's business because the Chief Secretary is raising serious concerns, and at the end of it, he asked that they do not proceed further with this particular Bill because this serves as the companion Bill to the constitutional amendment Bill. So without the passage of that first Bill, because this came in packages, this Bill will not be able to stand on its own because you need the constitutional grounding for this particular Bill.

Madam Chairman: Prime Minister.

Dr. Rowley: Madam Chairman, I am shocked that the Member for Barataria/San Juan could so cavalierly intervene in the parliamentary proceedings to play this game. Madam Chairman, the matter before us is a matter that has been in the public domain for years and in this House for years. We last met in this House on a debate. We are now in the committee stage. As I sit here, Madam Chairman, two minutes ago I saw a WhatsApp on my phone from the Chief Secretary. That is what the Member is talking about, that the Chief Secretary of the THA is now intervening in that matter, offering 8 pages of legal—I do not know who the lawyers are—telling the Parliament to stop its proceedings because he, through the Member for Barataria/San Juan, and other persons, have found another way or other things to be done under the rubric of consultation, Madam Speaker. How did we get here, if not by a series of years of consultation? And then, as I sit here, this minute, on my phone, I get a WhatsApp.

The laws of this country provide a mechanism for the Chief Secretary to communicate with the Office of the Prime Minister on matters for Tobago. Nothing has come to me from the Chief Secretary in my office, but today in the Parliament, one minute before, as we sit to deal with the committee stage of a joint select committee, of years of work, this Member comes here facilitating this intervention by a WhatsApp, by amendments being proposed by the Tobago House of Assembly through the Chief Secretary. Madam Chairman, this is preposterous.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Rowley: And I will have none of it.

Dr. Moonilal: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: Well, there was something said and there was a response. So, I do not see the need for a further reply. We are in committee stage. I have not before me any amendments circulated by anyone. So, I think at this stage we will proceed. I do not know of any other—

Dr. Moonilal: I just seek clarification from the Prime Minister who made a statement.

Madam Chairman: Well, I believe the Prime Minister's statement was in response to something else that was said and you—

Dr. Moonilal: But, we seek a point of clarification that is all.

Madam Chairman: Yeah, but on what? There is—

Dr. Moonilal: I just—

Madam Chairman: If it is on one of the 61 clauses, I will allow it.

Dr. Moonilal: The one that deals with self-determination. Madam Speaker, one second. Madam Speaker, then could I relate my query to clause 5?

Madam Chairman: Okay, so therefore, we put clauses 1 to 4 and then we will do clause 5.

Clauses 1 to 4 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 5.

Question proposed: That clause 5 stand part of the Bill.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Madam Chairman, this particular clause deals with the executive council jurisdiction for administration and in subsection 2:

“The exclusive administrative jurisdiction...”

—et cetera, et cetera. In the context of this clause, could I ask the Prime Minister and the Government whether or not they are in agreement with the THA’s submission, that it violates the very principle of self-determination? And whether or not the position of the Government is to ignore completely the submission by the THA on these matters?

10.45 a.m.

Madam Chairman: Okay.

Dr. Moonilal: If it is that we ignore completely their submission, then the Prime Minister can indicate that this morning we will continue our proceedings by ignoring completely the new administration in the THA and their submissions on this matter as to the critical issue of self-determination as outlined in clause 5(2).

Madam Chairman: So, Member for Oropouche East, there is no submission, and the only submission at this stage could be in terms of an amendment. There is no such thing before us, okay? So, I have given you the opportunity in the best spirit that I could.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chairman, if I may.

Madam Chairman: The Government would like to respond.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: If I may, Madam Chairman. Madam Chairman, may I

indicate that this clause exists only in the context of the Constitution (Amdt.) (Tobago Self-Government) Bill that is to come which is also in the committee stage.

In addition to that, Madam Chairman, clause 18 of the Constitution (Amdt.) (Tobago Self-Government) Bill states quite clearly how this clause is to operate. So, Madam Chairman, I concur with what you have just said, it is not an amendment before us, and, Madam Chairman, we would like to proceed.

Madam Chairman: Okay, and just so that we are going forward, there is only one Bill before the committee at this stage, so I would like everyone to confine any matter to the Bill that is before the House, okay?

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 5 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 6 to 61 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

First and Second Schedules 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 amendments.

Question put: That the House agree with the committee's report.

Madam Speaker: The Minister of Housing and Urban Development.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Division, Madam Speaker. They said no.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Rowley: Division?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: We could have a division now.

The House divided: Ayes 20 Noes 10

AYES

Robinson-Regis, Hon. C.

Rowley, Hon. Dr. K.

Imbert, Hon. C.

Young SC, Hon. S.

Hinds, Hon. F.

Deyalsingh, Hon. T.

Al-Rawi SC, Hon. F.

Beckles, Hon. P.

Webster-Roy, Hon. A.

Cudjoe-Lewis, Hon. S.

Gadsby-Dolly, Hon. Dr. N.

Gonzales, Hon. M.

Mc Clashie, Hon. S.

Cummings, Hon. F.

de Nobriga, Hon. S.

Scotland SC, Hon. K.

Leonce, Hon. A.

Morris-Julian, Hon. L.

Richards, K.

Monroe, R.

NOES

Lee, Mr. D.

Moonilal, Dr. R.

Indarsingh, R.

Bodoe, Dr. L.

Hosein, S.

Charles, R.

Tancoo, D.

Mohit, V.

Ram, A.

Seecheran, Dr. R.

Question agreed to.

Question put: That the Bill be read a third time.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Division.

The House divided: Ayes 20 Noes 10

AYES

Robinson-Regis, Hon. C.

Rowley, Hon. Dr. K.

Imbert, Hon. C.

Young SC, Hon. S.

Hinds, Hon. F.

Deyalsingh, Hon. T.

Al-Rawi SC, Hon. F.

Beckles, Hon. P.

Webster-Roy, Hon. A.

Cudjoe-Lewis, Hon. S.

Gadsby-Dolly, Hon. Dr. N.

Gonzales, Hon. M.

Mc Clashie, Hon. S.

Cummings, Hon. F.

de Nobriga, Hon. S.

Scotland SC, Hon. K.

Leonce, Hon. A.

Morris-Julian, Hon. L.

Richards, K.

Monroe, R.

NOES

Lee, Mr. D.

Moonilal, Dr. R.

Indarsingh, R.

Bodoe, Dr. L.

Hosein, S.

Charles, R.

Tancoo, D.

Mohit, V.

Ram, A.

Seecheran, Dr. R.

Question agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a third time and passed.

CONSTITUTION (AMDT.) (TOBAGO SELF-GOVERNMENT) BILL, 2020

[Third Day]

The committee of the whole House resumed its deliberations on the Bill.

[*Chairman: Mrs. Annisette-George*]

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, you will recall that the Constitution (Amdt.) (Tobago Self Government) Bill, 2020 was last before the committee of the whole on June 30th, 2021 the Bill having been carried over to this Fifth Session on July 3rd, 2024. The House will now continue the committee stage of the Bill. This Bill has 21 clauses and a preamble.

Hon. Members, there are amendments being circulated, I think at this stage

we will suspend. We will resume at 11:10 which will give—

Mr. Lee: Madam Chair, just before we suspend. In the last sitting when we did the committee stage for this Bill, I am just seeking clarity, did we not do clauses 1 to 4? I am just seeking clarification. Are we doing all over?

Madam Chairman: I believe having regard to the time lapse, the more prudent route is to start afresh with calling all of the clauses.

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, we are suspending for 10 minutes.

Madam Chairman: Ten minutes.

Dr. Moonilal: After all these years that is preposterous.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So, this committee is now suspended to 11:10.

10:59 a.m.: *Committee suspended.*

11.10 a.m.: *Committee resumed.*

Madam Chairman: This committee meeting is now resumed. I believe the amendments have been circulated.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes, Ma'am.

Clauses 1 to 11.

Question proposed: That clauses 1 to 11 stand part of the Bill.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Yes, please. Madam Chair, firstly, with respect to clause 4—so is it that we will have to call clauses 1 to 3 first?

Madam Chairman: All right. Let me just ask this. Could the Whip indicate if there are any particular clauses except the ones for amendment? So you could pass a note to the Whip so that we will know if there are any clauses, other than the ones for the amendments, that you wish to seek clarification on, because I do not have any other amendments here.

Clauses 1 to 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 4.

Question proposed: That clause 4 stand part of the Bill.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chairman, with respect to this particular amendment, it deals with, in particular—

Madam Chairman: Amendment?

Mr. Hosein: Sorry. Well, the amendment to the Constitution, sorry. Let me put it this way. Clause 4 deals with an amendment to the preamble of the Constitution.

Madam Chairman: Yeah.

Mr. Hosein: Yes. This, really, is an insertion of two further preambles or two clauses to the preamble in the 1976 Constitution and, Madam Chairman, the reason I am raising this is because the first amendment deals with:

“...the right to self-determination for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, including the right of the people of”—the island of—“Tobago to determine...”—its—“...political status and to freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development;”

The reason I raised this as a concern, Madam Chairman, is this. When—and it is tied back to the previous Bill that we did also. We had raised concerns that the Bill does not achieve what the Constitution—this constitutional amendment is saying, in that, the right to self-determination is not achieved by that former Bill, which is really to give it that right. So, is this really a true reflection of what the Bill is intending to do? Because we are dealing here with a declaration saying, “Okay, Tobago has the right of self-determination, but the law that was just passed does not give that particular right of self-determination.” And we had raised issues in particular with clause 5 of that Bill. So this, I am suggesting, is not a proper reflection of what the Bill is achieving.

Madam Chairman: So, which Bill are we dealing with? There is one Bill before us.

Mr. Hosein: Clause 4 of this Bill.

Madam Chairman: Yes, and that is all that is before us.

Mr. Hosein: Yes.

Madam Chairman: But, you know, if I understand well, your submission, you are talking about something that has already been done. All right? So we are not dealing with that because that has already been done.

Mr. Hosein: I am objecting to clause 4 in this Bill, because while the intention of the Bill, this Constitution (Amdt.) (Tobago Self-Government) Bill, is saying, “Give the right of self-determination,” the law is not really giving them the right to self-determination. Central government will still have a stronghold over the Executive arm—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: A stranglehold.

Mr. Hosein:—a stronghold over the Executive arm, and a stranglehold over the Executive arm of the newly constituted Assembly, and that is our issue here, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Member for Arouca/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very kindly, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, does the Member have an amendment, or does the Member have anything that he would like to say that would change what we have before us?

Mr. Hosein: No. I am just asking you to clarify.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chairman, we have placed this before the committee. We are asking if the Member has an amendment. If he does not have an amendment, I think this is very clear.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: In committee stage, we ask for amendments.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes, really, and you have been here for quite some time. We are asking if the Member has an amendment. If the Member does not have an amendment, then, Madam Chairman, I would like us to proceed, please. Thank you. I never said not to speak. You can speak for as long as you wish.

Madam Chairman: So I have allowed sufficient time to ventilate the concern and for a response.

Clause 4 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 5.

Question proposed: That clause 5 stand part of the Bill.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Madam Chairman, this is in relation to subclause (b). So it is clause 5(b), which now is the insertion to a new subsection (10). So, Madam Chair, we just got the amendments that the Government circulated—extensive amendments—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: In 10 minutes.

Mr. Hosein:—in less than 10 minutes, and at page 4, I am now seeing that there is a definition of “Tobago” that is different from the definition of “Tobago” in this clause. So the amendments that were circulated, it includes now a nautical distance from the watermark, from the territorial seas, right, Madam Chair? And that is absent from clause 5(b). So is it that you have to put a consistent definition with respect to Tobago here? I mean, this is really preposterous that we are getting this very short time to study these extensive submissions and now we are seeing inconsistencies reflecting in the original Bill.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Chairman: Member for Arouca/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chair, just to indicate if the Member for Barataria/San Juan had read the Bill—he had three years to do that—he would see that it is in the Bill.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: The definition—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Sorry, excuse me. The definition is in the Bill, and has been there since 2020. Then 2021, when we debated the Bill, it has been in this Bill.

Mr. Hosein: Madam Chairman—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: So, Madam Chairman, I am not understanding what the Member is trying to say.

Mr. Hosein: Madam Chair, I just want to be on the same page—

Madam Chairman: Just one minute—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chair, in addition to that, the persons who had sent information to the hon. Prime Minister by WhatsApp, these are some of the concerns that they raised, and so we have taken their concerns on board, including the letter that was sent since 2021. These are the concerns that were raised. And, Madam Chairman, if they are the mouthpieces for the TPP, then, Madam Chairman, they should be well aware of what is before us today.

Dr. Rowley: Madam Chairman—

Mr. Hosein: Madam Chairman, can I respond?

Madam Chairman: One minute. Prime Minister, and then I will take the Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Dr. Rowley: Madam Chairman, I just want, for the record, to make it abundantly

clear—because I see an attempt to put information in the public domain by suggestion in the House. These amendments that are here now today, which my colleague from Siparia and Barataria/San Juan are fuming about only just getting, and the Government's amendments, Madam Chair, these are not new amendments put here by the Government. These are the amendments that arose from the communication that was put here in the last bit of work.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Madam Chairman: Listen. Listen. Everybody, once they catch my eye, will get an opportunity to speak. Prime Minister.

Dr. Rowley: On the last occasion towards the end of the debate—because this committee was preceded by extensive debate, and the Members on the other side were here and took part at that debate. At that time, these suggestions came from the Tobago House of Assembly as their recommendations for amendment to the Bill that was being debated. So, I find it quite strange that Members of the House could be here now pretending that these are unknown to them, and that it is the Government springing some surprise on them. Madam Chairman, this is quite—I do not want to impute any improper motive, I am just wanting the record to be very clear. These are not any amendments put by the Government at the last minute. They are part of a continuation, dating back almost 30 months.

Madam Chairman: Member of Siparia, did you want to speak? Okay. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Madam Chairman, I just want to correct the record. The reason why we suspended the committee was to get new amendments.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hosein: So whatever the Prime Minister is saying, I really do not understand. These are four pages of new amendments that are going to amend the existing Bill.

Madam Chairman, the Bill that I have in front of me is the 2021 Bill. The Member for Arouca/Maloney referred to this definition being there. I am looking at the Bill at clause 5(b), and then I am looking at page 4 of the new amendment and I am seeing two different definitions of “Tobago”, and that is the concern. I know the Member has a problem with mathematics, but I do not think it is English now.

Dr. Moonilal: It is English as well, and banking.

Mr. Hosein: Madam Chairman, this clearly shows a discrepancy with respect to the definition of what “Tobago” is. They are now including:

“‘Tobago’ means...eleven nautical miles from the nearest point of that low watermark...”

—in the amendment, the new amendment that was circulated this morning.

Dr. Moonilal: Like a thief in the night.

Mr. Hosein: But in clause 5(b), you have a definition of “Tobago”, but it does not include that.

11.25 a.m.

Madam Chairman: Yeah, but remember Member, we are still here at 5 (b).

Mr. Hosein: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Alright? So, we are not dealing with a clause to come, we are dealing with 5 (b).

Mr. Hosein: So, is it that we are going to then amend 5 (b) to be consistent?

Madam Chairman: I would not know.

Mr. Hosein: Can I ask through you?

Madam Chairman: I think you have asked, and your friend has answered on the other side with respect to what is here before us. Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Chairman, just very simply to endorse what my colleague, Barataria/San Juan, said—because I was a Member of this said

Committee, and I find it very challenging here this morning, to be bombarded with these amendments, and these amendments are fundamental to the people of Tobago's interest.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Indarsingh: And that is I would ask the Government to reconsider its approach to this whole process this morning.

Madam Chairman: Member for Arouca/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. If the Member for Couva South has looked at the amendments, the amendments are 90 per cent nomenclature. Changing "Tobago Island Government" to "Tobago Island Council"—

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Madam Chairman: Remember—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: And, Madam Chairman, we are not there as yet.

Madam Chairman: But remember we are just 5.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Clause 5.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: And we are not there as yet.

Mr. Indarsingh: [*Inaudible*] Members of the Committee are very concerned about the Government.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: But, Madam Chairman, the Member should not be concerned, because on the last day—

Mr. Indarsingh: Yeah, we should be concerned about this entire Government in terms of its track records.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chairman, you would re—

Madam Chairman: Member for Arouca/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis:—well, you would recalled that on the last day when we suspended the committee stage, it is because the current Chief Secretary, Mr. Hochoy Charles, may his soul rest in peace, sent a letter to all Members of this House, that indicated some concerns that they had, and we stopped the committee stage at that point. We examined what was necessary and, Madam Chairman, we made the changes. So, I cannot understand what my friends are taking about, and if they have no amendments, I would really like us to proceed.

Madam Chairman: Alright, Member for Oropouche East, and this is last the intervention.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Let me just raising this very serious issue, because I think this is fundamental to this matter. I have in my hand the Bill, the Constitution (Amdt) (Tobago Self-Government) Bill, 2020, amendment 5 (b). I just want to it read it into the record. It says:

“by inserting after subsection (9), the following subsection:(10) For the purposes of sections 53, 75, 75A and Chapter 11A, a reference to ‘Tobago’ means the Island of Tobago, Little Tobago, St. Giles Island, Marble Island, Goat Island, Sisters Island and the internal and inland waters of Tobago.”—

In our amendment—which they took 10 minutes’ break and then brought for us—it says, and I wish to read the amendment.

Madam Chairman: Yeah, but the difficulty I am having is that we are at clause 5(b). We are not at any other clause, alright? I mean you are experienced, I am sure you understand the position, and I am sure Member for Oropouche East, you would be able to redirect yourself at the appropriated time for what you would like to raise. But we are at clause 5(b).

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Chairman, we are clause 5, I am just asking. They are

deleting what was there in the Bill to bring an amendment, and the amendment is fundamentally different. So, I am at clause 5 of the Bill. The amendment is fundamentally different. The Government is saying it is the same thing. I read already the initial Bill, and I am now reading the amendment.

Madam Chairman: And the amendment is not to clause 5 which we are at.

Mr. Hosein: It will amend that further down [*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: So all I am saying is—

Dr. Moonilal: But it will amend the section 5—

Madam Chairman: —there is nothing here pointing me to clause 5, there is nothing here. You might be a little more fortunate than me, but I am just at clause 5. Okay?

Dr. Moonilal: Okay. Madam, we will determine in a few moments.

Dr. Rowley: Madam Chairman, I need your assistance here. It appears as though from what my colleague has said, that we are having problem with the English language, because how could an amendment be the same thing? An amendment by its very nature and definition means—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Rowley:—it will not be—they are talking about two definitions and one is different from the other, that is why it is called an amendment.

Clause 5 ordered to stand part of Bill.

Clauses 6 and 7 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 8.

Question proposed: That clause 8 stand part of the Bill.

Madam Chairman: Member for Arouca/Maloney. Oh, sorry, Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much. Madam Chairman, clause 8 now indicates

that there will be:

“...Tobago Legislature may make laws for the peace, order and good government of Tobago with respect to the matters as prescribed.”

So, therefore, they are not going to be making laws as general as the national Parliament, so that “Legislature” is in fact limited, in terms of what it can pass and what is Schedule. What is Schedule will be set out in another place in the Bill, which I may not be able to go to in terms of amendments. Madam Chairman, what is one of the concerns is that, while in the preamble which just passed is giving both Trinidad and Tobago equality of status, and state, and self-determination. These laws that the “Tobago Legislature” will pass are actually going to be law, subordinate laws, to what the national Parliament pass. So, it is not going to be that there is an equality of status with respect to the “Tobago Legislature”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hosein: So, again, this in itself does not achieve what the Government’s narrative is. They are just fooling people with the amendment, please, Madam Chairman.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Chairman: Member for Arouca/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you, Madam Chairman. In this entire JSC the objective was to give Tobago additional powers, powers that they do not now have. Madam Chairman, the objective was not to have a separate Tobago from Trinidad. So, the law-making powers that govern Trinidad and Tobago as a country will continue to be done in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. The law-making powers that are within in this piece of legislation, and we have said it here very clearly in clause 8(3):

“The power of the Tobago Legislature to make laws shall not extend

to-

- (a) altering the provisions of this Constitution; or
- (b) any of the matters set out in Chapter 1 of this Constitution.

- (4) Where a Tobago Act is inconsistent with an Act passed by Parliament, the Act passed by Parliament shall prevail to the extent of the inconsistency.”

So, Madam Chairman, it is clear that “Tobago Legislature” may make laws and we have said in 8(2):

“...for the peace, order, and good government of Tobago with respect to the matters as prescribed”.

Madam Chairman, that was determined by the JSC, that was determined in all the consultations we have done, and consequently, we have no difficulty because it is in fact, to make laws for Tobago not Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Just in response to previous Member statements about the intent and what happened at the JSC. What I am about to say in relation to all clauses, so I will not have to trouble the Chair, any further, after making comment.

Madam Chairman: Once it is on the current clause that we are looking at.

Mr. Rambally: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Rambally: It is in direct response to what previous Member has said. In terms of the consultation, Madam Chairman, I have maintained and I will continue to maintain that notwithstanding that this may have been idly standing on the Order Paper for three years, and et cetera, and what Members on the other side believe

should have happened. The people Tobago and Trinidad continue to insist that they wanted more consultations, regardless of what clauses we are debating here.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Rambally: So, Madam Chairman, I just want to put that on the record. What could be possibly wrong with allowing the persons to have their voices, and we all know why it is—

Madam Chairman: Member, remember, we are at a particular clause. I do not think people remembering what we do in committee. We consider, we are not looking now at general comments, and policy and so on. We are looking at the clause. So, I will ask everyone to comply with the procedure that you all have bound yourself by. We are now at clause 8. If your comment is with respect to clause 8, anybody, I will entertain that. Alright? Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. I just want to get some clarification on that last issue that the Member for Arouca/Maloney raised, which deals with subsection (4) where it reads:

“Where a Tobago Act is inconsistent with an Act passed by Parliament, the Act passed by Parliament shall prevail to the extent of the inconsistency.”

I ask in this context, if the “Tobago Legislature” passes a particular Tobago law, as it is now called—by simple majority, the Government in Port of Spain, in this Parliament, can pass a simple majority Act, and rescind that decision of the “Tobago Legislature”. So, how are you really achieving this so call self-determination, and equality of status you are giving to the people of Tobago?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hosein: Because Port of Spain at the end of the day, by way of simple majority of the Government could pass one law and say “we rescind, we repeal that

Tobago law is inconsistent with Act passed by this Parliament”. And that is it really troubling.

Clause 8 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 9 and 10 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 11.

Question proposed: That clause 11 stand part of the Bill.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Right, Madam Chairman, this is in relation to several of the clauses tied with each other, which is 11(b)(3) and you have (4). In this, Madam Chairman, is the determining whether there is an “emergency or unforeseen circumstance”. So when this Bill is passed, we still have one Cabinet, which is the Cabinet of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. However, what the Bill is trying to do is indicate that the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago shall have—

“...no responsibility for the matters as prescribed under section 75A(1)(b)...”

So what it is really doing is that the Cabinet is accepting certain departments, divisions, matters for Tobago. However, there is a caveat to it. It says:

“...unless there is an emergency or unforeseen circumstance requiring the intervention of the Cabinet.”

Now, Madam Chairman, the issue with that is this. If you are giving Tobago sole discretion to let us just deal with the Marine Affairs of Tobago, just an example. The Cabinet is the one who will determine whether or not something is deemed “unforeseen” or an “emergency”. There are no real prescriptions, definitions, or clarity of what will constitute unforeseen circumstance or an emergency in these circumstances.

So, again, it means, that if the Government, the Cabinet in Trinidad and Tobago,

that sits in Port of Spain, is saying “listen we believe that is an emergency”, it takes away the executive control, and authority from the “Tobago Island Government” and places it back in the Cabinet. That is what this amendment is doing, Madam Chairman, because what it says all that the Cabinet has to do now is just request or send an invitation to the “Tobago Executive Council”. The “Tobago Executive Council” cannot say “well this is not an emergency, this is not unforeseen circumstances”. The Prime Minister of the day will be the one to make that determination and take away the power through prime ministerial prerogative that executive control that the Tobago Island Government has.

11.40 a.m.

Madam Chairman: Member for Arouca/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Madam Chairman, it is unfortunate that the Member for Barataria/San Juan obviously did not read this legislation. And, if he did, if the Member did, he is deliberately trying to mislead the House and the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Chairman: Retract that.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I withdraw that, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman: Yes please.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chairman, clause 11 is very clear. Very clear. Madam Chairman, that clause says, and I refer, if I may just read it:

“11.(b) by inserting after subsection (2), the following subsections:

- (3) In determining whether there is an emergency or unforeseen circumstance requiring its intervention under subsection (1)(b), the Cabinet shall consider the following matters:
 - (a) there is an expressed request or invitation from the Tobago Executive Council;

(b) where a request under paragraph (a) has not been received within a reasonable period in the circumstances, Cabinet through a Minister shall endeavor to consult with the Tobago Executive Council; or

(c) due to the urgency of the circumstances, consultation under paragraph (b) has not been possible and is not practicable.

(4) Where Cabinet has intervened under subsection (1)(b) the Tobago Island”—Council—“shall co-operate with the Cabinet in the management of the emergency or unforeseen circumstances.”

And, Madam Chairman, (5) goes on to say:

“Subsection (3) shall not apply where a state of public emergency has been declared pursuant to section 8.”

Madam Chairman, I do believe my friend is confusing himself or pretending to be confused in these circumstances

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hosein: Madam Chair, the Member for Arouca/Maloney provided no analysis of this clause. The Member just read the Bill again that we have in front of us. If I have to provide some analysis for the Member for Arouca/Maloney, it will be this, she answered my query and confirmed my concern at subclause (3)(b), where there are circumstances where the Minister, who is acting through the Cabinet, does not need to consult with the Tobago Executive Council. That is the issue that we are having here, Madam Chairman.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chairman—

Mr. Hosein: All they have to do is consultation. It does not say they act in

accordance with the advice, there are two different things. If you consult you do not have to follow the recommendations of the consultation. If you say “they act in accordance with the advice of”, it means that you have to follow that decision. That is a term of drafting that is throughout the Constitution, and there are judicial pronouncements on those two particular phrases, Madam Chairman.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chairman, contrary to what the Member for Barataria/San Juan said, that clause is self-explanatory. In addition to that, it says clearly that the “Minister shall endeavor to consult with the...Executive Council”. It also says that:

“Where Cabinet has intervened...the Tobago Island Government shall co-operate with the Cabinet in the management of the emergency or unforeseen circumstances.”

Madam Chairman, I am of the firm view, and we on this side we are of the firm view that this is fair, because if there is an emergency, perhaps similar to where there was the oil spill, the central government had to intervene in order to assist with what was happening in Tobago. That was an emergency. That was an unforeseen circumstance.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: And, Madam Chairman, we did that with alacrity, and it is a clear example of what would take place under certain circumstances. So, Madam Chairman, if there is no amendment we would like to proceed.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 11 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 12.

Question proposed: That clause 12 stand part of the Bill.

Madam Chairman: Member for Arouca/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chairman, we do have amendments to clause 12. Madam Chairman, the amendments, would you like me to indicate what the amendments are?

Madam Chairman: Yes, please.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chairman, the amendments are as follows:

“A. In the proposed section 75A-

- (i) insert after the words “Tobago Island Government” the words “which includes the Tobago Executive Council and its Divisions”; and
- (ii) delete the words “Tobago Legislature” and substitute the words “Tobago House of Assembly”, wherever they occur.

In 75(b), Madam Chairman:

B. In the proposed section 75B-

- (i) in paragraph (a) delete the words “Chief Secretary” and substitute the word “Premier”;
- (ii) in paragraph (b) delete the words “Deputy Chief Secretary” and substitute the word “Deputy Premier”; and
- (iii) in paragraph (c), delete the words “other Secretaries, selected from among Assembly Members” and substitute the words “Secretaries, selected from among the Members of the Assembly”.

Madam Chairman, this in particular is to allow councillors to be secretaries which is akin to Senators being appointed as Ministers.

C. In the proposed section 75C delete the words 'Chef Secretary' and substitute the words 'Premier' wherever they occur; and

D. In the proposed section 75D delete the words “Chief Secretary” and

substitute the word "Premier".

Madam Chairman, you would notice that these amendments in the main are in terms of nomenclature. Madam Chairman, when we received further information when we were in committee stage one of the issues was changing from Secretary to Premier. We had left it as Chief Secretary, but, Madam Chairman, there was an insistence that we move to, from Chief Secretary to Premier and we accepted that, and consequently that is before us for amendment. And in the same way, Madam Chairman, in order to be precise, where we had said "Tobago Island Government" we wanted it to be precise and indicate that the Tobago Island Government would include the Executive Council and its Divisions. Additionally, Madam Chairman, there was a concern about the Tobago Legislature, and consequently there was a request for the term "Tobago House of Assembly" to be used, and consequently we made that amendment. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much. I want to start where the Member left off, with the use of the words "Tobago House of Assembly". In the Bill, Madam Chairman, the term "Tobago House of Assembly" was removed and it was only called the "House of Assembly". So if you look at the definition section of the Bill, in particular clause 5, it still refers to "House of Assembly", then there will be a consequential amendment that will have to be made to what was just passed in terms of calling it now the "Tobago House of Assembly".

And again, when we rush through legislation like this, especially dealing with the amendments to the Constitution we have to be very careful, especially when it comes to definitions, and I want to caution the Government with this approach that they are taking. Now there will be consequential amendments that will have to be made throughout the Bill if you are going to just make the

amendment here at clause 12, because for the first time, we are hearing that the Government is now reverting to the term “Tobago House of Assembly” after it was called just “House of Assembly”.

Madam Chairman: Member for Arouca/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: We are grateful.

Mr. Hosein: Just grateful?

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 12, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 13 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 14.

Question proposed: That clause 14 stand part of the Bill.

Madam Chairman: Member for Arouca/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you, Madam Chairman. The amendment is as follows, Madam Chairman:

“Delete the words “Chief Secretary” and substitute the word “Premier”.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan, no?

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 14, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 15 to 18 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 19.

Question proposed: That clause 19 stand part of the Bill.

Madam Chairman: Member for Arouca/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very kindly, Madam Chairman. Madam Chairman, the amendments are as follows:

“A. In the heading delete the words “Tobago Legislature” and substitute the

words "Tobago House of Assembly'."

B. Delete the proposed section 141A and substitute the following:

—in the margin:

“Establishment 141A. (1) There shall be a Tobago House of Assembly. of the House of (2) Subject to the provisions of this Constitution, Assembly the Tobago House of Assembly shall have such other powers and functions in relation to Tobago as may be prescribed.”

C. In the proposed section 141B, insert the word “Tobago” before the words “House of Assembly”.

D. In the proposed section 141C-

(i) insert the word “Tobago” before the words “House of Assembly”, wherever they occur; and

(ii) in the paragraph (4), delete the words “by the Tobago Legislature and until so defined shall be those that apply to the House of Representatives and to its members and committees”.

E. In the proposed section 141D, insert the word “Tobago” before the words “House of Assembly”, wherever they occur.

F. In the proposed section 141E-

(i) insert the word “Tobago” before the words “House of Assembly”, wherever they occur; and

(ii) delete the words “Tobago Legislature” and substitute the words “Tobago House of Assembly”.

—wherever they occur.

11.55 a.m.

G. In the proposed section 141F, delete the words “Chief Secretary” and

“Deputy Chief Secretary” and substitute the words “Premier” and “Deputy Premier”, respectively, wherever they occur.

- H. In the proposed section 141G, delete the words “Chief Secretary” and “Deputy Chief Secretary” and substitute the words “Premier” and “Deputy Premier”, respectively, wherever they occur.
- I. In the proposed section 141H, delete the words “Chief Secretary” and substitute the words “Premier”.
- J. In the proposed section 141I-
- (i) insert the word “Tobago” before the words “House of Assembly”, wherever they occur; and
 - (ii) in subsection (2), delete the words “Chief Secretary” and “Deputy Chief Secretary” and substitute the words “Premier” and “Deputy Premier”, respectively
- K. In the proposed section 141K—
- (i) insert the word “Tobago” before the words “House of Assembly”, wherever they occur;
 - (ii) in subsection (2) delete the words “Chief Secretary” and substitute the word “Premier”.
- L. In the proposed section 141L-
- (i) delete the words “Chief Secretary” and “Deputy Chief Secretary” and substitute the words “Premier” and “Deputy Premier”, respectively, wherever they occur; and
 - (ii) delete the words “Tobago Legislature” and substitute the words “Tobago House of Assembly”;
 - (iii) insert the word “Tobago” before the words “House of Assembly”, wherever they occur; and

- (iv) in subsection (5), delete the words “141M (1)” and substitute the words “141N (1)”.
- M. In the proposed section 141M, insert the word “Tobago” before the words “House of Assembly”, wherever they occur.
- N. In the proposed section 141N, insert the word “Tobago” before the words “House of Assembly”, wherever they occur.
- O. In the proposed section 141O-
 - (i) insert the word “Tobago” before the words “House of Assembly”, wherever they occur;
 - (ii) in subsection (1)(a) delete the words “141N or 141M(4)” and substitute the words “141M or 141N”.
- P. In the proposed subsection 141P-
 - (i) delete the words “Chief Secretary” and substitute the word “Premier”; and
 - (ii) insert the word “Tobago” before the words “House of Assembly”, wherever they occur.
- Q. In the proposed section 141Q-
 - (i) delete the words “Tobago Legislature” and substitute the words “Tobago House of Assembly”; and
 - (ii) insert the word “Tobago” before the words “House of Assembly”, wherever they occur.
- R. In the proposed section 141R-
 - (i) insert the word “Tobago” before the words “House of Assembly”;
 - (ii) delete the words “53,”;
 - (iii) renumber section 141R as 141R(1); and

(iv) insert the following new subsection:

“(2) For the purposes of this section a reference to “Tobago” means the Island of Tobago, Little Tobago, St. Giles Island, Marble Island, Goat Island, Sisters Island and shall extend to such part of the territorial sea of Trinidad and Tobago comprising those areas of the sea having as their inner limits the low watermark of Tobago and as the outer limits, a line measured seaward from that low watermark, every point of which is at a distance of eleven nautical miles from the nearest point of that low watermark.”

Thank you, Madam Chairman, those are the proposed amendments.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you. I think the time has come. My query here and deep concern on this amendment before us, that I believe is a new amendment, is really the tale of two “Tobagos”. We are now starting to quote, we are introducing a new section 141R(2), which is new, and it reads:

“...For the purposes of this section a reference to Tobago means the Island of Tobago, Little Tobago, St. Giles Island, Marble Island, Goat Island, Sisters Island and shall extend to such part of the territorial sea of Trinidad and Tobago comprising those areas of the sea having as their inner limits the low watermark of Tobago and as their outer limits, a line measured seaward from that low watermark, every point of which is at a distance of eleven nautical miles from the nearest point of that low watermark.”

Madam Chairman, all we are asking is that, are there two Tobagos?—because in the earlier section 5 that we dealt with it says:

“For the purposes of sections 53, 75, 75A...Chapter 11A, a reference to ‘Tobago’ means the Island of Tobago, Little Tobago, St. Giles Island,

Marble Island, Goat Island, Sisters Island and the internal and inland waters of Tobago.”

And they had no reference here to nautical miles, measurements and so on, and this now is another definition. I do not believe it is consistent and I believe one needs to be substituted for the other and decide what is Tobago. Because the fundamental heart of this contradiction on the part of the Government is that they do not know what is Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: And it reflects itself.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: They do not care.

Hon. Members: And they do not care, quite frankly.

Madam Chairman: Member for Arouca/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Madam Chairman, what this amendment does is amplify what is Tobago. Madam Chairman, you would recall when I read the amendments it is very clear. For the purposes of this section, which would include, in terms of the law-making power of the Tobago House of Assembly and in terms of the issues of—if I may be so bold to say the maritime boundaries where the Tobago House of Assembly would have legislative jurisdiction. This just seeks to clarify exactly where this would end. And that is why we have included some of the same terms that were included in the actual Bill and that is to say, if we go back to the clauses that we have already passed, Madam Chairman, you would see quite clearly that they talk about the Island of Tobago, Little Tobago, St. Giles Island, Goat Island, Sisters Island, the same areas that we have stated quite clearly there. And then in 5 it says, “...and the internal and inland waters”—

Madam Chairman: Let us have one conversation so that when we ask questions

we are all in line with each other, please. Yes.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes, Ma'am—and the internal and inland waters of Tobago. Madam Chairman, this repeats all those islands that have been stated, but what it seeks to do, Madam Chairman, is give flesh to what was requested. Previously, Madam Speaker, Tobago was only the six miles out in terms of the territorial waters. This now extends it to eleven nautical miles which was a request of Tobago and Tobagonians, Madam Chairman, and this is all that we have done and it is clearly said, for the purposes of this section, and this section talks about the jurisdictional limit of Tobago.

Madam Chairman: Yes, Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you for the invitation, Madam. We have one Constitution, 1976 Constitution right now, and we are amending that Constitution. And with this Bill what the Government is now doing is putting two separate definitions of Tobago in the same Constitution which is clearly in conflict. There will now be a section 141R, which will have one definition of Tobago and you will have in the interpretation section of the Constitution, section 3, another definition of Tobago. So that is my first concern, Madam.

The second concern I am having is the new amendment to clause 19 that the Government is proposing to section 141A, where it is substituting—it is deleting the entire section 141A and substituting 141A (1) and (2). Now, Madam Speaker, when you look at 141A in the Bill it goes on to subsection (1) all the way to subsection (7). Is it the intension of the Government to also remove all of those subsections and just leave it with (1) and (2) or is that an inadvertent error there? I ask this because when you look at what is not going to form part of 141A, it is things like money Bills, which are important, because the Tobago Legislature will have pass their money Bill. It deals with things such as the effect of a Tobago law.

If you look at 141A(5) it says:

“A Tobago Act shall have effect in Tobago.”

However, with this new proposed amendment, that has gone.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chairman, if I may—

Mr. Hosein: Can I finish?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis:—I am very confused by what the Member is saying.

Mr. Hosein: Okay, sure.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: What are you saying and is there an amendment?

Mr. Hosein: Yes, let me read—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: What are you saying?

Mr. Hosein: Okay, let me read for you because you cannot understand, clearly. Clause 19, your new amendment, you are saying, delete the proposed section 141A, correct? 141A has seven subsections, which means that 141A together with those seven subsections are gone and you are now replacing it with 141A (1) and (2). That is your amendment. So what I am asking is whether or not you are also deleting, you are not going to put back subsections (3), (4), (5), (6), (7), because those are material subsections. Because it talks about when an Act is passed in Tobago it shall have effect in Tobago. We need that to give it the teeth. For example, you also have the power of the legislature to pass money Bills. That has not been included, again. That has been deleted. Because you are deleting the entire 141A.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chairman, it is clear that my friend does not understand law.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chairman, in the previous sections we clearly stated what the law making power of the Tobago House of Assembly would be.

By deleting what we propose to delete, it does not affect the law-making powers of the Assembly, it does not affect. Madam Chairman, I am very concerned for this Member—

Hon. Members: “Ohhh.”

Mrs. Robinson-Regis:—because obviously, obviously he does not understand what we are doing here today. And, Madam Chairman, all I am asking now, if the Member has a further amendment to the amendments we have proposed, could he please give us those amendments. In addition to that, Madam Chairman, if he does not have any, we have one further amendment here.

Hon. Member: Another? Oh.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes. We have a further amendment.

Hon. Members: Again. Permission of Tobago?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: And, Madam Chairman, if he has nothing further to say—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: Members. Could we have a little order in a process that we want to move with smoothly? Let us have a little order so that we can hear each other.

Mr. Hosein: Could I just respond to the Member, please.

Madam Chairman: I believe the Member was just telling us what the further amendment was. As soon as the Member is finished then we will ask.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I am waiting to see if he has amendment, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: So, you are not stating the further amendment.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chairman, so the further amendment is at 141K, Ma'am. 141K(2):

- (a) we are deleting the words “Chief Secretary” and inserting the word “Premier”.

Hon. Member: [*Interruption*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I never said it was big, I said we had an amendment.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

12.10 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Madam Chairman, I just want to respond to my colleague, earlier on when my colleague was worried about me. I ask my colleague, do not let her heart be troubled. Madam Chairman, I have studied law and I practise law. I cannot say the same for my colleague.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Chairman: And if my colleague is suggesting to this Parliament that we are deleting—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chairman, is that an amendment?

Mr. Hosein:—section 141A, why are you deleting the power of the council, in terms of money Bills? That is not going back into the Bill. I am asking whether or not you are going to put it back because it is falling off the legislation.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chairman, I am repeating ad nauseam. We are not deleting the powers of the council. Madam Chairman—

Mr. Hosein: Yes, you are.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis:—the powers of the council—

Mr. Hosein: You are just substituting subsections (1) and (2). Where are subsections (3) to (7)?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chairman, the powers of the council were clearly stated in the previous—

Mr. Hosein: Where are the powers of the Legislature?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: The powers of the Legislature were saved in the definition

of what the Legislature can do. Madam Chairman, in addition—

Mr. Hosein: Madam Chairman, we have warned the Government, if they—

Madam Chairman: One minute, please. We cannot hear two people at the same time. So I know everybody is anxious and passionate, but let us try to curb it so we could be productive. Okay? So that, I believe that particular point has been ventilated. Is there any other point, Member for Barataria/San Juan, that you wish to raise on clause 19?

Mr. Hosein: Madam Chairman, we are trying to help the Government. They do not want our assistance, so let them proceed.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chairman, in addition to that, the Bill that we just passed, section 18 of that Bill clearly states what the legislative power of the Tobago House of Assembly is—section 13. And it also says in 141A(2):

Subject to the provisions of this Constitution, the Tobago House of Assembly...—

Mr. Hosein: Are we allowed to go back to that Bill?

Madam Chairman: Are we talking about this one? Is it this amendment?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: No, Ma'am, we are not.

Madam Chairman: Okay. That is it. Question is that clause 19, be amended, as circulated, and further amended at clause 141K(2)(a) to delete the word “Chief Secretary” and replace it with the word “Premier”. Do I have that right?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Yes?

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 19, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 20.

Question proposed: That clause 20 stand part of the Bill.

Madam Chairman: Member for Arouca/Maloney

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very kindly, Madam Chairman. Madam Chairman, we have an amendment to this clause and it is as follows:

In the proposed section 145, delete the words “Chief Secretary” and substitute the word “Premier”, wherever they occur.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Madam Chairman, I want to raise a concern with respect to clause—well, what will be the new section 145, and this deals with the composition of the Dispute Resolution Committee.

- “(a) two members appointed by the Prime Minister;
- (b) two members appointed by the...”—now Premier.

And hear this one, Madam Chairman:

- (c) one Member appointed by the President, after consultation with the Prime Minister and the Chief Secretary, who shall be the Chairman...”—Premier, sorry.

Madam Chairman, what does that do? The President is really elected through the majority that the Prime Minister has in the Parliament, through the Electoral College, and it is not acting in accordance—so it is just consultation. So the President could very well take the appointee of the Prime Minister, make that person the Chairman, according to this section. So therefore, out of the council of five, the Prime Minister has three and the Chief Secretary has two when it comes to dispute resolution.

So, Madam Chairman, what this is, is really setting up the new Premier, or whoever, for failure, because at the end of the day, the Prime Minister of the day will have their say with respect to disputes between Tobago and Trinidad, and we

have fundamental concerns with that. Why could this Dispute Resolution Committee not be appointed through some independent manner or have independent persons serving in it, Madam Chairman? We are not in agreement with this particular amendment as suggested by the Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Chairman: Member for Tobago West.

Mrs. Cudjoe-Lewis: Madam Chairman, that point does not make any sense. Madam Chair, since when the President is a part of the Government? We, all Members of the Lower House, elect the President. The Member just said that the President is the President based on the Government's vote. We all here, Members of Government and Opposition, vote who the President is. We vote here at the Electoral College as to who is the President.

In addition, this was discussed in excess at the Joint Select Committee, Madam Chairman. So, Madam Chairman, when we did this at the Committee, this was based on having an independent person—like the President usually chooses the independent person. So I cannot connect with what the Member just tried to place in the public domain. I think that they are misleading the public on purpose.

Madam Chairman: Member for Arouca/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Just to give some clarity, Madam Chairman, if there is that concern, just noting that two members are appointed by the Prime Minister, two members by the Chief Secretary, and then the fifth member by the President after consultation, but, Madam Chairman, even after all of that, the clause goes on to say that there is judicial oversight. If there is a concern, there is judicial oversight over decisions that are made by the Dispute Resolution Committee, and we see that at section 145(5):

“A review of a decision of the Prime Minister shall lie to the High Court.”

Madam Speaker, further:

“(6) An appeal against a decision of the High Court under subsection (5) shall lie to the Court of Appeal, and the decision of the Court of Appeal shall be final.”

So after all of this protection that the Bill seeks to put in, there is still judicial oversight, Madam Chairman. And, Madam Chairman, if the Member has amendment, we will be happy to hear it.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Madam Chairman, two concerns at subsection (4), which the Member outlined, and at subsection (6). The Dispute Resolution Committee, after it considers the dispute, basically:

“(4) The Dispute Resolution Committee shall make recommendations to the Prime Minister...”

So it is direct that they make the recommendation to the Prime Minister.

“...who shall consult with the Chief Secretary before making a decision.”

If the Chief Secretary is having this—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Premier.

Mr. Hosein:—sorry, the Premier is having an equality of status, or so to speak, that you are trying to introduce here, why does the Dispute Resolution Committee not make the recommendation to the Chief Secretary and the Prime Minister? Why must the Prime Minister then have to go the Chief Secretary if you are trying to put these things as parity, and that you are having the Chief Secretary appoint two members, and the Prime Minister appoint two members? Why is there this disparity now with respect to the recommendations going directly to the Prime Minister? That is the first point. The second point, why are you stopping the

appeal at the stage of the Court of Appeal and not going to the Privy Council?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chairman, in the same way that election appeals stay at the state of the Court of Appeal, it is similar. It is similar, it is—what could be disputed is a dispute between what is happening within the islands of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Member: Islands.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes, I said, “islands”. So it would not go—it is not normal in those circumstances, Madam Chairman, because we did review other countries that have similar status and it was not normal for these kinds of disputes to go further than the Court of Appeal of the particular country.

In addition to that, Madam Chairman, the Prime Minister still remains the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. And consequently, when the Dispute Resolution Committee makes a decision, they come to the Prime Minister and give the information, the result of the dispute to the Prime Minister, and that is the objective of having that in this clause.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Just one observation I want to make with the Member’s contribution, it is that the Member is comparing apples and oranges. There are several cases that will tell you that when a civil court sits to determine an election petition, it sits as an election court. We are asking the court to invoke its civil jurisdiction in this particular case and not an election jurisdiction, and there is a clear distinction because the court exercises two separate powers when it sits in these various jurisdictions. So I think the Member is absolutely wrong when she talks about—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hosein:—that we should stop at the level of the Court of Appeal.

Madam Chairman: The question is that clause 20, be amended, as circulated.

Those in favour—

Dr. Rowley: Madam Chairman, could I just make one short comment on what my colleague just said there? Madam Chairman, when the decision was made to not let election petitions go to the Privy Council, it could easily have been made differently and said, “Okay, it will go to the Privy Council.” But it was put there in the context that the nature of this particular problem, the population should be satisfied that the decision is made within Trinidad and Tobago. So that was an example here.

There is no law or Constitution, right or wrong law that says that if on this occasion, in a dispute between the administration in Trinidad and Tobago between the THA and the central government, that an existing tribunal should be the authority, and that could go as high as our Supreme Court and that be the end of the matter, why is that a right or wrong decision? It is simply a decision of the Parliament today saying that between these electoral bodies, working out of a tribunal, the matter should not fall to anybody in London to tell us what to do. So it is not a right of wrong. It is whether we do it or we do not do it. And in this case, the decision is by the Joint Select Committee, by majority of the Parliament, that it ends at the Appeal Court of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Rowley: Simple as that. So it is not correct to say that you are wrong in law or you are not following the law, and you are sharing that, yes, he found that she was wrong in law. This is nonsense. It is a choice that we are making to have it end there because of the nature of the problem, in similar circumstance from an election petition. Because one cannot say that, “This is an election petition so therefore, you are wrong.” Madam Chairman, I think that is as far as one could explain in the English language. Our colleagues, I do not to ascribe ulterior

motives to them, but I think that the argument is without substance.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 20, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 21.

Question proposed: That clause 21 stand part of the Bill.

Madam Chairman: Member for Arouca/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Madam Chairman, the amendment is as follows:

Delete the words “Chief Secretary” and “Deputy Chief Secretary” and substitute the word “Premier” and “Deputy Premier” respectively, wherever they occur.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan? The question is that clause 21, be amended, as circulated.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 21, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Preamble approved.

Question put and agreed to: That the Bill, as amended, be reported to the House.

House resumed.

12.25 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, I beg to move that a bill entitle an Act to amend the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago—is that the correct one? Oh, the report.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I wish to report that the Constitution (Amdt.) (Tobago Self-Government) Bill, 2020, was considered in committee of the whole and approved with amendments. I now beg to move that the House agree with the committee's report.

Bill reported, with amendment.

Question put: That the Bill be now read a third time.

Madam Speaker: This Bill requires a three-fourths special majority.

The House divided: Ayes 21 Noes 16

AYES

Robinson-Regis, Hon. C.

Rowley, Hon. Dr. K.

Imbert, Hon. C.

Young SC, Hon. S.

Hinds, Hon. F.

Deyalsingh, Hon. T.

Al-Rawi SC, Hon. F.

Beckles, Hon. P.

Webster-Roy, Hon. A.

Cudjoe-Lewis, Hon. S.

Gadsby-Dolly, Hon Dr. N.

Gonzales, Hon. M.

Mc Clashie, Hon. S.

Cummings, Hon. F.

Forde, E.

de Nobriga, Hon. S.

Scotland SC, Hon. K.

Leonce, Hon. A.

Morris-Julian, Hon. L.

Richards, K.

Monroe, R.

NOES

Lee, D.

Persad-Bissessar SC, Mrs. K.

Moonilal, Dr. R.

Padarath, B.

Indarsingh, R.

Bodoe, Dr. L.

Hosein, S.

Ratiram, R.

Paray, R.

Rambally, D.

Charles, R.

Tancoo, D.

Benjamin, Ms. M.

Mohit, Ms. V.

Ram, A.

Seecheran, Dr. R.

Question negatived.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

ELECTIONS AND BOUNDARIES COMMISSION, 2024

(Approval of Draft Order)

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Thank you, Madam Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Whereas it is provided by subsection (3) of section 72 of the Constitution that as soon as may be after the Elections and Boundaries Commission (hereinafter referred to as “the Commission”) has submitted a report under paragraph (a) of subsection (1) of the said section 72, the Minister designated by the Prime Minister for this purpose, shall lay before the House of Representatives for its approval the draft of an Order by the President for giving effect whether with or without modifications, to the recommendations contained in the report;

And whereas the Commission has submitted a report to the Prime Minister and the Speaker in accordance with the provisions in subsection (1) of section 72;

And whereas the Draft Order entitled “the Elections and Boundaries Commission Order, 2024” giving effect without modifications, to the recommendations of the Commission was laid before the House of Representatives on the 9th day of December, 2024:

Be it resolved that the Draft Order entitled “the Elections and Boundaries Commission Order, 2024” be approved.

Madam Speaker, this Order is in keeping with something that we are very familiar with, those of us who have been associated with the electoral politics and the Representation of the People Act. And before I go into the content of the report, Madam Speaker, I think it would do well if we revisit the whole question of

how the seats referred to are arrived at in the parent legislation.

It is not uncommon, Madam Speaker, that from time to time you will hear the ill-informed in the country—and I say that by not meaning to be disparaging, but persons who are not familiar with the details would talk about some seats being big, and some seats being small, and some parties having the benefit of a number of small seats and other people having to have larger seats. Madam Speaker, that is a story that is believed by some people but it could not be further from the truth. There is a simple system that we operate and a simple formula that is called into play and that formula is that we established by way of the census, how many people are in the country, and the EBC, that independent body, determines how many of those people are in fact of voting age. Because we do have an age limit to qualify to vote in this country. Not every citizen can vote. You have to be of a certain age.

So the EBC will determine the gross number of people who qualify as electors and then the Parliament would have determined at an earlier time, how many seats should be in the Parliament. To determine the size, meaning the number of voters in each seat, one is required to divide the total electorate by the number of seats. At an earlier time, we had 36 seats, you divide the electorate by 36 and that gives you a figure of how many seats there should be, how the population— [*Inaudible*]. Then a little later on we moved to 41. So we currently have 41 seats approved. The size of our Parliament is 41 seats and the voting population as determined by the EBC, would be divided by 41 and that would give you the average number of voters in a seat.

There are two anomalies that need to be known. In fact, I should say three because two in that it is not a single figure. The law provides for a maximum size

of a seat, meaning the upper limit and a minimum size meaning a lower limit. So having established the average, then that upper and lower limit can now be established not to be more than ten per cent above, and not to be less than 10 per cent below, which means that the average constituency falls in a band. It is not an exact figure. It is an average figure that falls in that band not more than 10 per cent, not less than 10 per cent below of that average as determined after you divided the population by the number of seats.

The other anomaly, Madam Speaker, is that at an earlier time, an earlier Parliament, determined that Tobago should have two seats. Tobago used to be one seat. The entire Tobago population used to be one seat in the Parliament but then the population of Tobago seemed to be well above this average I just mentioned. Then that Tobago seat—that singular Tobago seat would have been above the average but you cannot have a piece of a seat, so you had to have two seats in Tobago. But once you have two seats there was not a population in Tobago to bring the average of a Tobago seat within the band of the national average. It was accepted that Tobago would have its two seats and over time as the population of Tobago grew, the number of electors in one of those seats will keep increasing consistently until it gets closer or equal to the size in Trinidad.

Madam Speaker, we are almost there because if I look at the work of this report, it mentions that the Tobago average is now—whereas in Trinidad the average in a constituency is 28,079. So the 39 constituencies in Trinidad now average approximately 28,079 and in Tobago, it is 26,082. We have come a very long way, Madam Speaker, because I recall when I just started out in politics as you may know, Madam Speaker, I did have an outing in Tobago in 1981. And if my memory serves me right, at that time the size of a seat in Tobago was

somewhere in the order of about 17,000, something like that. So today, a Tobago seat is just about 2,000 below the national average and as the population of Tobago grows one will expect that sooner rather than later it will be equal to. We may very well end up in the same situation where sometime in the distant future, that you may have a question about a piece of a seat and you may have to talk about the third seat and start the process all over again but I am just thinking aloud here.

12.40 p.m.

Madam Speaker, so with the average in Trinidad being 28,079, the permissible upper limit for a seat in Trinidad is 30,887 and the permissible lower limit in Trinidad is 25,271. The report makes no recommendation for changes in the boundaries in Tobago because there was no need for any change in Tobago. The two Tobago seats fall within the equation that exists.

However, Madam Speaker, in Trinidad, four constituencies have been found to fall above the permissible upper limit and those constituencies are Toco/Sangre Grande, D'Abadie/O'Meara, Cumuto/Manzanilla and Caroni Central. Those four constituencies have been found to have voting populations that are above the upper limit of the law as defined by the formula. So something had to be done to bring them under the upper limit and to fix the problem in Toco/Sangre Grande to bring it within the band that is permissible by the law, one polling division PD 2100 from Valencia, which is the western end of that constituency, goes into its neighbour, which is Arima.

Madam Speaker, one also now must remember for those people who have it in their head that you can move people around willy-nilly and interfere with seats willy-nilly and so on, that the electorate exists in packages called polling divisions as established by the EBC. So when you deal with moving people from one

constituency to the other, it is basically a package from one constituency you are moving and that package may be 300 people, it may be 800 people depending on the size of the polling division and it is the EBC that will decide which package is moved. And, like a waterbed, Madam Speaker, if you squeeze it on one end, it is going to bulge on the other end. Therefore when you interfere with one constituency, it is likely to interfere with its neighbour so that is what the EBC does to bring about some balance.

So in the case of Toco/Sangre Grande which has gone above the 30,887 level, one polling division from Toco/Sangre Grande is taken out, Polling Division 2100, and when that is done, that brings Toco/Sangre Grande within the upper limits as permitted by the law.

In the case of D'Abadie/O'Meara, a similar thing has been done by the Elections and Boundaries Commission. It being a little over the 30,000 limit, one polling division was taken out of D'Abadie/O'Meara and placed into the neighbouring constituency of Arouca/Maloney.

In Cumuto/Manzanilla, a similar problem, it being over the upper limit, Polling Division 2390 transferred to a neighbouring constituency, that constituency being the constituency of La Horquetta/Talparo.

In the case of Caroni Central, one polling division, Polling Division 3081 transferred to the constituency of Tabaquite. When those changes have been made as I just suggested, Madam Speaker, in the report, it brings those four oversized constituencies down a little bit into the range that the law permits.

Part b of the report talks about the opposite situation where the following constituencies are a little below the limit that the law requires, meaning that they have a little less people than the average and the band permits, so you have to top

them up a little bit to bring them within the band. Those constituencies are Port of Spain North/St Ann's West, Port of Spain South, San Fernando East, San Fernando West and Pointe-à-Pierre.

Madam Speaker, in the case of Port of Spain North/St Ann's West, one division has been added and that division, Polling Division 0750, is coming from Laventille West, which is the neighbouring constituency to the east. One polling division is taken out of Laventille West and placed into Port of Spain North/St Ann's West .

In the case of Port of Spain South, the recommendation is that PD 0750 be transferred to Port of Spain North coming from Port of Spain South and PD—

Hon. Member: *[Interruption]*

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I think there is an error—I did say from Laventille West to Port of Spain South. And then PD 0700 be transferred from Laventille West. So that the Laventille West contributes 0700—there is a transfer from Port of Spain South to Laventille West of 0700 and 0750 goes from Port of Spain South to Port of Spain North/St Ann's West.

In the case of San Fernando East, the recommendation for this constituency is that two polling divisions, Polling Divisions 3871 and 3874 be transferred to San Fernando East from Oropouche East and that Polling Divisions 4005 and 4006 be transferred from the constituency to San Fernando West. You see, Madam Speaker, because San Fernando West has fallen below the level and there is no population on the western side of San Fernando West, it being the sea, it is obvious that to top up San Fernando West, it has to come from San Fernando East or Oropouche West.

So once you have taken from San Fernando East to bring San Fernando

West up to the lower limit of the law, it means that you have also to bring from the eastern side of San Fernando East and in this case, it comes from the constituency of Oropouche East. Madam Speaker, San Fernando West receives Polling Divisions 4005 and 4006 and that goes into—they would have got that from San Fernando East.

Madam Speaker, in the case of Pointe-à-Pierre, there is a recommendation that one polling division, Polling Division 3206, be added from the constituency of Tabaquite. That is the only change that is being made to the constituency of Pointe-à-Pierre.

There are seven constituencies that will be affected by changes but remain within the permissible upper limit and permissible lower limit. So the constituency of Arima, Laventille East, Morvant, Oropouche East, Tabaquite, Arouca/Maloney, Laventille West and La Horquetta, they have been affected by these adjustments of the movement of a polling division or two. But in no instance of these seven constituencies is that movement of a polling division or two causing any of those seats to fall outside of the limit of the law.

Of course, we come to the question of renaming. I just mentioned, Madam Speaker, that the Elections and Boundaries Commission has seen it fit to move one polling division into Pointe-à-Pierre. Pointe-à-Pierre has been a constituency that has been around with that name for the longest while and we find it a little curious or unhelpful that by just moving one polling division, the entire name of the constituency has changed and it is now called Claxton Bay. I do not know, Madam Speaker. I have not consulted the EBC on this matter but being familiar with the constituencies and the populations, I do not know what would have caused the EBC to think that the community of Pointe-à-Pierre should disappear from the

name of this constituency. I would have thought that it being Pointe-à-Pierre for the longest while and you had one polling division, it would still be Pointe-à-Pierre, but if the polling division comes from Claxton Bay and you want to change the name, you would call it Pointe-à-Pierre/Claxton Bay. But this disappears Pointe-à-Pierre—

I am saying this, that if it is that—the Member of Pointe-à-Pierre is here, my colleagues are here. These recommendations can be adjusted in this Parliament because the law says that we can accept this report with or without amendment. So if it is that my colleagues would like to share the concern that I have that Pointe-à-Pierre as a community should not disappear from the constituency's name, because I could not find the reason why Pointe-à-Pierre suddenly become Claxton Bay and I will leave it there.

Then, Madam Speaker, because of the adjustments made in the package of constituencies that I just mentioned that are not affected in whole, five name changes are recommended by the Elections and Boundaries Commission. Arouca/Maloney is now to be renamed Trincity/Maloney; take that to mean that the western side of that constituency has been extended into Trincity so the name reflects end to end, Trincity at one end, Maloney at the other end.

D'Abadie/O'Meara renamed Malabar/Mausica. Because of the nature of the geography and the communities, one would have difficulty identifying exactly where this constituency is boundaried. But, I presume that those who live in the area—I have had complaints from people in Arima about this name of Malabar/Mausica with Mausica not being a distinctive community as O'Meara. And, they would have thought that the loss of the name O'Meara is not helpful in identifying the constituency because D'Abadie, which is a longstanding East-West

Corridor location, a community distinctive, and O'Meara is now to be replaced completely with Malabar/Mausica. If the Parliament wishes to adjust that, Parliament could or it could accept the EBC's assessment.

Lopinot/Bon Air West is now being renamed Arouca/Lopinot where the community of Arouca, which is a well-known distinctive community would be the southern part of this constituency, and the northern part would be Lopinot. So very much like how the change was made in Trincity/Maloney, one can understand the Arouca/Maloney.

St Joseph, while there have been no boundary changes with the constituency of St Joseph, the EBC has now seen it fit to change the name to Aranguez/St Joseph. I think what the EBC is trying to say here is that the community of Aranguez is being identified with the constituency of St Joseph so a name change is recommended, Aranguez/St Joseph. Nothing inside of the constituency is changing eh, nothing is changing. Not its quantum, not a polling division has been changed, it is just a change of name but here the EBC is accepting that if a community is so distinctive as Aranguez, it should be identified as part of the constituency's name.

Pointe-à-Pierre to be named Claxton Bay. I do not see the consistency because if you are going as far as to want to name St Joseph, Aranguez/St Joseph, because you want St Joseph to be seen to be the constituency which is part of the Aranguez community, why will you not want the same for Pointe-à-Pierre? And that brings me, Madam Speaker, to a contact—the very last time I personally had anything to do with the EBC, because from time to time members of the party or whoever would talk to the EBC as we deal with matters of electoral nature.

12.55 p.m.

Two elections ago, when the constituency of Mayaro had lost, for the second time, a significant portion of the original Ortoire/Mayaro seat, we did suggest to the Elections and Boundaries Commission that for community identification that the seat of Mayaro is a bit of a misnomer. Mayaro used to be Ortoire/Mayaro in the beginning, which ran from the Ortoire River all the way down to La Lune. It was the coastal area of the south-east corner, and that was Ortoire/Mayaro. Then, later on, that constituency was significantly adjusted when the constituency of Princes Town South was formed, which went down to the south coast, and when the constituency of Nariva became Cumuto/Manzanilla. So, Mayaro lost a significant portions of its geography, but the name remained Mayaro.

The last change put the constituency of Mayaro in with the community of Rio Claro. And here it is the EBC is saying to us that they have added the name Aranguez onto St. Joseph because 21 per cent of the population is in Aranguez. But the EBC resolutely refused to name the constituency Mayaro/Rio Claro when it is obvious that that is what it is. I am sure Rio Claro contributes more than 21 per cent to the Mayaro seat. And as I speak to you now, Madam Speaker, there are two distinctive communities in the nation which are not reflected in the constituency description, and one is Rio Claro. If you asked the average person where does Rio Claro fall in a seat or even the people in Rio Claro, “dey tell yuh Mayaro”. And if there is a situation where a name change is required, it is Mayaro to carry Rio Claro with it as Mayaro/Rio Claro. And I am herein suggesting that to the Parliament today, that the community of Rio Claro—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:—not be lost or isolated and Mayaro must not really seem to be so misrepresented that Mayaro means Rio Claro, but not states Rio Claro. It is

Mayaro/Rio Claro. If we are going to accept Arranguez/St. Joseph, then using the same argument, the same methodology, that seat should be Mayaro/Rio Claro. And by the same token, I really do not know why this seat is called Claxton Bay. It should be called Claxton Bay/Pointe a Pierre, or vice versa, Pointe-a-Pierre/Claxton Bay.

Madam Speaker, one other community, which is a vibrant community, distinctive, but not identified by its name on any seat, is Siparia/Debe. If you look at the description of the seat of Siparia, there are three directions where Penal/Debe comes in and mentioned as part of the edges of that constituency. But Penal is not mentioned on a seat because you hear Siparia, and you think it is Siparia, but it is really Siparia/Penal, in that Penal/Debe area.

So, if we are using the formula that the EBC is using, then we should use it across the board. When we asked, in 2015, for the—no, it was 2020. Before the election of 2020, we asked the EBC to make the adjustment for Mayaro/Rio Claro so that the name Rio Claro would be part of the seat. The EBC took position that the request was made too late; well, we understood that. We said, okay, if you think it is too late, “we cyah argue wit’ it”, but we will make it again in time for the next election. So, we made the request well before the 2025 election, and, of course, here it is the EBC made all these changes, changed all these names, and, of course, does not make the request to name Mayaro, Mayaro/Rio Claro. In which case, I think the Parliament should make that amendment because it has not been justified by the EBC why there is this resistance to having a commonsense name like Mayaro/Rio Claro, where such a large part of the seat contains the distinctive community of Rio Claro, but Rio Claro’s name does not appear.

Madam Speaker, other than that, I do not see anything in the report that warrants any concern or consideration. The EBC has done its work. We still have concerns about the cleanliness of the voters list because we do not believe that the original intent of the law where people who die should not be on the voters list. We think that that movement is happening too slowly. And we also do not believe that where people have moved their residence into new areas, that the EBC should take the position that if we meet you there, we are not changing you to where you live, but we leave you with something. Something has nebulously appeared on our voters list, something called an “ancestral voting.” That is because the work has not been done or is not being done where when people move into communities, they register there and vote.

If we continue with this for too long, there will be a situation where the intent of these packages in polling divisions, where people are supposed to be in a particular location, and they are taken into account there to determine the size of the seat and the boundaries of the seat, those people are somewhere else. And, therefore, that introduces a certain amount of inaccuracy into the boundary arrangements or the assessment of the population because the correction of “where you live, you vote” is not being had. But I raise that, Madam Speaker, just as an observation, and we expect that along the way, the voters list would be attended to in a way that the errors that are in the list are minimized when these things are addressed. So, Madam Speaker, having said those few words, I beg to move.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Madam Speaker: Member for Siparia.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC (Siparia): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and thank you for the help along the way. Thank you so much. The fact that we are today debating this EBC report definitely signals that the election is at hand. Because we could not have an election without this EBC report being approved. Unlike the SRC report, which does not have to be approved, the law is very clear that the EBC report, and the recommendations, and the Order must be approved, and once that is approved, I have placed our people on notice: count 35 days. Every day you wake up, 35 days, because that is the amount of time we need. Every day you wake up—35 days down the road.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Because I do not know when, and where, and how—I do not even know if the Prime Minister is going back or if he is not going back. He did not tell us that today. But we are reading a lot of things in the newspapers. So, we are ready, and the point is that the people are ready and willing.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: The time will come. People are eagerly awaiting to vote you out of office, to vote you out of office.

Hon. Member: Red and ready—

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And so— I am red and ready, yes—

Hon. Member: Red and ready—

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Red and ready, it is Christmas, and I love red. You cannot take away the red.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Red is a good Hanuman colour as well. So for all of us in every religion, it is a great colour. So, thank you very much. The Prime Minister spent some time, which was very interesting, talking about the size of the constituencies, and some are smaller and some are bigger. Then the hon. Prime Minister talked about renaming and so on. But, Prime Minister, there is a process, you know, the constituents—if you want to come and change this report, and I do not recall in my time, maybe it happened and my memory has failed me, but I do not recall in all the years of being here that a Parliament has modified the report of the EBC. If it were to do so, or would like to do so, there is a provision in the constitution. There is a process.

This report has been, with your good self, from since the 13th of March, 2024 and, of course, with the Parliament as well because I had written to the EBC to ask them if they had done their report and if they had submitted it and they acknowledged my letter. They indicated on the 1st of April, yes, we have submitted the report, the 2024 boundaries report dated 13 March, 2024, and it was sent to the Prime Minister and the Speaker on the same 13th of March 2024. So, it is nine months later.

And if the Prime Minister is coming now to say, let us make changes, let us modify the report, which I am not going to agree to today. I am not agreeing to change this report. One, because there is a process and if you want to change the report with respect to naming, there are far more important things contained in this report that need to be changed as well. We cannot do that on the hoof. We just cannot do it that way. The law tells us, the Constitution, section 72, it says:

The Commission shall—they will send the boundaries of the seats, and so on.

And then we come down to—which one is that, Saddam?

Mr. Hossein: Three and four—

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—three and four:

“As soon as may be after the Commission has submitted a report under subsection 1(a) the Minister designated by the Prime Minister, for this purpose (in this section called “the Minister”) shall lay before the House...for its approval the draft of an Order by the President for giving effect, whether with or without modifications, to the recommendation contained in the report, and that draft may make provision for any matters which appear to the Minister to be incidental to or consequential...”

And then 72(4):

“Where any draft made under this section gives effect...”—to the—
“...recommendations with modifications, the Minister shall lay before the House... together with the draft a statement of the reasons for the modifications.”

So, we just cannot come here and hoof on our feet and make modifications because you think it is a good thing or we think it is a good thing, anybody thinks. There is a process, and I am respectfully submitting that we cannot do that on the hoof today.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So the report was there for nine months and should the Government have felt these changes were necessary, these modifications were necessary, then bring the modifications, bring the statements of the reasons, and so on. So all of that is with respect to naming. And then, I will not be mamaguyed when you mention Siparia and say, Siparia and Siparia and

Siparia is not Siparia, and Siparia is there, and we should change it, and—no, no, no. I am not taking that. Because there are far more important things that we want to change, that we should do and it is this—the hon. Prime Minister did tell us today that changes, boundaries—what was it—a waterbed?

Mr. Hosein: A waterbed.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: A waterbed, but it seems to be a PNM waterbed.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Because when you are shifting the PDs, you said it is a package of polling divisions from one seat to the next. Why is it always in a particular direction? Hon. Prime Minister, you mentioned San Fernando East and San Fernando West. But do you know right on the border of West and East San Fernando, is what? Oropouche East and Oropouche West. Why is it—and again, the EBC gives us no reasons that we never take from Oropouche East or West to put in San Fernando West? We always take it from where? From San Fernando East to—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Why? And we know why, because it is a PNM waterbed, using your words. The package comes from a strong PNM seat into a marginal PNM seat. But, I put you on notice again, and warning for the hon. Member for San Fernando West.

Dr. Moonilal: The outgoing Member.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Outgoing Member for San Fernando West. This rounds that seat will come to the United National Congress.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And so, if we want to make changes—I mean, Prof. Hamid Ghany, some time ago, shared with us, data from other EBC reports and how the thing works. Again, PNM waterbed. I am using your gracious words, Sir. And he talked about “The politics of St. Joseph.” He wrote this article 31 March, 2024 in the *Guardian*. And what he did—I will not read the entire article, Madam Speaker, with your leave, I will quote some parts. What he talked about:

“After St. Joseph was significantly altered in 2004 in time for the 2007 general election, it became a true marginal. In its 2004 report on the review of constituency boundaries, the EBC removed polling divisions 1501 and 1505, which were reliably UNC, and placed them in the St. Augustine constituency.”

What did you do then? You removed from the waterbed the packages that were pure and strong UNC and placed them into a strong UNC seat, thereby, creating in St. Joseph, a marginal.

1.10 p.m.

The Prime Minister used the words packages and waterbed, Ma'am. And I am just saying that if the Prime Minister is saying I am not happy with the name, I am saying I am not happy with the way the EBC shifts the polling divisions. So if we want to modify, that is something we would have to consider. And then the EBC gives you no reason, no reason whatsoever as to why it happens in that manner.

So I could go on with this thing from Prof. Ghany, but the same thing happened. They picked up from St. Ann's East and then dropped it where? Into St. Joseph. You take out from St. Joseph and drop it into St. Augustine. So, it is a clear PNM waterbed, where packages are moving from PNM into PNM, in seats that the PNM wants to win. The EBC does not tell us why. It does not tell us why.

And so here we are.

I remember a couple years ago, still dealing with EBC reports, in this very Parliament, the Hon. Member for Diego Martin/North East, I remember, we were dealing with the 2015 draft order, which was under my watch when it came to this Parliament. And the Hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East had this to say, he said:

“I am giving an undertaking now”—2015—“on behalf of the People’s National Movement Government which will occur...which will occur in 2015—the next people’s national government which will occur in 2015—I am giving an undertaking that one of the first things that we will do, Mr. Speaker, is to amend that part of the Constitution to put a specific time frame for the laying of these boundaries reports...within 30 days, within 60 days.”

How long we have had this report now? Nine months, nine months. I think it was laid recently on the Table and for debate today. He says, and I quote again:

“I do not see why it cannot be laid within 30 days because there is no rocket science in all of this. The report comes to the Parliament without amendment. I am not aware—there may have been some change many, many years ago that I am not aware of, but I am not aware of in the last 25 years, where any Government or Parliament has made any changes to recommendations made by the Elections and Boundaries Commission. And therefore, there is...no reason for a Government to hold on to it for a year...Therefore, on behalf of the People’s National Movement, I am pledging that we will amend the Constitution to the next boundaries report which is due in 2020 or some time before that, because the way it goes, the Elections and Boundaries Commission is mandated to submit a report—

[*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, could you—what is the matter...Be quiet.”

So, gave the undertaking, that is one of the first things to be done, it is when the report is submitted by the EBC it must be laid and debated within 30 to 60 days. What do we have now? Nine months. And then goes on to talk about persons being dishonest and do not want the electorate to know where the boundaries are, how they have changed, how to prepare.

It took me, Madam, with due respect to you and everyone else, I had to write to the EBC. I wrote to the EBC, threatening legal action, because we knew the report was due by the 13th of March, and I wrote to the Chief Election Officer at the EBC for this report, 2024 report of the EBC, which is the one that we are debating today. I wrote to them on the 1st of April, and I pointed out the constitutional mandate of the EBC, to review the number of the boundaries and so on, and to present a report, and that duty under 72(1) of the Constitution, and called upon them to please advise whether the report had been sent to the Hon. Speaker and the Hon. Prime Minister, according to the constitutional mandate.

I also pointed out, and it is a very important piece of law here, coming from Justice of Appeal Kokaram, in the judgment of *Denicia Gopaul-Jones v the Returning Officer for the Electoral District of Lengua/Indian Walk and the Chief Election Officer*. Justice of Appeal Kokaram stated in paragraph 136 of that judgment:

“I had identified earlier in this judgment the importance of trust in the electoral process. This has a special socio-political significance for the electors of Trinidad and Tobago...”

—and pointed out there must be some trust with respect to the functioning of the body empowered to deal with the electoral process in our country and, of course,

the personnel of the EBC.

The EBC responded to me on the 3rd of April, I must say they gave us a very prompt response; 2nd April, received, dispatched on the 3rd April of this year, and told us yes, we have sent the reports to the Prime Minister and to the Hon. Speaker. Nine months later, we are now here and the Prime Minister is asking us to amend this report without the due process mandated by the Constitution, to modify this report. I am saying we will say no. We will not come here ad hoc, on the foot, to amend any report or modify any report.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And if we were to do that, then we have to modify other things, not just name changes, we have to modify the way in which the EBC chooses which package from the waterbed polling divisions are picked up and dumped wherever you want to dump them. And this has been happening over and over again. But this rounds, it will not work. As I say again, “yuh licks book”, and it is coming in the near future.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So Madam Speaker, there are a few other matters. I will not delay us very long with this, because we have no intention to disapprove the Motion placed before us. As I have explained there is a process, we want to do so, and we are just anxious to have the election at the earliest opportunity. So let us get this report out of the way and start counting down. The deadline is coming, the date is coming and we are ready for you.

So I want to share with you—well, we dissolve today or August? Well, you do not have a seat, what are you speaking about?

Hon. Members: [*Laughter and desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Are you sure you have a seat?

Dr. Moonilal: And he cannot land in an airport.

Mr. Hosein: And he cannot land in the airport. He cannot find one in Tobago.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Okay, okay. I withdraw that to the Hon. Member. I withdraw it. We will find out in a couple of days' time. But I know the Hon. Member for Laventille West has no seat. I know that he is gone. He is gone. He is gone already. He is not even there. He probably cannot vote anymore, I do not know.

But let us move along. The report here, the Constitution gives us the process, and so on. I will not delay us with that. And the procedure, that previous report was in 14th March, 2019, so we had to do this one by 13th March of this year; 14th March, 2019; 13th March, 2024, given the time frame set out in the constitutional framework.

Now, the details of the report, the Hon. Prime Minister shared with us. I will not spend much more time on that. I have a meeting to attend tonight, so we will approve this EBC report in its present form. I have no intention of amending it. But I have two other matters, Madam, with your leave I would like to raise.

In 2023, the EBC embarked upon a National Field Verification Exercise. I think the Hon. Prime Minister did mention the fact that we are using 2020 data, and we are now into 2024, and soon into 2025 when it might be the election year in 2025. Well, it will be definitely next year, it cannot be this year anymore. So, this National Field Verification Exercise, the EBC began last year. And you know something? We have not had an exercise like this for 22 years. The last field exercise was 2001, that is 22 years ago. And we are dealing with data, we are determining elections and democracy; the last one was 22 years ago.

According to the EBC website, this National Field Verification Exercise is very important, and I am going to quote why from the EBC itself on their website. And I quote:

“An accurate and up-to-date Electoral List is the cornerstone to any functional democracy and is essential to the conduct of efficient, free and fair elections and protecting the integrity of our elections.”

Hear that, I repeat:

“An accurate and up-to-date Electoral List is the cornerstone to any functional democracy and is essential to the conduct of efficient, free and fair elections and protecting the integrity of our elections.”

Let us repeat again:

“The last National Field Verification Exercise was conducted in 2001.”

The EBC’s national verification exercise started when? Last year, April 2023, more than a year ago. It:

“will cover all forty-one (41) parliamentary constituencies across Trinidad and Tobago. At this time field work in Tobago is already completed. Field work was started in fourteen (14) seats in Trinidad but was forced to pause for the conduct of the...Local Government Elections. The purpose of the...exercise is:

- To create an up-to-date List of Electors which would be in alignment with the Commission’s mandate of conducting efficient, free, and fair elections;
- To ensure, as far as practicable, that each person whose name appears on the Electoral List is entitled to be on this List and is listed at his/her correct address within the respective polling

divisions.

- To obtain information on persons whose names appear on the List for the particular polling division but are either deceased, residing at another location, migrated or unknown at that location;
- To effect transfers of persons now residing at addresses within a particular polling division, but are registered elsewhere.”

Let me say this then, there is no excuse for the EBC to have failed in its duty to conduct a National Field Verification Exercise for 22 years.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: It is unacceptable, inexcusable. It emphasizes a massive bias and dysfunction that the UNC has continuously accused the EBC of, and today I ask and call upon the Government to ascertain from the EBC what is the status of this ongoing National Field Verification Exercise, which began last year? It began last year; a year ago. What is the status of this? And therefore, these electoral lists pursuant to the EBC order, and thereafter the writ of election, is going to be based on 2020 data, and none of this would have been completed or done. So we are working on false lists. Again, Hon. Prime Minister, you want to make modifications, that is something we have to work with. I do not think—I think you mentioned it about dead people voting, or dead names on the list.

I know the Hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East, dead men walking, you remember that? His famous words, dead men walking and dead men voting. But if we do not have this exercise, Madam, we cannot have a proper, transparent, free and fair election.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: We cannot. On top of that now, there is the whole issue of the national census, which is tied in and related to having proper electoral lists.

So whilst we are on that list, I want to ask the Ministry of Planning and Development, in particular the CSO department under that Ministry—is the Hon. Minister here? I do not see the Minister here; the Ministry of Planning and Development, in particular with respect to the CSO, to provide our country with an urgent update on the status of the national census. That one began since 2022. We are in 2024. What is happening with that?

I know the Member for Arouca/Maloney, Hon. Member, you were once in that Ministry, but there is a new Minister. What is the status of the census? This is a very important report to inform, impact, directly or indirectly, the outcome of elections in our country.

The CSO's website tells us this, about that census that began in 2022.

“A national population and housing census is the complete count of the population and living quarters in any given area, territory or country. The census is conducted on a...every ten years—and is the most complex and costly activity that a statistical office can undertake. The data collected are essential to...planning, crisis response and improved governance. The purpose of the national population and housing census is to serve as the primary source of data on a broad range of demographics about the national population and the housing stock...”

It covers demographic variables such as age, gender, religion, ethnicity, education, internal migration, marital status, fertility, household size and household composition, international migration, disability, chronic illness, health, economic

activity, information and communication technology. Now, this is so important for an electoral list. Because this will help us to weed out dead people.

Now, I remember we were in St. Joseph one year for elections, and we discovered that about 30 people were not living at the addresses that were mentioned, and we wrote to the EBC and they said they cannot take a name off a list. They cannot take the name off a list. And that is why this census is so vital, because the census will inform EBC and verify. But even though we reported these persons were not living there, they said no, they cannot remove the name from a list on their own volition.

1.25 p.m.

So, this census gives us a wealth of information which will inform evidence-based decision-making, private/public data, and so on. So what is the status—I am asking, from the Government, from the CSO— of this census, national census?

The Ministry indicated that the CSO is working to conduct the census by the 4th quarter of 2022. I say, we are now in the 4th quarter of 2024. We have no update on this very important document. Does the Government have the document? If the answer is yes, it should be shared with the population. If the Government does not have the report, where is the report? What is the delay? Are you hiding the findings to inform your Government alone? PNM persons alone? It should be shared with the national population. We need answers on this census immediately.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And finally, Madam Speaker, as we go into—we are clearly—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Standing Order 48(1), please.

Madam Speaker: So, I do uphold the objection. We have allowed you some leeway but I think we need to get back to what this report is. Okay.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I thank you, Madam Speaker. I am just asking, where is the report, Madam Speaker? And I will move along. I will move along.

Madam Speaker, it is clear that we are going into election season. We may delay—I remember the hon. Member for one of the Diego Martin seats, I think it was the late hon. Ken Valley. He said, “You could run, but cyah hide”. “You could run, but you cannot hide.”

Hon. Member: “...run, but you cyah hide.”

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So, that date is coming, and therefore I have written to the hon. Prime Minister. I have yet to receive a response to that letter that I wrote to the hon. Prime Minister. I want to remind—would you ask this fella, “wanna be” Prime Minister—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—to leave me alone.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: No, no. Member for Siparia, I am on my legs. So, you know, two wrongs do not make a right. Okay? And you are really experienced, you know better than that. So, let us all proceed in a respectful manner. We were reminded earlier that this is the season of goodwill. No better season for us to practice that. Okay?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you. I will move along. So, three months ago, I wrote the hon. Prime Minister requesting that the Government bring in independent international observers to elections.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Three months later, I have no response. I want to place on the record some of the contents, not all of it, Madam Speaker. The letter was dated 16th September, 2024—

Madam Speaker: Again, I rise on Standing Order 48, I know you have painted a particular context about what we are dealing with, but this is not about elections. The debate is not about elections. The substance of the debate, is with respect to this report that is before us. So that, you know, I am not going to allow this discussion on this to stretch into all kinds of imaginable things that happens at elections. So, please if you have another point related to this report let us get on to that.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you very much. I will be guided hon. Madam Speaker. I was not going into what happens or does not happen. I am just asking to ensure we have free and fair elections, and this report is about elections, it is about boundaries, it is about constituencies—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Okay. I accept that, and I have ruled about what you are asking, and saying that, I pointed out to Standing Order 48(1), I ruled on Standing Order 48(1) that where you are heading is not permissible. Let us get back to where we were on this report.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: On this report, Madam Speaker, I am guided by your great wisdom, but I have a job to do, and my job is to raise concerns in the national interest.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: That is why I am sitting here, and so I say, this report clears the way for the next general election whenever it is called. You can

run, you cannot hide, and it has to be called. And you know you are being guided by events, but the UNC is about events, we are creating the events, and you are being controlled by events.

So, you have to bring an EBC report, you have to name a date, you have to issue the writ, and I am saying whenever that writ is issued, we will be ready. We have no intention to object to the report. We may have concerns. Our hon. Prime Minister mentioned, you are Siparia, he is right. The hon. Member is right. Siparia is called Siparia, it has been Siparia, the seat of Siparia, as far as I can remember, but 83 per cent of the seat of Siparia does not fall in Siparia. Yes, well, the hon. Prime Minister told me. You do not have to tell me, I know. I live there. I live there. I live in that area. I live in the Phillipine, which is in the PDRC.

So, Madam Speaker, yes there are some inconsistencies and so on, but the suggestion of the hon. Prime Minister to modify the report cannot be done, in my respectful view, on the hoof here in this Parliament today. And again, I call upon the Prime Minister, and the Government to please send for the international observers. I thank you, very much.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, you are familiar with the Shakespearean comment, “Sound and fury signify nothing.”

Hon. Member: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: But once again, Madam Speaker, as I am going to do, I just have to put the record straight. I know that my colleague from Siparia is infrequently in this House, meaning, she does not come in often. When she comes,

she does not stay. She does not take part in proceedings. So, I am not surprised at her concern in her little vignette here today about this report, and she likes to write. The Member for Siparia likes to write or the Member likes to sign letters, because I do not think it is done by her. How could the Member for Siparia come here today, and make all that fury about the EBC report being late, and hidden from the Opposition, and had to write the EBC to ask—

Madam Speaker, what are the facts? What—Madam Speaker, and the running commentary. I did not disturb the Member, I am just setting the records straight for those who might have heard her, and might have taken what she said seriously. The law required that the Election and Boundaries Commission complete, and submit a report by March. The facts will show that that was done by the Commission without any requirement for any letter or any intervention by the Member for Siparia.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: But, anybody hearing her a few moments ago would think that the EBC was being delinquent or that something was being hidden, and it took some letter from her which she was busy quoting herself, writing to the EBC. There were never any requirements for anybody to write to the EBC because the EBC did its work, and submitted a report in time, in March. I think it was the 13th or the 12th of March or thereabouts. The law says, “That the report should be laid in the Parliament as soon after as possible.” Madam Speaker, unless the Member for Siparia knows otherwise, and can show me, because my memory, and I think the Parliament’s records will bear me out, that report was laid in here in the Parliament in April.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

1.35 p.m.

So here it is the limit of the law is there for March. The EBC met the deadline of March. The Government laid it in the Parliament in April. What is this talk today about report and report and report and having to write to the EBC when the report was put here in April, one month later. And, where was it after April?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: On the website.

Hon. Member: Lost.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Once it was laid here—not lost, on the website—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: It is on the website. It is there.

Mr. Young SC: Ridiculous.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:—for the whole world, for the whole country to see it. The website—it was on the website. So why is my colleague from Siparia coming here today and talking as though this report somehow had some subterfuge to it and it required no writing to the EBC? It was all hooley.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Exactly.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: So Madam Speaker, let the record show that there was never any problem with this report being laid here or being prepared by the EBC.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: And then of course, of course, I did mention, Madam Speaker, that there were observations of name, not content of any constituency; name. My colleague went on to quote Hamid Ghany who proved to her that some seats were being gerrymandered. Madam Speaker—

Mr. Imbert: Nonsense.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:—what is the truth of that? Because UNC and other people

feed that foolishness to the population.

The reason for seat changes being made in a certain direction is because the lowest number on any polling division is in Chacachacare; zero, zero, zero, five. So any counting of votes, and electors in a constituency, you must start at that end and the first constituency to be made to fit this jigsaw is Diego Martin West. Once you establish the overall electorate and you divide it by the number of seats, and you set about to make sure that there are enough voters in each seat, you start in Diego Martin West.

That is why during my term as a Member for Diego Martin West, I have had boundary changes on the east and the north. Because at one time, when the population of Diego Martin West fell below, they added a piece of Petit Valley to it to bring it into Diego Martin West. And, if you take a piece on the east from Petit Valley, when you come to Diego Martin Central, if Diego Martin Central does not fall into the level, you take it from Diego Martin East. You move all the way along, and then you get to the point where you cannot go south because, from Diego Martin West, you cannot go south—that is the sea. You cannot go north, it is the sea. Same thing with San Fernando West.

So as you fill out Diego Martin West, you keep moving eastwards and the boundary changes are required to be made between those constituencies as you go, all the way around the country. That is what they keep misleading people about; that something funny is happening and the EBC—and talking about PNM seats and PNM seats, and “my seat”. Siparia is a constituency. You happen to be the MP for the moment, but it is not your seat. It is a part of the description of a constituency and it is not made for you.

What I pointed out, Madam Speaker, and I am glad she agreed, 80-odd per cent of

the seat of Siparia is not in Siparia. And all I said today, is that in a case like that, or in a case like Mayaro/Rio Claro, here it is the EBC telling us that they have made a name change to St. Joseph because 21 per cent of the constituency is in Aranguez, so they changed the name to St. Joseph/Aranguez.

All I am asking, if it is that you are saying that the community of 21 per cent be included in the name and it is at the perimeter, do not argue with that, but let us do the same thing—and I suggested to Pointe-à-Pierre, do you have that same concern where Pointe-à-Pierre has disappeared—that is some interpretation—personalize Siparia seat, and “I doh want”, and “I doh want”. Is either you have a principle or you do not. But principle is not something that my colleague from Siparia is familiar with.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister, I suggest you find another way to say what you would like to say.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I thought it would have been worst to say she is unprincipled. I did not say that, but Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister, I would ask you to withdraw that and I am certain you can find a way to say what you wish to say.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I withdraw. I withdraw. But I must say, if we are accepting the principle in St. Joseph, that 21 per cent of Aranguez requires a change, apply the same formula elsewhere.

Mrs. Persad Bissessar SC: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: And to come here, Madam Speaker, in the Parliament, where—Madam Speaker, I do not need a commentary from my colleague from

Siparia, she is too cantankerous.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Okay, so I will take them in the order. I will take them in the order. I just said that when we began, we will comply with the standing orders. Standing Order 53 talks about no running commentary and no loud talking. Okay? Let us stop the running commentary. Alright? Once we start doing that, we go down a particular route. So let us stop that. Prime Minister, I again ask you to withdraw that descriptive.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I thank you for your ruling, and that means I am now protected from that behaviour.

Hon. Member: Withdraw.

Madam Speaker: Just withdraw the descriptive.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I withdraw.

Madam Speaker: Thank you very much.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: But, Madam Speaker, a significant portion of the contribution, repeated ad nauseum, by my colleague from Siparia, was that she is not going to take part in any change because the process of change has to be—
Madam Speaker—

Hon. Member: The Parliament supposed to—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I read here in the preamble, and with your permission, I will read it again. It says that:

“...the Minister, designated by the Prime Minister for this purpose shall lay before the House of Representatives for its approval the Draft Order by the President for giving effect, whether with or without modifications, to the recommendations...”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: That is the preamble which ushers in the treatment of this report. I have my colleague from Siparia, Senior Counsel, telling me that if we want to change the name of a seat—the name, not the content of the constituency. The content of the constituency and the apportioning of electorate, all that is being done by the EBC.

We are here saying, if we follow my colleague from Siparia, that this Parliament here dealing with a Motion, does not have the authority to change the name of Mayaro to Mayaro/Rio Claro, it requires some process. What process? What process does one have to go through? The singular process is to pass an amendment here today and accept it by this House and the name change. It is a recommendation from the EBC and it says it can be passed with or without amendment. My colleague is making a big thing that she is prepared to pass it without interfering with it. That is your point of view. There are 40 other points of views in here. There are 40 others.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: And if of course, you do not want to do it—I did not demand that it be made. I put a suggestion to the House pointing out the situation, Madam Speaker, in two constituencies and communities, and all my colleague had to say was “I do not agree”. But fuming at the mouth and making it look and trying to make it sound as something underhand and you want outsiders.

Maybe, when the foreigners come, the foreigners will do it because that is what you are inviting them to do. Foreigners to come and do what? So we in this House, assembled as we are, under the Standing Orders, we do not have the power and the authority to change the name of Mayaro to Mayaro/Rio Claro but some

foreigners are going to come in and tell us what?

Mr. Imbert: Imagine that.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Tell us what? What will the foreigners tell—Madam Speaker, I want your protection from Siparia.

Madam Speaker: Member, please.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I know I am going to be ruled out of order, but the Member for Siparia apparently has no behaviour.

Hon. Member: None.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, the issues raised by the Member are without merit. As a matter of fact, to comfort her on the way home, because I know at this hour—she is not normally up at this hour, but Madam Speaker, at the moment, I am waiting. I have already given the instruction. The draft is prepared. Any minute now it can come in front of me. I have already indicated to the Secretariat of CARICOM that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is asking CARICOM to send a delegation whenever the election takes place in Trinidad and Tobago. We expect a CARICOM delegation. I would sign it. It is due to come to me any time now. Because I do not know why they are so previous and hurry. Election, election—my colleague has called for election nine times and lost all nine times. That is—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Always calling for election. Madam Speaker, what do you call a person who likes licks?

Hon. Member: “Ah Bobolee”.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Is it a “sodomasochist”?

Hon. Member: Sodomasochist.

Mr. Young SC: A sadomasochist.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Calling for election, calling for election, and as fast as you call it, you get beaten, you go off, you corral yourself, you lick your wounds and you call for it again. Madam Speaker, that has to be some kind of fetish.

Hon. Member: Masochist.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: So we are going to have CARICOM. I did receive from the Member, or some one of her underlings, “a list of all kind of Tom, Dick and Harry from ohee-oho and Timbuktu”. I am not inviting them here.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I do not know who they are, but I am certainly going to have to ask CARICOM, and I trust that CARICOM will find it necessary to send us a delegation to observe our elections because we have nothing to hide, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*].

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Nothing to hide. And I would like the Members of the Opposition—it goes back to the DLP days—to stop fooling people about the way we get our seats organized. Educate our people. Let them know that Chacachacare is our first polling division and as you adjust boundaries from Diego Martin going east, if you find shortfalls or over average, you adjust them into the neighbouring constituencies. That is the law in Trinidad and Tobago. That is the formula. That is the mechanism, and it is done by a commission independent of the Government, and of course, independent of the People’s National Movement or any political party.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*].

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Why is that so difficult to let the population and to let the

children understand that? Why you have to be telling them untruths, giving them the impression that something underhand is happening? Madam Speaker, I have been in this political avenue from Tobago to Trinidad for over 40 years. I have not seen the EBC acting on behalf of any political party. Our Elections and Boundaries Commission is an independent entity.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: But I have seen conversations misrepresenting how seats are formed. And as for the one point the Member made that I think has some merit today is the whole question of the lateness of a national survey by the Election and Boundaries Commission. The last time the EBC did a survey it was on a Motion that came from the Opposition side where we demanded that that survey be done.

Mr. Young SC: In 2000.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: When that survey was done in 2000, it was 100,000 people that came off the list.

Hon. Member: Exactly.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Because the EBC was going merrily along and following its own principle of not taking the names of dead people off the list. I should tell you, Madam Speaker, even as my colleague raised this very valid point, she confused it with the census. The census does not have any name on it—

Hon. Member: It is only numbers.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:—so the census cannot be used to fix any list. She is confused. The census is just numbers of people so the EBC cannot use that. The EBC exists for, and is required to go there and find the name, the location and the address of individuals to have them on the voters' list. So the census cannot help

the EBC in the EBC work.

1.50 p.m.

What the Member said today was pure nonsense—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:—going on about calling for a census to deal with the voters' list. Go to the record of *Hansard* and you will see how many hours—and I think I led that Motion, pointing out how many people were on that list. When you have 100,000 persons on the list, right—that is about 8 per cent of the voting population, or 10 per cent of the voting population thereabouts—and they do not exist, it means that when you do the apportionment of the thing, you have an in-built error known to you, and the only way you could fix that error is to take those names off and see what is left and then apply the formula. Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, somewhere in the proceedings, the EBC is taking the position that it is not taking names off the list because it is afraid of legal challenges.

Mr. Imbert: From them.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: That is something that all politicians should know, and do we accept that? That you are doing the work, the EBC must put in the funds? I am being asked to ask the EBC—and the Member is implying that there is some list somewhere of the work of the exercise and maybe Government has it. Maybe she will write and ask me for it again. The bottom line is, I know of no list, and I also know that the work may not have been done. Because if it was done, then we should know. And what the EBC was doing, rather than do a national list like they did in 2000, they were doing, I think, spot. And even as they do the spot, they are taking the position, if they meet people living anywhere, where their name is not in the community, they are not rectifying it. That is my understanding of what is

going on.

So I have no list. The Government has no list. The Cabinet has no list. The EBC has produced no outcome of that exercise and therefore, instead of trying to make it look as if the Government is hoping to prosper by something, we need to have serious conversation with the EBC on the whole question of how the list is cleaned up. Because if in 2000, 100,000 people came off, between then and now, is it possible that another few tens of thousands should not be on the list? And the easiest record to get is the death record.

The death records are available as part of this country's archive and therefore, if someone is consulting those records and correlating them with the EBC list, with the authority to do so, then the list could be cleaned up on a continuous basis. As people move around the country or as populations grow in the country, the EBC has the requirement to understand that, to know that, and to apply it to the formula and the list. That is what the EBC exists to do. The question is: Is it being done? That ought not to be put at the Government's feet.

There is an independent commission to do that. And if the commission is taking the position because it is historical or ancestral voting, then it makes a nonsense of the whole idea of wanting to know who is where and how they fall as constituencies. And I think somewhere along the way, the EBC has got into that, either habit or has come up with its own policy of talking about ancestral voting. You are to vote where you live and the EBC ought to have a current list, not a 20-year-old list.

The last point I want to make is that even if this report had not been brought to the Parliament and passed, it is quite legal and proper that you could have called the election on the last list. So do not imply that the Government is doing anything

underhand or trying anything fancy to get an advantage by not bringing the report and whatever. The report is brought here on time and it does not take an MIT physicist or putting a man on the moon to understand that it is brought here before the election, it is passed today. So this new report will cover the next election, whenever it is called. And I want to give my colleague from Siparia the undertaking, so that she can sleep well, that in Trinidad and Tobago, elections will be called. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I beg to move.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Draft Order entitled “the Elections and Boundaries Commission Order, 2024” be approved.

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, may I crave your indulgence to revert to two items of business, which we previously dealt with. Do I have your concurrence?

Agreed to.

Madam Speaker: Yes, please proceed. Leader of the House.

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Madam Speaker, with regard to written Question No. 9, we are asking for a two-week deferral—

Hon. Member: [*Interruption*]

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: We are asking for a two-week deferral on that response, please.

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, unless I

am mistaken that written question, Question No. 9, was filed by the Member for Oropouche East. I would, therefore, like to invoke Standing Order 29(13), and invite you to send a very strong and stern letter to the appropriate Minister on this level of tardiness and disrespect to the Parliament.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: So that in accordance with Standing Order 29(13), the letter will be written on Question No. 9.

MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS (SENIOR CITIZENS' PENSION AND PUBLIC ASSISTANCE) BILL, 2024

Bill to amend the Senior Citizens' Pension Act, Chap. 32:02 and the Public Assistance Act, Chap. 32:03 [*The Minister of Social Development and Family Services*]; read the first time.

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House.

ADJOURNMENT

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

CHRISTMAS DAY GREETINGS

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, before I put the question, as you all know, we are in season of Advent, which is the precursor to the very festive joyous season of Christmas and therefore, I now invite Members to bring greetings on the occasion of Christmas. The Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Indarsingh: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam Speaker, I have always found that the gospel, according to Luke, gives the best lesson with respect to the birth of Christ. And although the King James Version of the Bible is not the recommended Catholic text—the Catholic text being the Douay-Rheims version, the Jerusalem version and so on—I have always found that the King James Version is one of the most elegant versions of the Bible and in fact, England was one of the most Catholic countries when the King James Version of the Bible was completed. So allow me to read from the Gospel according to Luke, King James Version.

“And it came to pass in those days, that they went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world shall be taxed.

And all went to be taxed, everyone into his own city...”

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Hon. C. Imbert: That is what it was, actually. “And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem...

To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

And she brought forth her first born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

And there were in that same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone around about them; and they were...afraid.

And the Angel said to them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ, the Lord...”

Now, Luke continues to a great extent after that, but that is the signal point, Madam Speaker, that on December 25th, we celebrate the birth of Christ, whom we Christians believe is our Saviour, Lord and God. Christmas is the second most important Christian celebration of the year, the first being Easter, where we celebrate the resurrection, but Christmas is the second most important Christian feast of the year, and some, even I, might figure it is right there with the resurrection.

So this is a very important festival for Christians and it is celebrated by all our peoples, of all faiths, of all dispositions. We are a country that is multicultural and multi-religious, and it always pleases me when I see all persons of all faiths, whether Hindu, Muslim, Christian, et cetera, celebrating the birth of Christ.

So on behalf of the Government, on behalf of the People’s National Movement, on behalf of myself, I wish to bring tidings to this House as we move forward from Advent, as the hon. Speaker has pointed out—we are now in the season of Advent, which is in anticipation of the birth of Christ—I wish to wish everyone good tidings, joy, fellowship, family, and I also wish to take this opportunity to wish everyone in this House, a bright and prosperous new year, 2025. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Members of the Opposition, I wish to offer a hearty, sincere and warm greetings, Christmas greetings, to all Members of this House, colleagues on both sides, and especially our hard-working parliamentary staff.

Every year, at this time, we rise to offer festive greetings of joy and hope to our nation. However, this year as a Parliament, this year as elected officials, we are called to go beyond the fragile, cosmetic messages of joy. This year, we cannot simply offer messages of merriment, when so many in our society exist in turmoil. As a matter of fact, today, we are two weeks away from Christmas. In that two weeks, many families may fall into further turmoil, whether from crime, from the cost of living or other socio-economic burdens facing our nation.

This Christmas as parliamentarians, especially those in authority, we are called to ask ourselves, is it kind words of temporary merriment that our society deserves, or is it determined actions of permanent impact to improve the lives of those we serve that is required? Today, we in the Opposition make a clarion call, that this Christmas must be a season where our actions, our words, our commitment ensures the welfare of all.

If as a Parliament we are to truly reflect the love and goodness that defines Christmas, then we cannot separate ourselves from the reality facing our nation. Christmas is not simply about repeating the blessed journey of Mary and Joseph. It is not simply a story of the nativity. Christmas is a reminder of God's selfless love for us. Christmas is a reminder of God's selfless love to offer his only begotten son to us. Christmas is a reminder that the Christ child grew up to dedicate his life, his work and his heart to ensure the salvation of all.

This Christmas, it cannot be a repetition of the usual Christmas rhetoric. If there ever was a time when we are called as leaders, called as a nation, called as

individuals to let our actions speak louder than our words, it is this season. This season, we are called to be selfless like the Christ child that was born in the manger, dedicating our actions to those in need. This year, so many depend on our kindness.

2.05 p.m. This year, so many are at the mercy of those in authority. Let us go beyond. Let us put people first. This Christmas, let us go beyond speaking about joyous festivities with the hope that it drowns out the hardship in our country. Christmas is the birth of Jesus, the Saviour who came to redeem the world at the foundation of his birth, his kindness towards all.

I pray for God's blessings on each Member of this House and their family. I thank all parliamentary staff for their dedicated work in the last year. I thank each Member here, and let us have a brighter 2025. So on behalf of myself, the Leader of the Opposition, the United National Congress and each of the Members here, I say, Merry Christmas to you, Madam Speaker, and to you. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I too would like to offer warm and heartfelt greetings to the Christian community, and the nation as a whole, on the occasion of Christmas. For many of us, Christmas is synonymous with parang music—traditional and soca parang—cleaning, good food, visiting with family and friends, and the sharing of gifts. On a deeper level, it is a time to reflect on the year gone by, to get rid of old mindsets, and let go of old grudges and grievances. It is a time for renewal, forgiveness, hope and joy. And while it is very easy to get lost in the trappings and extravagance of the Christmas season, let us not forget the reason for the season, that is, the celebration of the birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

So in the midst of all the hustle and bustle, and the merriment, let us take some time to renew ourselves and our minds and remember the extraordinary life

and sacrifice of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Let us be like the angel, who appeared to the shepherds, and spread the message of hope, peace, love and justice to our fellowmen. Let us collectively and individually pledge to be like the Christmas star that led the Three Wise Men to the baby Jesus, the light of the world, so that we can usher and guide Trinidad and Tobago onto a brighter, hopeful, more sustainable and prosperous path for all.

On behalf of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, on behalf of my family, on my own behalf, I take this opportunity to wish each of you and all of Trinidad and Tobago, a very happy, holy and safe Christmas, and best wishes for a healthy and prosperous new year, 2025.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 2.08 p.m.