

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

*Wednesday, February 05, 2025*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

**PRAYERS**

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**PAPERS LAID**

1. Notification of Her Excellency, the President, in respect of the nomination of Mr. Junior Benjamin, for appointment to act in the Office of Commissioner of Police. [*The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Esmond Forde)*]
2. Notification of Her Excellency, the President, in respect of the nomination of Mr. Curt Simon, for appointment to act in the Office of Deputy Commissioner of Police. [*Mr. E. Forde*]
3. Forty-Sixth Annual Report of the Ombudsman for the period January to December 2023. [*Mr. E. Forde*]
4. Annual Report of the Anti-Terrorism Unit for the period 2023-2024. [*The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis)*]
5. Executed Investment Loan Agreement between the Corporación Andina de Fomento (CAF) and the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, for the Project for the Strengthening of the Export Import Bank of Trinidad and Tobago (EXIMBANK) Limited. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]
6. Value Added Tax (Bond-Payment Refund) (Amendment) Regulations, 2025. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
7. Annual Report of the Financial Intelligence Unit of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended September 30, 2024. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

**UNREVISED**

8. Annual Administrative Report of the Trinidad and Tobago International Financial Centre Management Company Limited as at September 30, 2023. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
9. Audited Financial Statements of Trinidad and Tobago International Financial Centre Management Company Limited (TTIFCMCL) for the year ended September 30, 2024. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]  
*To be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.*
10. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Children's Life Fund for the year ended September 30, 2014. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
11. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the South-West Regional Health Authority for the year ended September 30, 2012. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
12. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Police Complaints Authority for the year ended September 30, 2023. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]  
*Papers 10 to 12 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.*
13. Administrative Report of the Point Fortin Borough Corporation for the period October 01, 2014 to September 30, 2015. [*The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi SC)*]
14. Administrative Report of the Point Fortin Borough Corporation for the period October 01, 2015 to September 30, 2016. [*Hon. F. Al-Rawi SC*]
15. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries to the Eighteenth Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Examination of the Reports of the Auditor General on the Financial Statements of the National Agricultural Marketing and Development

- Corporation (NAMDEVCO) for the financial years 2014 to 2021 and follow-up on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Public Accounts Committee's Twenty-Third Report from the Eleventh Parliament. [*The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis)*]
16. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries to the Nineteenth Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Examination of the Reports of the Auditor General on the Financial Statements of the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB) for the financial years 2014 to 2018. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
  17. Annual Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Civil Aviation Authority for the year 2023-2024. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
  18. Administrative Report of the University of Trinidad and Tobago for the period October 2020 to September 2021. [*The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly)*]
  19. Annual Report of the Custodian on the operations of the National Forensic DNA Databank Custodian Unit of Trinidad and Tobago for the year 2021. [*The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds)*]
  20. Annual Report of the Custodian on the operations of the National Forensic DNA Databank Custodian Unit of Trinidad and Tobago for the year 2022. [*Hon. F. Hinds*]
  21. Annual Report of the Custodian on the operations of the National Forensic DNA Databank Custodian Unit of Trinidad and Tobago for the year 2023. [*Hon. F. Hinds*]

22. Annual Administrative Report of the Caribbean Industrial Research Institute for the fiscal year 2019. [*The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Penelope Beckles)*]
23. Annual Report of the National Trust of Trinidad and Tobago for the fiscal year 2021/2022. [*Hon. P. Beckles*]

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

### ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

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

### ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

#### US National Energy Emergency

#### (Impact on T&T)

**37. Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (Couva South)** asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Having regard to the settlement for the collective bargaining period 2014-2019, will the Minister inform this House of the number of police officers who, as at December 15, 2024, are yet to receive their “back pay”?

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

**The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. According to information provided by the Commissioner of Police, as at December the 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024, as a result of incomplete personnel records and other related matters, there are 847 police officers who are yet to receive their back pay for the collective bargaining period 2014 to 2019. It should be noted that the Government has made and will continue to make all available

resources available to the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service to complete this exercise and will continue to assist the police service to finalize this matter wherever possible.

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

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, I do not know if the Minister can clarify which Commissioner of Police provided the information to him. But more importantly also—

**Madam Speaker:** Member you are allowed one question. Which is the question?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** I am following through, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Okay. So there was not a question?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Yes, there is a question to come.

**Madam Speaker:** Okay. So one question at a time.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** I am guided.

**Madam Speaker:** Okay. So could you state what the question is, and then we will see where we are going.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister taking into consideration that the Commissioner of Police told a Joint Select Committee on July 2024 that 1500 police officers were still awaiting their back pay, as the line Minister, can you inform the House what is the specific reason for these officers who are yet to receive their back pay?

**Madam Speaker:** I am not going to allow all that preamble. We are talking about 847 because that was the response.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Yes.

**Madam Speaker:** If you ask the question properly, then we will allow it. You have another question you could ask.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, could the Minister inform this House what is the specific reason that the 847 officers are yet to receive their back pay?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Thank you. From information available to me, there might not be a single specific reason. There might be a number of reasons, including, Madam Speaker, the computation of the arrangements where sick leave is involved and certain amounts of that. So it is those kinds of things and the availability of those records, Madam Speaker, that might have lent itself to the difficulty that has taken us to where we are now. Thank you.

### **Trinidad and Tobago Police Service**

#### **(Updates on Pensions and Gratuities)**

**38. Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh** (*Couva South*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Will the Minister inform this House of the number of retired police officers who, as at December 15, 2024, have not received their pensions and gratuity entitlements from the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS)?

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

**The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds):** Thank you very much again, Madam Speaker. According to information received from the Commissioner of Police, as at December 15, 2024, there are 198 retired police officers who are yet to receive their pension and gratuity entitlements from the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. It should be noted that the Government has made and will continue to make all available resources available to the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service to finalize these payments and will continue to assist the police service to finalize these in the shortest possible time.

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

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you very much. Minister could you inform this House of the number that you have just identified? Because the Government had given a commitment in lieu of the computation of the pension arrangements that an initial sum of \$3500 will be paid to persons who have retired and are yet to receive their back pay. Can you confirm if any of these—

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Back pay?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Not back pay but their pension entitlement, if any of these officers are in receipt of this \$3500 sum.

**Madam Speaker:** Minister.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** I cannot answer that with any specificity, Madam Speaker, but I would be surprised if, as we had made arrangements, to pay \$3500 in lieu of the final computations if this was not being done. Thank you.

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

### **TTDF & Immigration Division**

#### **(Updates on Pensions and Gratuities)**

**39. Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh** (*Couva South*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Will the Minister indicate the number of retired service men and women/public officers who, as at December 15, 2024, have not received their pension and gratuity entitlements from the following:

- i. The Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force; and
- ii. The Immigration Division?

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

**The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds):** Again, I thank you, Madam Speaker. The question seeks information about the Defence Force and, secondly, the Immigration. In respect of the Defence Force, based on information

received from the chief of defence staff as at December 15, 2024, there are 125 former employees awaiting receipt of their terminal benefits, that is to say, pensions and gratuity. Of this amount, the files of 75 persons are under active review by the Ministry's internal audit unit, while the remaining 50 are currently at processing stages at the Auditor General's Department and/or the Ministry of Finance.

It should be noted that the Government has made and will continue to make all available resources available to the Defense Force to complete this exercise and will continue to assist the Defense Force in this regard whenever and however possible. In respect of the Immigration Division, the Chief Immigration Officer has advised that as of December the 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024, there are no technical or administrative officers within the Immigration Division that are awaiting receipt of terminal benefits, pension, and gratuity so meaning. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

**1.45 p.m.**

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

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Minister, given your continued information in respect of the question, are you in a position to tell this House when these additional resources will be granted to the Defence Force and the Immigration Division to facilitate the payment?

**Hon. F. Hinds:** All of my responses, Madam Speaker, suggested that this help has been, is continuing to be, and will continue to be made available to the police service, the Defence Force and the Immigration Division. I thank you.

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

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Minister, are you satisfied given the cost of living and the challenges that retirees have to live with in Trinidad and Tobago that the



Government is really doing its earnest best to deal with the issue that is being faced by retirees within the law enforcement agencies in this country?

**Madam Speaker:** Member, I rule that question out of order having regard to what has been asked and what has been answered. Member for Caroni Central.

### **Chase Village to Chaguanas Highway Expansion Project**

#### **(Revised Time frame)**

**42. Mr. Arnold Ram** (*Caroni Central*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

Will the Minister provide the revised time frame for the completion of the highway expansion project from Chaguanas to Chase Village?

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

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

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I wish to start by placing the highway expansion project from Chaguanas to Chase Village in context. The Uriah Butler Highway, originally named the Princess Margaret Highway, runs from Champ Fleurs to Chaguanas at which point it meets the Solomon Hochoy Highway. The highway was constructed in 1958 in order to connect Chaguanas to other commercial centres in northwest Trinidad. It was extended and renamed after labour leader Tubal Uriah Butler in 1988. Starting off as a single-lane roadway in the 50s it has since then developed into a multilane highway with two lanes on either side of Champ Fleurs and expanding into three from Grand Bazaar to Chaguanas. The Sir Solomon Hochoy Highway begins at Chaguanas heading south of the island ending in Ghandi Village, Debe. The highway was named after Sir Solomon Hochoy, the first Caribbean-born governor of Trinidad and Tobago and the first governor general of Trinidad and Tobago. Originally constructed as a two-lane highway in the early 1970s, it was expanded to a four-lane dual-carriageway

in the late 1970s.

The work being done from Chaguanas to Chase village is an expansion of a four-lane highway to six lanes in keeping with the UBH and is a natural extension of the highway network upgrade started by this Government from Colville Street in the north, CRH in the east and the San Fernando to Point Fortin Highway in the south. In all the attempts at upgrade, the main challenge is working on a site which is already in use. There is inconvenience experienced and the ever-persistent risk of known and unknown factors in retarding progress. In this instance, the weather and fluctuation in working hours have caused delays by the Ministry, but the Ministry remains steadfast in providing improved infrastructure for the travelling public.

Accordingly, the Sir Solomon Hochoy Highway project from Chaguanas to Chase Village is divided into two packages, package one from Chaguanas to Brentwood and package two from Brentwood to Chase Village. Road work including median work and surface course asphalt is expected to be completed by the end of February 2025. Slope stabilisation and other ancillary road works along the acceleration and deceleration ramps of the Chaguanas overpass are expected to be completed by the end of March 2025. I thank you.

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

**Mr. Ram:** Thank you. Hon. Minister, can you indicate—you mentioned two packages—the nature of these packages, in terms of the cost for the packages that you have identified?

**Madam Speaker:** Well, Member having regard to the original question, its time frame, I rule that question out of order.

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

**Mr. Ram:** Hon. Minister, can you indicate whether there are any cost overruns

that have been caused as a result of the revised time frame?

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Madam Speaker, through you, no, there have been no cost overruns and the projects are within budget. Thank you.

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

**Mr. Lee:** As a follow-up question, Madam Speaker, to the Minister of Works and Transport. Could the Minister state what are the reasons for the delay in completing this extension from Chaguanas to Chase Village because it was supposed to have been completed a while ago.

**Madam Speaker:** Minister.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Madam Speaker, I actually did indicate that in the answer. The challenges are when you are working on a site that is already in use and you have limited time to work during the day, and then we have weather constraints. So those are the reasons for the delay. Thank you.

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

### **Edinburgh Road to Longdenville**

#### **(Revised Time frame)**

**43. Mr. Arnold Ram** (*Caroni Central*) asked the hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government:

Will the Minister advise as to the timeframe for the completion of the Edinburgh Road that connects Carlsen Field to Longdenville?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Rural Development and Local Government.

**The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi SC):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank the hon. Member for the question. The Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government is committed to fulfilling its mandate of constructing and maintaining all secondary

roads and drainage networks under its purview. It is on this principle the Ministry has placed great priority on all of its projects, which include the road works to be completed at Edingburgh Road, Carlsen Field.

To ensure works are completed in an expeditious manner, the project will be executed by the Rural Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago. The project scope consists of coal milling, paving, and the marking of the roadway. It is the Ministry's intention to have the road works commence and completed within the first half of calendar 2025. It is anticipated that the procurement cycle for the project will be completed in early March 2025 with the award of the contract. Further to this, it is estimated that the works will be executed within a period of six weeks.

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

**Jerningham Junction Road WASA Main  
(Relocation of)**

**44. Ms. Vandana Mohit** (*Chaguanas East*) asked the hon. Minister of Public Utilities:

Will the Minister indicate the status of the relocation of the WASA Main along the Jerningham Junction Road, Cunapia at the S-Bend?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Public Utilities.

**The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Marvin Gonzales):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Water and Sewage Authority has advised that the authority is collaborating with the Ministry of Works and Transport in the execution of the project with a view to having it prioritized and included in a programme of works for execution in this fiscal year.

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

**Ms. Mohit:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, given the Minister's

explanation and answer to this question and based on his last promise in 2023 that this project would have been done in 2024, Minister, can you give a specific timeline in this fiscal year when this project will be conducted and completed?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister.

**Hon. M. Gonzales:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, let me reiterate that the Ministry of Works and Transport and the Water and Sewage Authority are collaborating to ensure the execution of this project in fiscal 2025.

**COMMISSIONER OF POLICE (AG.)**

**(NOMINATION OF MR. JUNIOR BENJAMIN)**

**Madam Speaker:** Prime Minister.

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

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

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

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

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

*And whereas* the Police Service Commission has submitted to the President

Commissioner of Police (Ag.)  
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Hon. Dr. K. Rowley (cont'd)

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the name Mr. Junior Benjamin, Deputy Commissioner of Police, as the person nominated to act in the office of Commissioner of Police;

*And whereas* the President has on the 31<sup>st</sup> day of January, 2025 issued a Notification in respect of the nomination;

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

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

Madam Speaker, this is one of these days when the Government wishes it did not have this responsibility. But, this is the day when the Government cannot create its own pathway as to the steps to be taken for the appointment of an acting person in a position, in this case, the Commissioner of Police.

Madam Speaker, this requirement of us being called upon to affirmatively deal with the intention of the Service Commissions to make an appointment follows from some correspondence that went from the appropriate quarters through the system of the Police Service Commission, the police service, the Office of the President and now the Parliament.

Madam Speaker, it would appear from the correspondence that I have in my possession that the Police Service of Trinidad and Tobago was engaged in an investigation. That investigation resulted in the police service reporting to the Police Service Commission on matters pertinent to the existence and operations and behaviour of the Commissioner of Police. That being so, on the 31<sup>st</sup> January, 2025, the Chairman of the Police Service Commission wrote the following letter to the President and, Madam Speaker, I place this on the record of the Parliament, and with your leave I would like to read this letter in its entirety. It is dated and

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stamped 31<sup>st</sup> January, 2025 and addressed to Her Excellency Christine Carla Kangaloo, ORTT, the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

“Your Excellency.

Re: Nomination for acting appointment in the office of Commissioner of Police and Deputy Commissioner of Police, Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, Ministry of National Security.

Police Service Commission in accordance with Section 123 (2) and (3) of the Constitution and Clauses 4 and 5 of Legal Notice No. 277 of 2021 - The Commissioner of Police and Deputy Commissioner (Selection Process) (No. 2) Order, 2021 amended by Legal Notice No. 278 of 2021-The Commissioner of Police and Deputy Commissioner of Police (Selection Process) (No. 2) (Amendment) Order, 2021, has nominated:

1. Mr. Junior Benjamin, Deputy Commissioner of Police for acting appointment in the office of the Commissioner of Police vice Ms. Erla Harewood-Christopher, Commissioner of Police, who has been directed by the Commission to cease to report for duty and cease to discharge the duties office of Commissioner of Police, with effect from 31<sup>st</sup> January, 2025 as a result of an ongoing investigation into misbehaviour in public office; and

**2.00 p.m.**

- “2. Mr. Curt Simon, Assistant Commissioner of Police for acting appointment in the Office of the Deputy Commissioner of Police, vice Mr. Junior Benjamin who is being recommended at 1 above.

Mr. Benjamin and Mr. Simon hold the No. 1 position on the Order-of-Merit Lists established and maintained pursuant to Clauses 4(2) and 5(2),

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Commissioner of Police (Ag.) (Nomination  
Of Mr. Junior Benjamin  
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respectfully, of Legal Notice No. 277 of 2021 as amended by Legal Notice No. 278 of 2021.

Accordingly, the Commission submits the names of Mr. Junior Benjamin and Mr. Curt Simon to Her Excellency.

Your Excellency, also enclosed for your information are the resumes in respect of Mr. Benjamin and Mr. Simon.

Thank you for the consideration of this matter and please be assured Your Excellency of my highest regard.

Yours sincerely

Dr. Wendell C. Wallace

Chairman.”

Madam Speaker, I read it in its entirety because a number of members in the public, either of their own volition or encouraged by conversation led by people who are either uninformed or just, I would not say mischievous, just involved, but involved out of not knowing what they are talking about. So this letter summarizes the situation.

The Police Service Commission which is the constitutional authority for making an appointment in these posts of Deputy Commissioner, the Police Service Commission followed the pathway having come to a decision at the Commission to advise the President that they would like to make this appointment. I think this is a good point for, as head of the Government, for me to make it pellucidly clear that this operation has absolutely nothing to do with the Government.

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

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** The Government is a separate operating entity in this matter to the police service and the Police Service Commission and the Office of the



President.

**Hon. Member:** *[Interruption]*

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Madam Speaker—

**Madam Speaker:** I do not know. I am hearing some loud talking. I am not sure who it is and I will ask all Members—okay. All Members in going forward if we could—

**Hon. Member:** *[Interruption]*

**Madam Speaker:** Member, if we could observe Standing Order 53 please. Let us proceed.

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I was making the point that from the origin where a police investigation, which by itself has absolutely nothing to do with the Government, not knowledge, not consent, not operation, not responsibility because we all know especially in this House and especially in the minds of many people who have been commenting on this matter, that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has no role whatsoever in directing the police as to who they should go after, who they should investigate, how the investigation should go, how they should arrest or not arrest. The Government has absolutely no role in that. And on this particular matter like others, the Government will be informed about what the police is doing, when the police makes it public.

Madam Speaker, in this case, the police investigation at whatever stage it is or was, the police informed the Police Service Commission of its operations. The Commission takes no direction from the Government, asks for no clearance or direction, and the Police Service Commission proceeded to advise the President as to what it would like to do with respect to the offices of Acting Commissioner and Commissioner in the police service. So, I put that on the record.

The President, having received that correspondence from the Police Service Commission with respect to matters in the police service influencing the decision of the Police Service Commission, is now informed by that letter that a vacancy exists, and the President is required to take the step to have that vacancy or those vacancies dealt with.

So a notification comes to us in this House, and that notification, Madam Speaker, is dated the 31<sup>st</sup> of January stamped and it contains the recommendations of an officer to act as Deputy Commissioner of Police. Madam Speaker, the matter, the notification says, as the process works its way forward:

“Pursuant to section 123(4) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, it is hereby notified that the Police Service Commission, in accordance with subsections (2) and (3) of section 123 of the said Constitution, and Clause 4(2) of the Legal Notice No. 277 of 2021-...MR. JUNIOR BENJAMIN, Deputy Commissioner of Police, to act in the office of Commissioner of Police - Trinidad and Tobago.”

Madam Speaker, as head the Government, today I want to say, again, to make it very clear and in this matter that has blown up in the public domain, where from information that is in the public domain, it appears to me as Prime Minister and to the Government that I lead, that the Police Service Commission has seen it fit to take action which has resulted in a vacancy arising at the level of Commissioner of Police and we are called here to fill that vacancy by identifying the person as has been identified to act in that position. And a similar thing would happen with respect to an acting commissioner, and the reason why an acting commissioner is required to be dealt with by the House is because one of the deputies—

**Hon. Member:** A Deputy Commissioner.

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:**—a Deputy Commissioner as per the intention of the Service Commission is being elevated to act as Commissioner, so that leaves a vacancy behind of Deputy Commissioner which the Commission seeks to fill.

Madam Speaker, the CV of Mr. Benjamin is well known to this House because in dealing with him recently for an appointment to the substantive position of Deputy Commissioner, this House received his CV and dealt with it, and some Members of this House spoke very glowingly and I presume that they still know him. Madam Speaker, I want to make it clear that the Government has no new information except what is in the public domain with respect to this officer and views might vary. But today because of how this matter is being handled the Government is in a very invidious position, where if we say no to this, we will be accused of taking sides against this gentleman and in favour of somebody else. If we say yes to this, it will be said that the Government wants this. I want to make it very clear to everybody in this country, on this day on this occasion, the Government is simply discharging its responsibility for the Police Service Commission to make the appointment that they want to make that they recommended to make.

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

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** I want to identify it very clearly to you, Madam Speaker, that the Police Service Commission has something called a “merit list”. As a matter of fact, they have two merit lists. One for persons who are—

**Hon. Member:** [*Interruption*]

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Madam Speaker, I have seen it written that there are two merit lists. One for persons who are in substantive positions or who are to be in substantive positions, and one for persons who are to act given the layout of

persons in the organization. Again, I want to make it very clear notwithstanding all that you would have heard from people all over this country especially some of them in the legal profession and Members of Parliament, I have never seen a merit list, not today, not before—

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

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Never.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** “What about de one yuh take from President House”?

**Madam Speaker:** Okay. So, again, I ask people to contain their volumes, please.

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Madam Speaker, let me just because I was interrupted by my colleague from Siparia who seems to be sitting on something uncomfortable there. Madam Speaker, I have not seen a merit list from the Police Service Commission or anybody. I have never spoken to anybody about a merit list and therefore, when the Police Service Commission comes and says that they have chosen Mr. Benjamin because he is at the top of some list, they know that. I do not know that. I have nothing to put me in a position to know that. But I am saying, because the law, the Constitution requires that the Police Service Commission holds that authority to make an appointment, I have to assume today that the recommendation made by the Police Service Commission is worthy of support and today, I have no questions to ask the Police Service Commission. None whatsoever, except that a vacancy exists there and it is to be filled by their recommendation and I brought it here as a messenger sent by the Constitution.

Madam Speaker, I do not want to go into any detail about Mr. Benjamin who is in the position, substantively, of Deputy Commissioner, and being selected by the Police Service Commission as their pick. I have not a line of anything to add or subtract because I have no basis, they have shared nothing with me. In fact,

the last time we had a debate of this nature in this House, it was my friends on the other side, I think it was Naparima, who made a contribution saying that in matters like this, the Police Service Commission should make available information, that is, a recommendation that has not yet come into law, go into force. I am still required to act blindly, and the only people who would have assessed Mr. Benjamin on this matter in the last few days is the Police Service Commission. And therefore, I have nothing to add or subtract to improve or to denigrate. Madam Speaker, on that basis, I beg to move.

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

*Question proposed.*

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

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

**Dr. Roodal Moonilal** (*Oropouche East*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to this very, very important matter that has been occupying the public attention for several painful days in the national discourse.

**2.15. p.m.**

Madam Speaker, I cannot promise that I will be equally brief as the last speaker, but the Prime Minister did raise several issues in his untypically brief presentation which I would like to respond to. The substantive Motion before us speaks—without again taking the liberty to recite the entire Motion—to the appointment of a police officer to act in the Office of Commissioner of Police. Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister did not find it fit to place the events of today in the context of the events of the recent past. It has been since last Thursday a most disturbing, painful, anxious, and distressing period for Trinidad and Tobago, and more so the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, and officers in the service.

I was very happy that the Prime Minister chose, with your leave Madam Speaker, to read into the record a very important piece of correspondence between the Police Service Commission, its Chairman Dr. Wendell C. Wallace, and her Excellency the President. Again, it is not necessary for me to read the entire letter since the Prime Minister, on this read aloud day, did read aloud the letter. So, it is not necessary to do that, but to respond to the Prime Minister on some of the issues raised.

Madam Speaker, the first question we asked ourselves here, is having been summoned to the Parliament urgently, hastily, and in circumstances of national disturbance, is there a vacancy today to fill in the office of Commissioner of Police?

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Madam Speaker, and I reflect on the letter that has been read in today's public record by the Prime Minister, and I just quote one paragraph without again reading the entire letter. It is dated 31<sup>st</sup> of January 2025, Excellency the President. It says that the:

“Police Service Commission in accordance with...”—the law and so on—  
“...amended Legal Notice No. 278 of 2021 - The Commissioner of Police and Deputy Commissioner of Police (Selection Process) (No. 2) (Amendment) Order, 2021, has nominated: 1. Mr. Junior Benjamin, Deputy Commissioner of Police for acting appointment in the office of Commissioner of Police vice Mrs. Erla Harewood-Christopher, Commissioner of Police, who has been directed by the Commission to cease to report for duty and cease to discharge the duties of the office of Commissioner of Police with effect from 31<sup>st</sup> January, 2025 as a result of an

ongoing investigation into misbehaviour in public office;”

Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister did not ask the question that the Opposition asked, what is the effect of this? Is this a suspension pursuant to the Police Service Commission’s rules and regulations? I reflect on the Police Service Commission now, who have brought this matter to her Excellency, and her Excellency, properly relayed the matter in accordance with the law to the Parliament, to the House of Representatives.

You see, Madam Speaker, the Service Commissions Department, Police Service Secretariat, by notice dated 5<sup>th</sup> October 2023, issued 9<sup>th</sup> October 2023, and this speaks to the acting appointment policy for the offices of Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of Police, Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. This is the policy guidelines of the Police Service Commission. This really spells out the framework within which the Police Service Commission operates that would generate their notification to her Excellency, and in turn generate a Motion on the Order Paper of the House of Representatives. This really is the backbone policy guidance.

I just want to read one section of this, Madam Speaker, that deals with the position of Commissioner of Police where one is nominated through a merit list process and so on to act. Madam Speaker, at clause 3 (a) it says:

“Where—the Commissioner...”of Police is or is likely to be “absent from Trinidad and Tobago”—

This is Police Service Commission Regulations:

“Where the Police Commissioner “...is on vacation leave...”—where the Police Commissioner Police “...is unable by reason of illness or any other reason, to perform the functions of the Commissioner of

Police; or

- (b) the office of the Commissioner of Police is...” or is likely to become “...vacant...”.

Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister said in his statement—I took copious notes in his brief presentation. He says today, unlike I imagine other days, he is not questioning the Police Service Commission. He is here not to question them. I just reminded the Prime Minister, because I need to respond to that as well very briefly, that the Prime Minister was very clear today that the role and the Government’s role is not to question the Police Service Commission, it is to look at their nominee.

The Prime Minister rightly said that the House, we met Mr. Benjamin before in debate, and I believe speakers on both sides of the House, had no serious concerns about Mr. Benjamin. Apart from some really concerns in the public space within recent time which, we discovered that Mr. Benjamin is really something of a charismatic, energized, and high-octane pastor, there is nothing new about Mr. Benjamin apart from his one or two sermons that have received public attention. That in no way brings to bear on Mr. Benjamin any adverse comment at all.

But, I want to remind the Prime Minister if he can remember the names Harold Phillips, Steven Williams, Wendell Lucas, Neil Parker, Deodath Dulalchan.

**Madam Speaker:** Member.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Sorry.

**Madam Speaker:** Member, you know I just want to guide you where we are going. We are dealing with a particular, a very specific focused debate. We are not debating other people, we are not debating other matters that have gone. Okay,



so I want you to stick to the confines of what we have. Something I have always mentioned before, not every peripheral comment, it becomes a substantive matter in the debate. Okay, please.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Okay, Madam Speaker, I will leave that there. I only mentioned that in passing because the Prime Minister had no difficulty today, whereas, before he had a difficulty, the Member had a difficulty.

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Madam Speaker, if I may be permitted to reflect again on the Police Service Commissions guidance, regulations, and policy which, as I keep saying, brought us here. We are here because of the Police Service Commission and their role in the governance structure, and in the in constitutional arrangements to arrive at an Acting Commissioner of Police.

We ask the question today, that we are entitled to ask. Is the Commissioner Police absent from Trinidad and Tobago? Is the Commissioner on vacation leave? Is the Commissioner ill? Is there another reason why the Commissioner cannot perform the functions of Commissioner of Police that gave rise to our vacancy that brought us here? While the Prime Minister may not want to question the Police Service Commission, in looking at Mr. Benjamin, who we have no difficulty with, we ask the question, is there a proper vacancy that the Police Service Commission attempts to fill?

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Based on their own guidance, not on guidance, not on any opinion, not on any inference, not on any conclusion, not on any casting aspersions on anyone. Based on their own policy we are asking this. Because then it means of what purpose, of what relevance? Why are we here today, if these questions

cannot be answered properly? Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister indicated as well, and made reference, and when I make reference to the words of the Prime Minister, it is not my intention at all to dwell or over speak and you know, spend too much time. It is just that I took some notes and prefer to respond.

Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister placed on the public record the pathway steps that brought us here that he had knowledge, it is in the public domain as well, so I do not imagine it is private knowledge, that the Police Service was engaged in investigations and they had concerns. The Prime Minister placed on the record that the Police Service Commission had concerns about the behaviour and the operations of the incumbent Commissioner of Police. The Prime Minister said the Police Service Commission, PSC, raised matters concerning operations and behaviour, and of course, that is it also referenced in our January 31<sup>st</sup> letter, which summaries the position. And the Prime Minister of course, went on to say the Government is not involved, we have nothing to do with this.

But, Madam Speaker, there was an article brought to my attention dated March 14<sup>th</sup> 2022, in the *Daily Express*.

“PM: IT WAS ME

PM confirms he was ‘high-ranking official’ who met PolSC chairman”—involved in another matter.

I leave that there. I know, Madam Speaker, you would want me to move post-haste over that, because it is really not central to this, but the Prime Minister has some track record of involving himself in matters concerning appointments of Commissioner of Police.

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** He has some track records. So, today to tell us it is not I. It is

not us. It is not the Government.

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** I do not know about, who is that? It was not me, something else. Madam Speaker, to tell us that the Government plays no role, but yet, in the public space there is an article I believe in the *Newsday* of today, I believe as well, and I am just quoting in passing again:

“DCP Martin writes to Rowley.”

Writes the Member for Diego Martin West:

“...on sniper probe—PM, tell us what you know.”

The Government is involved in this business—

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:**—since the Chairman of the National Security Council, is not centre stage in explaining matters which the Prime Minister raised today. The Prime Minister in his address earlier made reference to a police investigation of which the Prime Minister may well become a part of now. One wonders whether the Prime Minister should have moved this Motion in the first place, or allowed someone else to do it. But, Madam Speaker, the Government is involved; one way or another, they are involved. The other matter that I leave only with this heading of Government involvement, because the Prime Minister raised this, is the incumbent Commissioner of Police who we are now moving away, some will say “throwing under the bus”, but I imagine not even the buses working in this country.

The Commissioner of Police incumbent is there not because of Police Service Commission. The incumbent Commissioner of Police is there because of the Cabinet, and because of the Prime Minister. They extended on two occasions,

her tenure as Commissioner of Police.

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

**Madam Speaker:** So, Member, please, I am just asking to quickly tie that to what we have here because I am getting concerned that you are really skirting Standing Order 48(1).

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. So, I again I want to leave that there rather than carry that argument further. This sordid affair has led us to the state where we must reflect yet again, on the résumé of Police Officer and committed and dedicated member of Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, Mr. Junior Benjamin. Madam Speaker, I can say if I am permitted to do that, over the past I have had the opportunity to sit on the Joint Select Committee on National Security to which Mr. Benjamin has presented himself for examination, and at no time did Mr. Benjamin fall in our expectation and never appeared at any time to be unprofessional, discourteous—

**Hon. Member:** “Wanting”.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:**—wanting or “wanna be” or in any regard.

**2.30 p.m.**

So, in fact—and he was not before the law as well. But, Madam Speaker, Mr. Benjamin conducted himself with quite a high level of professionalism, and when asked in particular difficult questions Mr. Benjamin was very clear that he would supply information to the committee subsequent, and I am pleased to also indicate that Mr. Benjamin has provided information when asked to do so to the Joint Select Committee on National Security, but also I imagine to other organizations and has maintained that level of openness and so on.

So, in that regard, we do know Mr. Benjamin a bit more than we did the first time

he came around the compound to be proposed, and his CV speaks to a lifelong service in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, a lifelong career as a career policeman, a career that began sometime around 1989 as a Special Reserve Police officer and rose in the ranks to Constable, Corporal, Sergeant, Inspector, Assistant Superintendent of Police, Superintendent of Police, Senior Superintendent of Police, Assistant Commissioner of Police, Deputy Commissioner of Police, and now of course proposed as Acting Commissioner of Police. I do not think there is a rank in the police service this gentleman has not held, unless I am mistaken, not one. And he has served with a level of dedication and commitment and in a way I feel sorry for Mr. Benjamin as I feel sorry for other officers today that their service has been brought into this level of disrepute and almost contempt by the machinations of some unseen invisible hand that created the circumstances of this national scandal that we face today, that the Government would like to extricate itself from.

Madam Speaker, Mr. Benjamin will be in an enviable position. He will be in an enviable position and our system, as progressive as it may be, we are not yet at the congressional system where some of us would have witnessed over the last week or so, the grilling of Mr. Patel and others at the confirmation hearing. Maybe one day we will have a system where nominees like Mr. Benjamin will present themselves to the Joint Select Committee on National Security and be asked to answer themselves. But, in the absence of Mr. Benjamin, I can use this opportunity, you know, to ask Mr. Benjamin questions, rhetorically of course, and to raise issues with the conduct of Mr. Benjamin and the circumstances that he will now find himself in.

It is a time Mr. Benjamin, when the service is suffering from what is an

undermining of public confidence. Public confidence before the outbreak of this latest scandal was, I believe 15 per cent. Fifteen out of every 100 citizens had confidence in the police service before last Thursday. One can only imagine what it is today. And Mr. Benjamin will take on his not too slender shoulders the burden of seeking to improve the morale of police officers to start with. Because they are already talking in the public space about who is investigator, who is not investigator, should you investigate the investigator, et cetera, and Mr. Benjamin finds himself in this hot seat, so to speak, that he has to navigate in terms of public trust and confidence in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. It is unbelievable the damage that has been done, and the Opposition told you this, warned you about this, and did not recommend certain persons, but I say no more on that.

Madam Speaker, the other matter that faces Mr. Benjamin that he would have to respond to, I imagine, is of course further action by the incumbent, who is not suspended, who is not dismissed, who has not faced any disciplinary proceedings but is being removed from office, and Mr. Benjamin would have to respond to this. I imagine the first course of action of Mr. Benjamin is to summon his lawyers to start writing up affidavits and writing up court documents and getting his—and be posing for purposes of another place. So it is not an easy task because, Madam Speaker, Mr. Benjamin will reflect that his immediate predecessor has in a way demitted office without cause, without any single disciplinary action against her.

**Hon. Member:** Been forced to demit.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** And has been forced to do that, and he could well contemplate his own future. And on this side we are fond, well, we find it our duty to inform public officers like Mr. Benjamin, others, but today we are dealing only with Mr. Benjamin so I do not want to deviate from Mr. Benjamin. We are compelled to tell

Mr. Benjamin, please, conduct yourself in this office with the utmost fairness, transparency, impartiality, and do not fall prey to doing the dirty work of this Government.

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

[*Madam Speaker stands*]

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** The word? Yes, I will withdraw that word, Madam Speaker. Do not fall prey to doing the indelicate work of superiors, political superiors. I think that sounds more delicate. Do not fall prey to conducting yourself that brings your office into disrepute and then ending up like your predecessor booted and thrown under the bus without cause. And, Madam Speaker, we hold no brief for no one in this business. None! None! We hold no brief, because we are on record in certain cases as raising serious questions concerning certain appointments. So we hold no brief. I could only imagine others warning Mr. Benjamin, try not to travel to Barbados, but that is another matter.

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Madam Speaker, so the matter has blown up in the public domain. As the Prime Minister indicated, the Prime Minister says he has no business today, I imagine, dealing with the Police Service Commission, but it is the same Prime Minister who had a business in an earlier debate about the EBC and the name of seats, but today is the Police Service Commission, it is not any other business.

But, Madam Speaker, so I have spoken in passing about the circumstances that brought us here. I have mentioned the issues related to the various notices and so on. I have raised concerns about the process and the very Police Service Commission following their own processes and so on. Madam Speaker, today in

this country I do not want—again, I cannot hold up and display anything, but to remind the country and to remind Members of this House that this is not an easy time. This is a time of great distress. One headline today:

“Erla to sue”.

Next one:

Cops go back to DPP.

Next one:

“...PM, tell us what you know”.

So, Madam Speaker, these are the issues of the day. And to focus as the Government would like us to focus, specifically on—to focus only on—

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Résumé.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Yes, I am looking at this now. The University of the West Indies Bachelor of Science Degree and the Bachelor of Law Degree, to focus only on this is really to bring the entire debate into a state of contempt, that you ignore the concerns in the national community. That you ignore it. That you stuff your head—as they say, plant your head in the proverbial sand and ignore the circumstances and the context and the crises that the country is facing today because we are concerned with the Diploma in Legal Practice.

Madam Speaker, it cannot be that the Government will bury their heads in the sand on this issue and allow circumstances, and I want to say no one here will know where those circumstances will lead to and the end point. It could be that millions of taxpayers' dollars must still be spent on compensating person A or B. Mr. Benjamin may play a role in that as well, because Mr. Benjamin, as I said before, is a central figure now, assuming he is approved by the House, will be a central figure in matters elsewhere. So it is relevant, we submit, to this debate. It



is relevant that we can end up charging the taxpayer millions and millions of dollars for the mistakes of this Government in bringing certain appointments here, and notwithstanding the concerns of the Opposition having their way, putting square pegs in round holes. Not only in the police service but at the commission level as well, we raised questions concerning that.

So, Madam Speaker, those are some of the issues we wish to make now within the very tight constraints of the debate. I imagine colleagues opposite may intervene, and then our own colleagues on this side of the House may use the opportunity to continue and to respond to issues raised. Madam Speaker, I thank you.

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

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

[*Hon. F. Hinds stands*]

[*Pause*]

**Madam Speaker:** Prime Minister.

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

**The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley):** Madam Speaker, I just want to say that words mean different things to different people. When I spoke a while ago I specifically chose my words very carefully, but that did not seem to impress my colleague from Oropouche. Because when I said that today I am taking a position on this matter in front of us today, my colleague from Oropouche saw it fit to compare today with yesterday. It was the Chairman of his party who said yesterday was yesterday and today is today. Like he did not learn anything there either. But the matter before us today is not the same matter that was before us on any other day.

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

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** So I have no excuse to make to my colleague about attempting to compare a position I take today on information I had on other matters at a previous occasion. That was just making up time. I must say, Madam Speaker, that I do not normally feel very sorry for my colleague for Oropouche because I know he can handle himself, but he did struggle today.

**Mr. Hinds:** He did.

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

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** My colleague did—but he brought a very useful—today is a special day.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Calculate.

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** “Calculated struggling”, right. Good.

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

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Madam Speaker, my colleague from Oropouche did take the opportunity to read the guidelines for the police service acting arrangements. A guideline. A guideline is not an infinite description of circumstances that will arise. But more importantly, even as my colleague read the specifics of the guideline, whether it is vacation the person is on, whether it is sick leave, whatever, the guidelines went on to say: “Any other”. That phrase “any other” is a catch-all phrase.

**Mr. Scotland:** Omnibus phrase.

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Oh, I may put it a little more elegantly, it is an “omnibus phrase”.

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

**Hon. Member:** Yeah. Yeah.

Commissioner of Police (Ag.) (Nomination  
Of Mr. Junior Benjamin  
Hon. Dr. K. Rowley (cont'd)

02.05.2025

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Thank you my colleague for Port of Spain South. So what it means is, if what is listed there does not cover what is required then you are not just stopped from doing it.

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

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

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Because under “other”—

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

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:**—“any other”, like in this case, the substantive holder of the post is not sick, is not on vacation leave, is not out of the country, but the police have indicated to the Police Service Commission that she is under investigation for serious criminal conduct. That is what the fact is, so that is caught in the omnibus. It is omnibus.

**2.45 p.m.**

So that is a non-point. He could have saved us that all that time but he wants—

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

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:**—to mislead the public—oh, should I take that back? No, no. He wants to sell a point that something is wrong with the operations. Madam Speaker, that point was not made by him.

And in this case, there is another point I want to touch on, where my colleague tried to compare what I said and put words in my mouth that I did not say. I was very careful to say that, except when I spoke to a commission, the Bliss Seepersad commission, providing them with information from the National Security Council that I have never spoken to anybody on any Police Service Commission—there have been two commissions since then, certainly not the one Judith Jones led nor the one that exists now under Wallace. I can say without fear

of contradiction in any quarter that I have never communicated with any of those persons on any of those two commissions.

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

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** So I could say that. There are colleagues of mine and other people in the public domain, some with Silk on their shoulder as well, who are very happy in being confidently wrong and would love to speak their positions of extremity based on ignorance of facts. I am not like that, Madam Speaker. When I stand, and I stand predominate, I like to do so on facts.

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

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** And I will simply say to the public on this occasion that these matters are there and they are to be observed, persons are in jobs and when you hear about an ongoing investigation, do not pretend to know that you know everything. That is why there is an investigation. An investigation is meant to elucidate information which might be pertinent to the concerns that are before us.

My colleague from Oropouche East made a crescendo of saying that the Prime Minister is now in it, so therefore, the Prime Minister is involved in it. Let me just clarify this again, Madam Speaker, for you and for the public. Up until the police wrote me, and I think that correspondence came to me on Sunday or Monday, asking me, in my capacity as Chairman of the National Security Council, whether I can answer a question that the police wanted answered—and it had to do with the work of the Commission having granted certain approvals. That is the sum total of what was asked of me.

I could have done like another Prime Minister, who was asked a question by the police, by the AG's Office, when the State was in court and said, "I am not answering." But I did not do that. As Chairman of the National Security Council,

the police asked a question of me that is pertinent to the Council's work. In discharging of my duty without fear or favour, malice or ill will, I got the National Security Council to find the appropriate answer and I have since submitted that to the police for onward transmission to the Director of Public Prosecutions. That is what I have done.

So I do not know why my colleague is coming here and pretending that somehow something earth-shattering has happened, because I know full well that because I have done that, answering a question of the police, that it is quite possible that somebody may cite me as a witness. Madam Speaker, that is par for the course. When I was expelling trespassers in the Nariva Swamp to preserve the Swamp as a Ramsar site, I was summoned to court as a Minister of Government. I had to go to San Fernando and sit down in the dock to be cross-examined by Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj.

But, Madam Speaker, I said, I took an oath to act without fear or favour, malice or ill will, and I deal with truth. So if I am summoned to court, nobody in here or in the country should have any fear. So I do not have to do like my colleague and say that I am not answering you. The police asked me a question and that question came to me long after this became a public spectacle. You understand that? So there is nothing mysterious about this and there is nothing mysterious about the question and nothing mysterious about the answer, except, I mean, you can come to your own conclusion as to when I was asked that. So we move on.

My colleague from Oropouche East, he somehow knows enough. My colleague is not prepared to accept the work of the Commission. The Commission—

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

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Madam Speaker, I would like my colleague from Siparia to not disturb me. My colleague from Oropouche East is quite free to not accept the work of the Commission, but I made it very clear here, Madam Speaker, that the reason why we are here is because the Commission saw it fit to advise the President that a vacancy occurs as a result of actions that the Commission took based on its interaction with the police. That is what it is.

So to come and say that the Commissioner was made to demit office without cause, has he tried the matter? If he wants to be irresponsible, he can do that. If he wants to hear about an ongoing investigation, an ongoing criminal investigation and he knows that somebody has demitted office without cause, then what he is saying, Madam Speaker, is that he—my colleague from Siparia is saying that—

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Oropouche East.

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:**—sorry, Oropouche East. He is saying that he has no confidence in the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

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

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** That is what he is saying. I am not saying that. As a matter of fact, Madam Speaker, I spoke on Friday night, Friday evening late in Moruga, and I want to repeat what I said there, and I am saying it again in the House, that if it is that there are allegations against any person, in this case the Commissioner of Police, that such allegations would be subjected to the independent office for monitoring and that direction of the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. And insofar as in this case, it is the Commissioner of Police, there is another layer, and that layer is the independent Police Service Commission.

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

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** And that I expect that the law will take its course. The fact that the law in taking its course, a question was put to me—I am just another citizen, another office-holder. So, Madam Speaker, I do not know that I am impressed with my colleague trying to stir up some kind of narrative in the country that the Commissioner has been removed and demitted office without cause and without disciplinary process. That is not the position I will hold or I will advance. And to say that he holds no brief for anyone, but goes on to say that she is booted under the bus, Madam Speaker, it is that kind of inflammatory language from office-holders who should know better, and who I know knows better, but they believe that they can incite and instill a reaction from the public which would be to their benefit.

Madam Speaker, I would want to warn my colleagues that in situations like this, that you want to temper your exuberance in acting while you are confidently wrong. Madam Speaker, I beg to move.

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

That the Notification of the President of the nomination by the Police Service Commission of Mr. Junior Benjamin to act in the office of Commissioner of Police be approved.

**Madam Speaker:** Prime Minister.

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

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Ag.)  
(Nomination of Mr. Curt Simon (cont'd))  
Hon. Dr. K. Rowley (cont'd)

02.05.2025

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

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

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

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

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

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

*And whereas* the President has on the 31<sup>st</sup> day of January, 2025 issued a Notification in respect of the nomination;

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

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

**UNREVISED**



Deputy Commissioner of Police (Ag.)  
(Nomination of Mr. Curt Simon)  
Hon. Dr. K. Rowley (cont'd)

02.05.2025

Madam Speaker, once again, I should say that it is the view of the Commission, given the action it has taken on the matter which had just attracted our attention, which is the suspension of the Commissioner of Police and the recommendation to appoint Mr. Benjamin, who is substantively a Deputy Commissioner, by elevating a Deputy Commissioner to act as Commissioner, that establishes a vacancy at the level of Deputy Commissioner. So in this case, the Commission is expressing its intention to appoint Assistant Commissioner Simon to act in that position of Deputy Commissioner.

Madam Speaker, Mr. Simon, who substantively is an Assistant Commissioner, has before—this House would know because he came before the House before—has acted as Deputy Commissioner twice and therefore, he is known to us. And we had adjudicated on him and now we are called upon to adjudicate with respect to him filling the position as Acting Deputy Commissioner.

Madam Speaker, I recall that at an earlier time, given the mundane nature of this matter where elevating an Assistant Commissioner to act as Deputy Commissioner is something that will arise from time to time in the service, we, in this House—some of us in this House felt that we did not want to be burdened by such a mundane action, but others felt that it must be the work of the House on every occasion, whether it is for one day or one year, that the House must adjudicate on this kind of acting or someone acting in the police service. Unfortunately, those of us who felt that that should have been left to the Commission did not prevail and now the Commission is asking the Parliament again, as the Commission must do, on every occasion, that the Parliament should convene and determine who should act when there is a requirement for an acting in the police service, even if it is for an Assistant Commissioner to act as Deputy.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Ag.)  
(Nomination of Mr. Curt Simon)  
Hon. Dr. K. Rowley (cont'd)

02.05.2025

**3.00 p.m.**

Madam Speaker, the matter of how acting should be dealt with is not before us, but I make that point if only to bring home to the House that this is going to happen over and over again until we do the necessary thing—I would not say sensible, but necessary thing—of allowing the Commission to make an acting appointment of an assistant commissioner, especially when that person is somebody who would have been viewed by the House before.

So, Madam Speaker, he is qualified to act as Assistant Commissioner, qualified to hold the substantive position of Assistant Commissioner, vetted by the Police Service Commission. Today, I have nothing further to act on the work of the Commission recommending that Mr. Simon act as the Deputy Commissioner. Madam Speaker, I beg to move.

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

*Question proposed.*

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

**Mr. Saddam Hosein (Barataria/San Juan):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for recognizing me to enter this debate on the Motion with respect, the appointment of Mr. Curt Simon, Assistant Commissioner of Police, to be nominated to act in the office of Deputy Commissioner of Police.

Madam Speaker, I will start where Prime Minister left off, where the Prime Minister indicated that certain legislation came to this House before to really bypass this entire process for the acting appointments of Deputy Commissioner of Police. But that legislation that came to the Parliament was not just for Deputy Commissioner of Police but it was also for the Acting Commissioner of Police, and that is a Bill that we did not support simply because we have no trust in this

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Ag.)  
(Nomination of Mr. Curt Simon)  
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Government when it comes to interference—

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

**Mr. S. Hosein:**—with respect to law enforcement. Because, Madam Speaker, how can we have confidence in a Government who brings a Bill like that, when high public officials loiter around the President's House at times where merit lists are delivered at that station?

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

**Madam Speaker:** So, Member for—Member. Member, I hope—Member, I hope that is just your introduction and you are going to go on because we are not dealing with legislation here. Yes? Let us go on.

**Mr. S. Hosein:** Yes, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, what we are engaged in here is a role prescribed to us by our predecessors, in that, the Constitution according to the Motion provides that when a name is sent to the President by notification, that name will then be forwarded to the House of Representatives, and that name has to be debated, approved and then the notification comes.

So we are engaged in a constitutional exercise, and Mr. Curt Simon is no stranger to this Chamber. Mr. Curt Simon. I believe this will be the third time his name would have entered into this Chamber. On two occasions, his name was approved but I believe that only on one of those occasions the appointment was actually made and now this is the third occasion that we are here, and this is by reason, Madam Speaker, a domino effect of what just took place with respect to the first Motion. Because if Mr. Benjamin moves up the rank to Acting Commissioner of Police, there is now a vacancy in the post of Deputy Commissioner of Police. There are only three posts of Deputy Commissioner of Police in Trinidad and Tobago. So now one becomes vacant once the appointment is made of Mr.

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(Nomination of Mr. Curt Simon)  
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Benjamin to act as Commissioner of Police.

Madam Speaker, I wish not to get in any constitutional arguments, but suffice to say if that nomination of Mr. Benjamin is not properly made, everything falls after that. It is a domino effect. So if the legality of that is challenged, then the legality of this will also be a consequential order that the court will make.

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

**Mr. S. Hosein:** And this really, Madam Speaker, is a process. The Prime Minister earlier on said it is a guideline, but it is not a guideline which dictates a vacancy because we are filling a vacancy. It is actually the law, law make pursuant to the Constitution.

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

**Mr. S. Hosein:** Because there are Legal Notices to guide what we do here today and to guide the Commission to send a name to us, and that is found in Legal Notice 277 and that was published on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November, 2021, and that is called the Commissioner of Police and Deputy Commissioner of Police (Selection Process) (No 2) Order, 2021, at clause 4, which says:

That a person acting or holding in the Office of Deputy Commissioner or Assistant Commissioner of Police, can be entitled or eligible to act in the position of Deputy Commissioner of Police.

So assistant will act as deputy, deputy will act as commissioner. But in order for you to have an acting commissioner, there must be a vacancy and you must have a vacancy to fill. The Member for Oropouche East earlier and I do not want to get into that debate—

**Madam Speaker:** So we are not here dealing with an acting commissioner. We dealt with that already. Okay? This is again, a very narrow, specific debate. We

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

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are speaking now with respect to the filling to act as a Deputy Commissioner of Police. Let us keep there.

**Mr. S. Hosein:** Yes, please, Madam Speaker. The point that I am making, Madam Speaker, is this, as I earlier alluded, is that what we do here must be done constitutionally. That is the point. We cannot have a bad appointment because this appointment will in fact be affected and we have to be very careful of that.

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

**Mr. S. Hosein:** So, Madam Speaker, with respect to the Government saying that they play no role in this procedure that we are engaged in, that is untrue. In fact, the criteria that the Police Service Commissioner would have used to make Mr. Simon eligible to be placed on the Order Paper was in fact a procedure that was prescribed by the Government by way of Legal Notice. The Cabinet makes those Legal Notices. And, Madam Speaker, I would look—

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Signed by the Cabinet.

**Mr. S. Hosein:** Signed by Cabinet—at the policy of the Police Service Commission, which is the establishment and the utilization of the Order of Merit List, for the purpose of making acting appointments to the offices of Commissioner of Police and Deputy Commissioner of Police, Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. That is one policy. Then there is another policy, Madam Speaker, which they are guided by, and that is the policy, acting appointment policy for the offices of Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of Police, Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

Madam Speaker, it goes on to tell us the eligibility criteria of the candidates. So we have to examine what the criteria are in relation to the résumé that is before us because we have to make sure that the person being appointed is in fact a fit and

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proper person whose name is brought before this Parliament, and, Madam Speaker, Mr. Simon, no stranger to this Parliament, was in fact appointed to the office already. He is a career police officer. Through his résumé we saw that he went through various training in terms of education; Masters of Science in Criminology and Criminal Justice from The UWI; Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice, Police Service, COSTAATT 2017; Associate of Arts in Criminal Justice with high honours again—that is COSTAATT 2014.

So while being a career police, he has always engaged with respect to further training and qualification, especially in terms of education, and in his résumé there are various skills and abilities that he would have in fact outlined, Madam Speaker. But, Madam Speaker, one important point to make is that he would have had to score the highest on that particular merit list, and I say this in terms of the criteria—that previous the criteria for the establishment of the merit list was based on seniority. But when we look at the new criteria it is now based on merit of the candidate. So, Mr. Simon in fact would have scored the highest on the acting Order of Merit List for Deputy Commissioner of Police. So we have nothing of concern on this side, Madam Speaker, to raise against the gentleman.

As I said before, he came before this Parliament already, his name. I do not believe he was ever charged. I do not believe he ever abducted anyone from a foreign jurisdiction. In fact, I do not believe he ever arrested a Commissioner of Police, but, Madam Speaker, I think his résumé is quite laudable. He has several years of training having joined the police service in 1990—one year before I was born—and I think, Madam Speaker, I wish him well going forward. The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service has been placed in a state of uncertainty. It has been placed in a messy situation, and that is all because of the prescription and the

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actions of this present Government and I thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Prime Minister.

**The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley):** Madam Speaker, I have made two notes and one is this response to my colleague from Barataria/San Juan and others forever trying to make something out of the fact that I, as Prime Minister, passed a report to the Police Service Commission. Madam Speaker, let me today since my colleague from Barataria/San Juan tried as hard as he could, could find nothing to say—

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

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:**—and notwithstanding his sound and fury on political platforms, comes to the House, given the floor, all of us are all ears, and all he could raise today is that the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago passed a report to the Police Service Commission. Let me for the basis of educating our children, our university graduates, our university lecturers, and our Opposition politicians, state that the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Chairman of the National Security Council, is duty bound as settled by the law—

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

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:**—to make available to the Police Service Commission any matter or report, or any matter, which is the pertinent to the remit of the Police Service Commission.

**Madam Speaker:** Prime Minister. There is a Member whose device just went off. If they could go outside, get their device under control and they are welcome back. They need to go outside and get it under control. Prime Minister.

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** And just in case, Madam Speaker, I did not stop because I

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(Nomination of Mr. Curt Simon)  
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did not want my colleague from Barataria/San Juan to not understand what I say saying, so I will repeat it. The Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, as Chairman of the National Security Council, is duty bound in law, settled by the Privy Council, to make available to the Police Service Commission any information or pertinent matter which has to do with the remit of the Police Service Commission.

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

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** That being so, Madam Speaker, I am appalled that this particular point has been led in the national discourse by a Senior Counsel who from time to time writes foolishness in the newspaper and, unfortunately, that is where my colleague gets his support from, talking about Prime Minister and merit list at President House. Absolute poppycock.

Madam Speaker, the other point that was raised in that brief intervention from Barataria/San Juan, is that I said that the Government is not involved in this matter, and he is saying—my colleague from Barataria/San Juan say, “No, no, the Government is responsible.” The point that I am making and the “not involved” that I am going to repeat, is that with respect to the investigation, the submission of a complaint to the Police Service Commission, the recommendation to arrest the Police Commissioner, recommendation to continue finding information and evidence from the DPP’s Office, has absolutely nothing to do with the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Government is a separate line of operation of the State. And, as you know, Madam Speaker, the Government is prevented from—even if we wanted to—getting involved with police investigation, police recommendation to the Commission, advice to the Commission, dealing with the DPP and his



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recommendations, and any recommendation that the DPP might make to arrest anybody in this country. It is wicked and mischievous for any Member of Parliament, or any person in the know, to give the impression that whatever difficulty the Commissioner of Police is facing now, has to do with the Government.

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

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Stop misleading people.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Exactly.

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** And insofar as the Government has been approached by the police, and the Government has reported answering a question raised by the police, which I have done, that cannot be properly said to be involved in the process of investigating and in fact ordering any action against the Commissioner of Police.

We, like the rest of the country, await the outcome of the work of the police and the advice of the Director of Public Prosecutions as it has to do with the Commissioner of Police or any other person under police investigation. Madam Speaker, I beg to move.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

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

### ADJOURNMENT

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

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

fixed.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly*

*Adjourned at 3.17 p.m.*