

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, February 06, 2026

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from Mr. Stewart Richard Young, SC, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West who has requested leave of absence from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Member has sought is hereby granted.

PARLIAMENTARY PRIVILEGES OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, as you all might be aware, and certainly I became aware, before I had seen it, on Friday last, I received two pieces of correspondence from the Member for Arouca/Lopinot on two matters which purport to directly concern, and I choose these words very carefully, which purport to directly concern a matter of privilege of the House.

I have considered, given these two matters very careful consideration. I have also considered the relevant circumstances of each one. I have also reflected deeply on the definition and practice of what constitutes parliamentary privilege. What exactly is parliamentary privilege? What constitutes the circumstances under which a privilege attaches to a statement? I have also considered statutory provisions on the Parliamentary Privileges Act 1987 in Australia, and I have considered Parliamentary practice from around the world. I have also considered matters which are distinct as a breach of privilege and matters which ought properly to be considered contempt of Parliament. I have also considered the threshold. I have also considered the fact that Standing Order 32 presents a rolled-

up compendious consideration of what has to be met as a question of privilege, and the threshold before leave is granted. In the circumstances, consistent with the ruling of President Mark, I have found that these complaints do not meet the threshold.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: The Minister of Land and Legal Affairs.

COPYRIGHT (AMDT.) BILL 2026

Bill to amend the Copyright Act, Chap. 82:80 to extend the duration of the term of protection for copyright and neighbouring rights for authors, performers and producers of sound recordings; to extend the duration of the term of protection for moral rights for authors and performers; and to provide for related matters, brought from the Senate [*The Minister of Land and Legal Affairs*]; read the first time.

Motion made: That the next stage be taken later in the proceedings. [*Hon. S. Hosein*]

Question put and agreed to.

PAPER LAID

1. Land Acquisition (Requisition) Order, 2026. [*The Minister of Public Utilities and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Barry Padarath)*]

URGENT QUESTIONS

Mr. Speaker: Member for Arouca/Lopinot.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Damage of MV Blue Wave Harmony
(Measures for Transport of Heavy Cargo)

Mr. Marvin Gonzales (*Arouca/Lopinot*): Given recent complaints about shortages of goods and services across various sectors throughout Tobago, following the recent damage sustained by the *MV Blue Wave Harmony*, can the Minister advise what is being done to ensure the efficient and timely transport of heavy cargo to and from Tobago?

Mr. Speaker: Minister of Works and Infrastructure.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Works and Infrastructure (Hon. Jearlean John): Mr. Speaker, although there have been challenges, there has been no shortage of goods and services from Trinidad and Tobago, well, Tobago from Trinidad that is.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: Because we have continued to have sailings by the *Galleons Passage* and by the *APT James*, as a matter of fact, we have double two sailings per day across to Tobago, so the vans are going across. As of today, there was a challenge with things like cement, dangerous goods and so on. We have put a barge on the water from today for 10 days.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. M. Gonzales: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. Minister, can you state what is the timeline for the completion of the repairs to the *MV Blue Wave*?

Mr. Speaker: Minister, are you able to answer as to the timeline?

Hon. J. John: Certainly. Currently, work has been done on *MV Blue Wave* to make sure that it is safe for sailing again. So by next Tuesday it should start the trial runs again. Hopefully, we will put it back to service by Thursday of next week.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Minister, are you saying that media reports with respect to a shortage of goods on shelves in groceries in Tobago are simply not true?

Mr. Speaker: I think the Minister has answered that question. It stands to reason, come on.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for St. Ann's East.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*].

**Egypt Village Government Primary School
(Sanitization and Reopening)**

Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly (*St. Ann's East*): In light of the continued closure of Egypt Village Government Primary School due to an ongoing rat infestation since January 2026, can the Minister state when the school will be fully sanitized, certified safe, and reopened, so that students may resume classes without further disruption to their education?

Mr. Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*].

(Hon. Dr. Michael Dowlath): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for the question. I am always happy to answer questions posed by St. Ann's East.

Mr. Elder: Always, always.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*].

Hon. Dr. M. Dowlath: Mr Speaker, I am advised the Egypt Village Government Primary School remains temporarily closed due to a continued mice infestation, a different rodent. The school was reopened on Monday, 26th January 2026, following initial sanitization.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. M. Dowlath: However, upon reopening, further evidence of mice activity was observed, including droppings and confirmed sightings on the compound. And so, in keeping with health and safety protocols, the school was immediately reclosed to protect the students and staff.

As of Monday, the 2nd of February, 2026, the Standard 5 classes continue to be housed at the conference room of the South West Regional Indoor Sports Arena. All other teachers are engaging students via Zoom, WhatsApp and Google Classroom. Student engagement stands at 308 out of 449 students as of today. The pest control unit of the Point Fortin Borough Corporation conducted a further site visit, during which bait consumption remained evident in Classrooms 3 and 7, and around the sewer system at the rear of the school near Classroom 7. So that additional baiting was placed and sticky traps were installed in ceiling spaces.

The Public Health Inspector I has advised that the teachers' quarters appear to be the primary nesting area and has been requested to submit formal written confirmation to the Ministry of Education. Mr. Speaker, the Ministry's Health, Safety and Environmental Officer continues to work closely with the Point Fortin Borough Corporation—

Mr. Speaker: I am afraid the two-minute time limit is up. St. Ann's East.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker does the Minister have a date by which the school will be reopened?

Mr. Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Dr. M. Dowlath: Mr. Speaker, through you, as soon as we get clearance from the Health Department of the Point Fortin Borough Corporation, the school will be reopened.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: St. Ann's East.

Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank You. So can the Minister confirm then, that the school will not be reopened on Monday coming?

Mr. Speaker: I think it stands to reason. I am not allowing that. That is implicit in the answer the Minister just gave you. That is just simply gilding the lily. Come on, next question. I am not allowing that. I think you are number 3 on the question list, too. Go ahead.

Rio Claro East Secondary School

(Safety and Security Concerns)

Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly (*St. Ann's East*): In light of the protest by parents of students of the Rio Claro East Secondary School on February 5th, 2026, arising from serious safety concerns due to ongoing online threats against the school, can the Minister state what immediate and long-term measures are being implemented by the Ministry to ensure the safety and security of students and staff at the school?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Minister of Education.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Michael Dowlath): Mr Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for the question. In light of the safety concerns arising from recent online threats directed at the Rio Claro East Secondary School, the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the TTPS and the Ministry of Homeland Security, immediately implemented enhanced security measures at the school. One additional school-oriented police officer was installed at the school. Total, there are three school-oriented police officers at the school. In addition, an additional safety officer was installed at the school.

On a daily basis, there is a rotation of between three and four MTS security officers. The Rio Claro police have been providing static patrols at the beginning of the school day from 7.30 a.m. to 8.45 a.m., and at the end of the school period, 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. The MTS sergeants have been on regular patrols during the course of the day. Mr Speaker, the school remains safe and secure for all school personnel.

In addition, all entry and exit protocols have been strengthened, and visitors and students entering the compound are searched daily. Student attendance has increased. Teachers are in attendance. The Ministry's Health and Safety Division has been monitoring the school's safety on a daily basis. The SSSD Division has been providing psychosocial support for both students and teachers. All reports have been made to the police about the cyber threats. My information is that the police is pursuing this matter actively. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: St. Ann's East.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Minister confirm that since the ongoing threat started in November, less than 50 per cent of the attendance of students at this school has been realized?

Mr. Speaker: Minister, are you able to answer that?

Hon. Dr. M. Dowlath: Mr Speaker, that question is beyond the scope of this particular question. If the Member submits another question, I will be happy to answer.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Yes, St. Ann's East.

Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Does the Minister of Education have any update on the arrest that was said to be imminent by the Minister of

Homeland Security on January 20, 2026?

Ms Ameen: Of course not. [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: I do not think—St Augustine, please. I do not think this is an appropriate question for this Minister, disallowed.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Point Lisas Water Transmission

Leak Repair Programme

Mr. Speaker: Minister of Public Utilities.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Public Utilities and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Barry Padarath): Thank you kindly, Mr Speaker. I have been authorized by the Cabinet to make the following statement. Non-revenue water remains a central pillar of WASA's evolution plan. As such, I mandated WASA to aggressively expand detection and repair activities nationwide, beyond routine operations, to recover treated water that has been lost for six years due to neglect and inaction.

Mr Speaker, my contribution has to do specifically with Point Lisas Industrial Estate, which continues to be the hub of economic activity of Trinidad and Tobago. Over the past few months, WASA has partnered closely with Point Lisas Industrial Port Development Company, PLIPDECO, to identify and address several long-standing issues within the estate. It is deeply concerning that many of these issues were reported to WASA as far back as 2020 and left unattended by the former WASA administration under the PNM Government.

Despite the growing strain on national water supplies and the hardship faced by thousands of residential customers, what this nation is confronting at Point Lisas is not merely a water leak problem. It is a physical evidence of six years of

political arrogance, ministerial abandonment, and institutional decay under the former PNM Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr Speaker, this was not an emergency that suddenly appeared. This was a crisis manufactured by neglect, sustained by indifference, and allowed to fester by a former Minister of Public Utilities, who perfected the art of being present in office but absent in leadership.

Mr Speaker, these leaks were raised six years ago via correspondence from PLIPDECO under a PNM board. Reports were submitted, red flags were waved, yet the response from the former administration was silent. Enabled by a top-heavy, politically appointed WASA board that failed to govern, failed to intervene, and ultimately failed the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr Speaker, the consequences of that failure are staggering. For six years, millions of gallons of treated water were allowed to gush into the ground every single day. Water that taxpayers paid to treat, pump, and distribute, while citizens endured shortages and communities were placed on rotational supply. Mr Speaker, this was not ignorance. This was wilful disregard.

The Point Lisas Industrial Estate is a national economic engine. It underwrites foreign exchange earnings, industrial production, and employment. Yet, under the former administration, even this strategic asset was treated with contemptuous neglect. While this Government assumed office, we found a transmission system haemorrhaging an estimated 6 million imperial gallons of potable water per day, with losses valued at approximately TT\$250 million for the period. Mr Speaker, when this Government assumed office, we found a transmission system haemorrhaging an estimated 6 million imperial gallons of

potable water per day, with losses valued at approximately TT\$250 million for the period it was left to languish.

1.50 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, let the record reflect this clearly. A loss of that magnitude does not occur without systematic failure at the ministerial and board levels. The former Minister cannot plead ignorance. The former WASA board cannot plead surprise. They were warned, and they chose to do nothing. Unlike the former administration, this Government did not hide behind bureaucracy or deflect blame onto engineers and frontline workers. We acted. Under this Government, what the PNM failed to do in six years was confronted decisively. Initial assessments identified nine priority areas. Proper technical investigations, deliberately avoided under the former administration, uncovered 21 active transmission failures concealed beneath congested utility corridors and in open lots on the Industrial Estate.

Despite operating amid high-pressure gas pipelines, hydrogen, high-voltage, electrical infrastructure, and telecommunication networks, and SCADA systems, this Government coordinated a disciplined risk-based intervention with PLIPDECO, NGC, T&TEC, and TSTT. I want to thank my colleague from Couva North, the Minister of Works, for her intervention and assistance.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: I want to thank the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries for his assistance in collaborating on these matters.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, this is a government that collaborates and does not work in silos, but gets the job done. To date, 19 of the 21 confirmed leaks have been repaired, representing a 91 per cent completion rate delivered squarely within

the original six-to-eight-week time frame. Mr. Speaker, I was just shortly advised by WASA that it is no longer 19 out of 21, but it is now 20 out of 21. The results are undeniable.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Significant reduction in non-revenue water, stabilized supply to surrounding communities, restored roadway integrity, and reduced industrial and safety risk. Only two high-risk access constraint leaks remained at that time; now it is only one. Both are fully identified, actively managed, and progressing under strict safety and shutdown protocols. Full completion is expected by—well, by the time it was prepared, Mr. Speaker, it would have been at the end of January. I am told that by next week, all 21 will be completed, once safety conditions allow.

Mr. Speaker, the contrast is brutal. Six years of PNM governance delivered waste, decay, and excuses. Weeks of this Government's leadership delivered action and results on the Industrial Estate. This programme exposes PNM's core failure. They did not govern; they occupied office. This Government governs. We are undoing years of deliberate neglect. We are correcting the cost of political arrogance, and we are restoring accountability for the management of the nation's water resources. The Point Lisas leak repair programme is not only a technical success, but it is a clear indictment of the former administration's record. This intervention at Point Lisas is not an isolated fix, nor is it a one-off. It forms part of a clear and deliberate national policy direction set by the hon. Prime Minister, the Member for Siparia, whose leadership has been unequivocal.

Every community in Trinidad and Tobago, urban or rural, industrial or residential, must have equitable, reliable access to safe potable water. Under her instructive leadership, this Government has rejected the narrow, shortsighted approach of the past. We understand that water security is not achieved by patchwork repairs or

press statements; it requires system-wide reform: from raw water sourcing, treatment capacity, transmission integrity, storage resilience, and distribution efficiency. Accordingly, this Government is advancing multiple complementary projects across the entire production and distribution network: Aggressive non-revenue water reduction, transmission upgrades, treatment plant optimization, pumping and storage rehabilitation, and improved operational coordination across agencies.

Leak management is critical, but it is only one component of a broader strategy to modernize and stabilize the national water system. This is the difference between managing decline and governing for results. Mr. Speaker, under the PNM over the last six years, \$250million in potable water was lost. Today, we have stopped the mismanagement, the corruption, and the waste, and, Mr. Speaker, as Machel says, now MPU and WASA are giving them performance. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 24, the Member for Arouca/Lopinot has one question for elucidation.

Mr. Marvin Gonzales (*Arouca/Lopinot*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. Minister, you made reference to a report that was completed on leaks on the Point Lisas Industrial Estate. Can you give a date when that report was completed and when it was submitted to WASA?

Mr. Speaker: Minister.

Hon. B. Padarath: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I think my friend needs some assistance in amplifying the volume inside of the Chamber, because I started off by indicating, Mr. Speaker, that these issues were brought to the attention of WASA as early as 2020 by the Board of PLIPDECO.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*].

Mr. Speaker: Minister of Land and Legal Affairs.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Land Acquisition (Requisition) Order, 2026

The Minister of Land and Legal Affairs and Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (Hon. Saddam Hosein): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Whereas it is provided by section 5(1) of the Land Acquisition Act, Chap. 58:01 (hereinafter referred to as “the Act”) that the President may by Order, declare that land is required for a public purpose;

And whereas it is provided by section 5(2) of the Act that Parliament may by resolution approve an Order made under section 5(1);

And whereas the Land Acquisition (Requisition) Order, 2026 was made by the President under section 5(1) of the Act as Legal Notice No. 24 dated the 2nd day of February, 2026;

And whereas it is expedient to approve the said Order;

Be it resolved that the Land Acquisition (Requisition) Order, 2026 be approved.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity of allowing me to raise this very timely, important, and simple matter before the House. This, Mr. Speaker, comes right after we have settled a particular matter that has been engaging the people of Tobago since 2008, and under nine months, I can happily report to this particular Chamber, Mr. Speaker, that we had unanimous support from the other place, and the land acquisition Order for the Cove Estate has finally been completed.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Land Acquisition (Requisition)
Order, 2026 (cont'd)
Hon. S. Hosein (cont'd)

2026.02.06

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Land and Legal Affairs is working very hard. We are working expediently, and we are giving them performance, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: That is why, Mr. Speaker, in quick order, we can engage the attention of this House to settle another one of the land acquisition matters that the other side left languishing, Mr. Speaker. This particular order deals with a parcel of land that is described—and I will read to you, Mr. Speaker, the Schedule that we are acquiring. It comprises, approximately, 11.94 acres, more or less, situated off Caura Royal Road, El Dorado, in the ward of Tacarigua, in the County of St. George, and described in the Schedule on a plan of survey—

Mr. Speaker: St. Ann's East, are you on your phone? St. Ann's East, are you on your phone?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No, I am not.

Mr. Speaker: What is that device you are holding to your ear?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: What is the device you are holding to your ear?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: A phone, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: You are listening to messages in the Chamber?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: You know very well the Standing Orders say you should not do that, okay? It is not for me to admonish a grown professional person not to use devices in the Chamber. So, can we resist the temptation to do so? Thank you very much. Minister, continue.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: [*Inaudible*]—you are not supposed to use a device in the

Land Acquisition (Requisition)
Order, 2026 (cont'd)
Hon. S. Hosein (cont'd)

2026.02.06

Chamber?

Mr. Speaker: Well, you could do so, but discreetly. Are you holding the phone to your ear? I am given to draw the inference that you are on your phone. I routinely see Members on their phones sending messages. This is the first time I am seeing someone actually holding a phone to their ear. What am I supposed to assume?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Mr. Speaker, I was not speaking. I was—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: Well, I would not know. I am some 12 to 15 feet away from you. I would not know whether you are speaking, but it gives me to draw the inference that you are. So—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: But, Mr. Speaker, if I was not speaking, how was I disturbing—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: It is not a question of disturbing the House. It is a question of you giving the impression that you are on your phone or a device. Nothing is wrong with being on your computer or using your phone as a computer, but when you use the phone in such a manner, so as to give the impression that you are actually on the phone, then it requires my intervention. That is all I am saying. I am not disbarring you from using your phone as a messaging device or some other.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Well, it is a message that I was listening to, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: You see—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: The Member for Port of Spain South—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Mr. Speaker, I am just seeking your clarity, you know. Because—

Land Acquisition (Requisition)
Order, 2026 (cont'd)
Hon. S. Hosein (cont'd)

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Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Alright, please. The Member for Port of Spain South, I have noticed, regularly puts his earphones on and he listens to his messages. Nothing is wrong with that. Surely, you must understand the misleading impression it gives when you sit in the Chamber with a device attached to your ear. It gives the impression that you are using your phone in the Chamber. Surely, you must understand that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Okay, I think we have taken enough time on that Member. I have said enough. I think you have said enough. I think it is clear. I am not debarring you from using your phone, but please do not hold it to your ear and give me the impression that you are on the phone.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: You are welcome. Minister.

Hon. S. Hosein: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, getting back to the business at hand. We are dealing with—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: That is all my friends opposite engage in, you know, distractions.

Mr. Speaker, 11.94 acres, more or less, situated off Caura Royal Road, El Dorado in the ward of Tacarigua, in the County of St. George, and this parcel of land is described on a plan of survey signed by the Director of Surveys dated the 12th of February 2025, and the lands are being acquired for the public purpose of the construction of affordable homes for the Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation.

Mr. Speaker, this parcel of land that we are dealing with, I am informed, through the Ministry of Housing and also the Housing Development Corporation, that the houses have, in fact, been completed on the site. Those houses are ready for distribution. However, Mr. Speaker, I must raise a matter of concern. This is something that this Government, as we go along with all the land acquisitions, we are seeing happening, just like in Tobago, Mr. Speaker, they moved persons who had titles to their lands from the airport expansion onto the Cove Estate, where the State did not have title. So, you are moving persons with titles and making them titleless. In this instance, Mr. Speaker, they were building homes on a parcel of land, and they had no title to it. They had no title. That is why this House's attention is being engaged today to vest the title in the State.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, they were governing backwards. They were putting the cart before the horse. Mr. Speaker, they were going to bathe, and they did not carry a towel. That is what they were doing. Mr. Speaker, they were in fact engaged in exercises along the entire part of the developmental programmes—the little that they had—and they could not sort out simple things like land tenure. One will think that the State, being a responsible, prudent organization, would ensure that if you were going build houses piece of land, you owned the land. At least own the land, have the title for the land. Although section 4 of the Act—and they may come with this to say that we are allowed to take possession. Why did you not finish the procedure? It took a UNC administration to complete this exercise of land acquisition.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: They, Mr. Speaker, governed backwards, and that is why they

have been committed to the Opposition, and they will be there for a very, very long time.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Now, Mr. Speaker, one may ask and enquire in terms of where or who will be the owner of this land, and whose lands the State has occupied, and whose lands that the State has taken possession upon, and whose lands that these houses were built on. Mr. Speaker, by Cabinet Minute dated—the Note was brought in December 2019. At that time, Mr. Speaker, the HDC would have looked at several parcels of land that would have been owned by or vested with the CL Financial group.

There were several properties and parcels of land that were identified, in fact, seven parcels. Of those seven parcels, this piece off Caura Royal Road was one of those parcels that had been identified. Others were in Bon Air Gardens, Arouca; El Dorado Estate; El Toco Estate; Santa Rosa Industrial Estate, and one parcel off Tumpuna Road in Arima, Mr. Speaker. All of those lands would have amounted to approximately 1,400 acres of land. Now, we were only dealing with that one parcel of land that was subject to that Cabinet Note in 2019.

So, Mr. Speaker, according to section 3 of the Land Acquisition Act, the first procedure that had to take place is that first, when you file the section 3 Notice, is that you are giving notice to the world that will be published through the Government Printery industry that the State has the intention of acquiring this land for a public purpose. That particular section 3 Notice was published by Legal Notice No. 24 on the 24th of January, 2020. At this point, the surveys can then be executed to delineate the particular parcels that we are dealing with.

Thereafter, that process happens, Mr. Speaker; you engage the section 4

process. Section 4 is where the State will now take physical possession or occupation of the parcel of land. So it authorizes the Commissioner of State Lands to go onto the lands and take physical possession. Mr. Speaker, based on the records, the section 4 Notice was published as Legal Notice No. 84, dated April 30th 2020. However, there is a window in which the State must, in fact, take physical possession of the land, and that was not done. So, therefore, the section 4 Notice had to be republished as Legal Notice No. 355 dated the 13th of November 2020.

Subsequently, Mr. Speaker, after the section 3 and 4 Notices have taken place, we are now engaged in the section 5 procedure, which requires us to engage the attention of this honourable Chamber, and then engage the attention of the other place. Mr. Speaker, in this particular instance, the HDC would have engaged contractors, and the houses would have been constructed upon the lands that were intended to be acquired, because we are now physically or formally vesting the lands in the State, Mr. Speaker. Therefore, we hope that we have the support of our colleagues opposite in order to finally complete this particularly important procedure. So, therefore, only when this happens, Mr. Speaker, thereafter, will the houses in that area be able to be distributed, as now those recipients or those purchasers will be able to get their titles. They can take the titles to the bank, get their mortgages upon the properties, and, therefore, enter into financing arrangements for the purchases of those particular units.

I am informed it is 100 units in townhouse structures, Mr. Speaker. So that will take place—it would not be Inez Gate, neither Trestrail. So, Mr. Speaker, these particular matters will engage the attention of this House, and I want to give the commitment that more and more of these long-standing issues will come to the

Land Acquisition (Requisition)
Order, 2026 (cont'd)
Hon. S. Hosein (cont'd)

2026.02.06

public's attention in this place for approval so that we can begin the process of regularization.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

2.10 p.m.

Hon. S. Hosein: We at the Ministry of Land and Legal Affairs, Mr. Speaker, under the guidance of our hon. Prime Minister, we are working very hard. That is why I can be proud to say that over 600 Caroni workers, in under nine months, have received their leases.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: That is why, Mr. Speaker, we can boast as a government and say over 200 citizens have received their Certificates of Comfort after waiting decades, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, that is why in soon order, we will see that persons will be able to get their state grants from the former Caroni (1975) Limited.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, at the Ministry of Land and Legal Affairs, we are working very hard, and we will continue to give them performance, give them performance, give them performance, Mr. Speaker, and I beg to move.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]**Mr. Speaker:** Member for Trincity/Maloney.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Camille Robinson-Regis (Trincity/Maloney): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we on this side are in full support of this—

Hon. Member: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Land Acquisition (Requisition)
Order, 2026 (cont'd)
Mrs. Robinson-Regis (cont'd)

2026.02.06

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: [*Laughter*] We are in full support, Mr. Speaker, because as the mover of this Motion rightly said, this was started in 2019, continued in 2020, and now we are completing. As the mover also said, once you do a section 3 and a section 4, the State can move onto the land and proceed to do what it has to do with regard to the land, because notice has been provided to the world that this is the intention and the State wants to use the land for a particular purpose.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things that prevented the Government from moving forward with this particular matter more expeditiously was the fact that this was HCL land, and there was a stark difference between what the HCL wanted for this land in terms of compensation and what the Commissioner of Valuations stated the land was worth. Unlike what happened with EMBD, Mr. Speaker—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis:—we determined that we should go the straight and narrow path, work with the Commissioner of State Lands and HCL in order to come to an agreed position, not try to inveigle EMBD to overcharge and apparently have the then Ministry benefit from that overcharge. That was not what we would have—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: So, Mr. Speaker, it did take some time. And we are proud to say that when we turned the sod on this particular piece of land, as I then was the Minister of Housing and Urban Development, alongside former Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley—we turned the sod on March 19, 2024. And, Mr. Speaker, that time, I said and announced publicly that we were building 100 three-

bedroom townhouses, 72 units would have been completed by June 2025, the full project would have been completed by December 2025, and we were utilizing 4.56 hectares of land. At that time, the project was described as the single largest public investment in Caura in recent times, and it was estimated to cost \$117 million.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Legal Affairs quite rightly said that the parcel of land was being used to build affordable homes. And we said that you are providing affordable shelter for low and middle income persons, with associated community facilities, and it was to implement the government's policy of providing affordable homes. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, my information is that whereas these homes were to cost each person who fit the criteria for these homes—\$950,000 for the units that were built on the inside and \$1.1 million for the units that were located on the outside—my information is, Mr. Speaker, that these homes are now costing \$1.5 million and \$1.7 million.

And what is even worse, Mr. Speaker, is that the persons who met the criteria at the time had been interviewed, they had been assessed and they had also been given the assurance that they were getting specific units. And now my information is that every single one of those persons has been removed after being assessed and assured that they would be the persons who would occupy this Caura development. Mr. Speaker, this is governance, UNC-style.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: In addition to this, Mr. Speaker, I understand that units in the Chaguanas area that were in the order of \$575,000, persons are now being asked to pay \$750,000 for those units.

Mr. Speaker: I am going to rule on relevance there. I have permitted you to talk about the values with regard to the lands which are actually the subject of this

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acquisition Order. I think you are going a little beyond the colouring box there, Member. So if you could just rein in to the relevance to this—the very narrow issue to the House.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, I thank you for your guidance, but I was just following what my friend had done because he spoke about Tobago, so I—
[Inaudible]

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker: Now, the reference to Tobago is not an open licence to step outside the box. The reference Tobago was merely a—

Hon. Members: [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: It was merely to lend context to say that that was the last acquisition order that came here. So do not use it, please, as an open licence to draw anything into this debate. I think you have gone far beyond the relevance. I allowed you to talk about the price increase, I allowed you to talk about other things insofar as this parcel of land is concerned. So let us stick to that, thank you.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, so the fact that the Edinburgh Towers are now going to be used for the HDC's head office, I should not talk about that?

Mr. Speaker: No, that is not relevance to this. This is a very narrow—
[Inaudible]

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you for your guidance, Mr. Speaker.

The mover of this Motion spoke glowingly about policy decisions led by the leader of the Government and indicated that without that kind of guidance, all of this would not be happening. But, Mr. Speaker, it is clear that in the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, and as it relates to HDC in particular, we are

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being led by Wynken, Blyken, and Nod—

Mr. Morris: 48(1) This is not a debate about HDC. This is about land acquisition.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Member, come, let us colour between the lines, please. Let us colour between the lines. You are way too experienced. You must know you are going beyond the line. Come on, let us stick to the relevance.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, this is an acquisition for HDC—

Mr. Speaker: HDC does not allow—as I said before, it is not an open licence to bring anything under the HDC. So what next are we going to draw in? Employment practices? Garbage? Grass cutting? What next are we going to do? No, come on. It is a simple acquisition Motion, come on. Come on, let us stick to the relevant issues. Those are issues you may raise in another debate, not this one.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, again for your guidance.

Mr. Speaker, as the mover of this Motion rightly said, the last acquisition Motion that came before us dealt with Tobago. He also indicated that what has been happening with the Ministry of Land and Legal Affairs is that they have been able to give deeds to over 100, was it?—Caroni workers—

Hon. Members: Six hundred.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, 600 Caroni workers. But, Mr. Speaker, you know what is very painful for persons who have their houses with the HDC, whilst they watch 600 Caroni workers get their deeds? These deeds—

Mr. Tancoo: [*Inaudible*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Sorry?

Mr. Tancoo: [*Inaudible*]

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Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: You want to hear what I have to say?

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

Mr. Speaker: Member, you all are going to address each other, or you are going to address the Chair? Make your choice, you know. It is as simple as that. Go ahead.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the thing is that the irony here is really glaring. In 2014, under a UNC Cabinet, the 10-year restriction that had been put in place as part of the VSEP for Caroni workers that the PNM gave, the 10-year restriction on the sale or transfer of their two-acre parcel of Caroni lands were removed. Whereas now, with the HDC, there remains a 10-year restriction because the objective of the housing policy was to ensure that persons had houses that they could pass on to their children and grandchildren, so that we were developing intergenerational wealth.

So, now with the Caroni workers, they can sell the land immediately if they wish. They can monetize the land immediately if they wish. And, Mr. Speaker, the transfer fee is a minimal administrative fee. Why the difference with HDC homeowners, Mr. Speaker? I would like to ask.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: With the HDC homeowners, Mr. Speaker, it is 10 years. It is a requirement to pay 5 per cent or 10 per cent on the purchase price to transfer. And what we are seeing on this side is the implementation of an inheritance tax on the HDC homeowners.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: So, Mr. Speaker, we ask the question, why was it good policy for the Caroni workers, but it is bad policy now? Why could the HDC

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homeowners not get the same benefit, Mr. Speaker? That is all we want to know. So, why were the Caroni workers trusted with their assets, but the HDC homeowners seem to be being penalized?

Hon. Members: “Hmmm”.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: That is all we are asking on this side. And all we are asking is for policy coherence. And, Mr. Speaker, all we want is equity for the HDC homeowners.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: But, Mr. Speaker, what we are seeing is policy by “vaps” because the Ministers—and it is three of them—do not know what is taking place in their own Ministry.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: And that is why I feel moved to call them “Wynken, Blynken, and Nod”.

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

Mr. Speaker: You know you should withdraw that. You know you should withdraw that. Withdraw it and move on, please.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: It is withdrawn, Mr. Speaker, and I will move on. But, Mr. Speaker, I just wanted, before I close, to say, once again, that we do agree with what is taking place.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: But, Mr. Speaker, you know we would have been so much happier if the Minister was aware of what was taking place at the HDC.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: And—

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Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Well, it seems as though—I have been asked a question, eh, Mr. Speaker, so I am just responding.

Mr. Speaker: Either—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: I am not aware that you, being one of the most—perhaps the second most experienced Member of this House present now—

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Yes, I am.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, I am happy that you have taken ownership of that experiential history that you would be drawn into responding to a question across the aisle, please.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Okay, I would not respond across the aisle, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: But, Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to indicate that it would appear as though there is that policy difference, and it is clear that perhaps because of the fact that the Chairman of the HDC has nothing to do with the Programme Manager of URP, because there is nothing going on—

Mr. Speaker: That is completely irrelevant.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Member, why do you consistently colour outside the lines? That is completely irrelevant.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, apart from being an attorney-at-law, I am an artist at heart.

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

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: My colouring is not restricted to the lines.

Mr. Speaker: Well, that much is pretty obvious.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: So, Mr. Speaker, my hope is that there is no intention—now that the land has been acquired and the deeds can properly pass—to penalize the people who, in the first instance, were able to qualify for these homes. I hope that my information that the amounts for the units have been increased exponentially is incorrect. And I also hope that the HDC will get its act together and work in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago who deserve proper governance. And, Mr. Speaker, I know I am waxing philosophical, but I hope they get a Minister who understands what is happening and—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis:—and who does not have a preoccupation with trying to avoid bail.

Hon. Members: “Ohhhh”. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: No. Member—

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker:—I would require you to make an unreserved withdrawal of that andan unmitigated apology to the Member.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, I withdraw, and I apologize unreservedly.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Minister, Caroni Central, I apologize.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, with those few words, I say that we agree

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with what is taking place today, and we look forward to the Ministry of Legal Affairs continuing to bring more—

Hon. Member: Land.

Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis:—Land and Legal Affairs—continuing to honestly bring more matters of this nature before us. Thank you kindly, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

2.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Caroni Central.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

The Minister of Housing (Hon. David Lee): Mr. Speaker, I was not planning to speak this afternoon, but I asked the Leader of my Bench to allow me to speak, to respond to some of the nonsense that my colleague from Trincity/Maloney—and it is pure nonsense she is saying. And I think she is suffering from withdrawal symptoms of losing elections. I think she still believes, I think the Member still believes she is still the Minister of Housing at some point in time.

Now, I have not heard. And I thought she was my friend. I still consider her my friend, Mr. Speaker. I know it is banter, but it is nice to be—I welcome you back to the Lower House after an absence of six or seven months, Member for Trincity/Maloney.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: We have not—I think the last time I saw you was some time when we took our Oath of Office back then. So I am happy to see you back in the Chamber once again.

Let me start off by saying to the Member for Trincity/Maloney that I am fully aware of what is going on in HDC. And I want to remind you of the

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mismanagement of your administration of HDC over the last 10 years under your stewardship, Member. And the corruption that took place in HDC under your stewardship, Member.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Under my stewardship?

Hon. D. Lee: I want to remind you of the contracts—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, I object. I know of no corruption that took place under my stewardship. Standing Order 48(6), Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: 48(6) is an imputation of an improper motive directed at a particular Member. The Member simply made a generalized statement. He did not—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: No. All the Member said, I will remind you—“I wish to remind you of the mismanagement and corruption which took place under...”—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: That does not impute direct responsibility. If the Minister, if the Member had said directed by—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Alright. So, in contradistinction to that, this is what you said with regard to EMBD. Where there is allegation that the then Minister benefitted.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: There is a court case.

Mr. Speaker: Well, the court case, that has nothing to do with EMBD, first of all. That court case you are referring to, Eden Gardens, has nothing to do with EMBD. It has to do with HDC, as far as I am aware. Well, we are not going to argue about that. I am simply going to rule that this is not an improper imputation of motive.

Hon. D. Lee: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: This is in response to what was said.

Mr. de Nobriga: Mr. Speaker, in that case, could I get a ruling on 48(4) then?

Mr. Speaker: Just so that we have it, 48(4), offensive and insulting language. What is the offensive and what is the insulting language you are referring to? What is the offensive and insulting words you are relying on?

Mr. de Nobriga: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: I am sorry?

Mr. de Nobriga: We both cannot be on our legs.

Mr. Speaker: I am going to sit and I am going to ask you to identify the insulting and the offensive words.

Mr. de Nobriga: Mr. Speaker, I have raised a Standing Order. You can support it or not.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: I am going to wait until the din of that unhelpful table pounding dies down. Member, can I remind you that when a Member raises a point of order and a Standing Order, you have to be prepared to support your interjection, both in form and substance. To simply stand and say—misguidedly rely on a Standing Order, which you are unable. I ask you specifically to identify the offensive words and the insulting language. You seem incapable, unable or unwilling to do so. That is unhelpful. It is unhelpful. It results in exactly what I am doing here, wasting time.

Members have a duty and a responsibility. When you make an interjection, you rely on a Standing Order, be prepared to advocate your cause. Do not simply say—rely on the Standing Order and when your reliance on the Standing Order is interrogated you seek to hide behind the fig leaf, “well, Mr. Speaker, that is your

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responsibility.” Quite frankly, yes it is. But it is also your responsibility to justify why you are making an unwarranted interjection.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: This is thoroughly unhelpful. This is thoroughly unhelpful. Member, continue, please.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, let me just bring it back into context here.

Mr. Speaker: Stay relevant please. The Member was admonished for staying relevant. So stay relevant, please.

Hon. D. Lee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the lands that we are here to discuss is in the Caura Royal Road, El Dorado, in the ward of Tacarigua and the county of St. George. And, Mr. Speaker, in respect to this development in this same county there was a wastewater facility that was being built to assist this area, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, that is the Bon Air Wastewater Plant that started under that administration to assist this area back in 2018, at a cost of \$3.6 million, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, a point of order, 48(1).

Mr. Speaker: Unless, Member, unless that is necessary to give context, I am going to ask you to move on to the simple issue which is before the House.

Hon. D. Lee: I will give the context, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the context is that this wastewater plant was being built by that administration to assist this same development that we are discussing about.

Mr. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, a point of order. Mr. Speaker, clearly, 48(1). Mr. Speaker, the Bon Air Wastewater project is far from the Caura lands that we are

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debating in this Motion.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Gonzales: So, clearly, the Minister does not know where Bon Air is located as opposed to the Order that we are debating here today. It is far removed from the project.

Mr. Speaker: Okay. That is why I asked the Member, that unless he could lend a measure of contextual relevance to the references to that—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: I took his word, just as I have taken your word many times in the past about contextual relevance. Minister, I ask you again: Are you able to lend contextual relevance to the references? If you are able to and you give me—

Mr. Tancoo: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Alright, Minister of Finance, come on. If you are able to and you give me that undertaking, I am prepared to allow you a small measure.

Hon. D. Lee: Mr. Speaker, the development that is in question here today is 100 units, 100 townhouses in the Caura area. The wastewater plant is to assist this area, Mr. Speaker. And I am trying to put it in context of the infrastructure that took place to assist this area, Mr. Speaker. And I know my friend from Arouca/Lopinot does not want me to talk about that wastewater that assisted this area.

Mr. Speaker, I just put it in context because the Member for Trincity/Maloney raised certain prices of these units. She raised certain prices and I am trying to show you the cost that took place in the pricing of these units, Mr. Speaker. And that is why I raised this matter about the wastewater plant that assisted, that will assist the 100 townhouses, Mr. Speaker. And there is a cost benefit, Mr. Speaker,

that is relevant in addressing and answering my friend from Trincity/Maloney.

And the reason why I raised this—and they do not want me to talk about it. This plant started under their watch at \$3.6 million. At the end of 2023, Mr. Speaker, you know what that plant went to? \$34 million. So when I mentioned earlier about the corruption underneath them, Mr. Speaker, this is what I am talking about. Because they cannot justify why that plant could move from 3.6 and in four years it moves to \$34 million.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, point of order please, 48(1). What does this have to do with the Bill?

Mr. Speaker: The Member completely justified the contextual relevance of it. It is the Member who opened the pricing, and the Member is simply justifying why the price increases had to take place. That is all.

Hon. D. Lee: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Trincity/Maloney, this project started back with trying to acquire the lands underneath them from HCL back in 2018/2019. And you would have heard from my colleague and the Minister of Legal Affairs, the history of it, Mr. Speaker.

What they were trying to do, Mr. Speaker, without having the lands properly vested into HDC from HCL, at the time these townhouses were not completed up to the general election. But they were allocating those townhouses to their friends and family, Mr. Speaker, and the townhouses were not built, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, point of order, 48(6), please. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: Hey, shut up.

Mr. Speaker: I think that interjection only needs to be stated to be dismissed.

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Hon. D. Lee: They do not want to hear. They do not want to hear. They do not want to hear about that development in Caura, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I am absolutely certain—

Mr. Padarath: What is your Standing Order?

Mr. Manning:—that in 48(6), in the past when those on this side have said “friends, family and financiers—”

Mr. Speaker: Have a seat. Have a seat. Have a seat.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for San Fernando East, I am formally warning you pursuant to Standing Order 55. Consider yourself formally warned. Read Standing Order 55. Reconsider what you just said. And I am formally putting you on notice, pursuant to Standing Order 55. I am formally putting you on notice.

Hon. D. Lee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, one of the things that that last administration used to do with HDC houses, they never used to vest properly the lands that were owned, for example, like Home Construction Limited, to HDC. And what that allowed them to do, Mr. Speaker, was to be able, again, to give their friends, family and financiers homes and something called lease-to-own or rent-to-own, Mr. Speaker.

What used to happen with a rent-to-own or lease-to-own is that they would have given their friends and family and favouritism of people getting homes in these developments, Mr. Speaker, at peppercorn rental rates, Mr. Speaker, with the notion at some point in time they would change that rent or lease-to-own to mortgages, Mr. Speaker. And that is why we have so many problems at HDC and we have a billion-dollar rent receivable that is uncollectable at HDC, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon, D. Lee: And that is why HDC's new board and management is trying to restructure HDC, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you about Caura that is here this afternoon. And I will give you the history of what the development is about. The development was and is designed for 100 townhouse units and it was completed underneath this administration, Mr. Speaker, underneath the leadership of the hon. Prime Minister, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Member for Siparia. Mr. Speaker, the Member talked, and my colleague from Legal Affairs, the hon. Saddam Hosein, when he opened the debate, he read from a Cabinet Note about affordable houses, Mr. Speaker, affordable homes.

The Member for Trincity/Maloney somehow feels that she is still the Minister of Housing. So, from my information, she had called down to HDC to get information on this debate, Mr. Speaker. She called certain individuals. She called certain individuals to try and get information on this. And the persons that she called, Mr. Speaker, gave her wrong information, Mr. Speaker. They gave her wrong information.

Now, so, the Member raised some prices that since underneath our watch, the Caura townhouses is no longer affordable. And the prices, she called some prices at 1.5 for the inner units and 1.7 for the outer units. Is that not what you said, Member for Trincity/Maloney? I want to tell the Member for Trincity/Maloney, the prices of these townhouses are \$950,000 for the inner units and 1.1 for the outer units. We have not changed the price of those townhouses, Member for Trincity/Maloney. So, whoever told you that information downstairs in HDC, they are setting you up. They are setting you up, Trincity/Maloney. They are setting you up. They are setting you up. Do not take—do not listen to what is

going on in HDC. They are giving you the wrong information, Member. I feel sorry for you here today. I feel sorry for you here today. So that the information you have is totally erroneous; whoever gave you that information.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: So, I put it on *Hansard* here. The prices are still \$950,000 for the inner units and 1.1 for the outer units.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: I rise on Standing Order, please Minister, 53(1)(e). The Minister continues to put his contribution forward and the Member for Trincity/Maloney will not allow him to put his contribution. It is a non-stop, non-stop, non-stop babbling, 53(1)(e). I want to hear the Minister.

Hon. D. Lee: I thank the Member for Siparia for protecting me here this afternoon. I appreciate your intervention.

Mr. Speaker, this Motion is a simple Motion. It is either they want to give the people of Trinidad and Tobago affordable homes or they do not, Mr. Speaker. The way the Member for Trincity/Maloney is getting on, clearly, she does not want to afford affordable homes to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: The Member went on a frolic all over the place, Mr. Speaker. I do not know. She has not spoken since April to now, Mr. Speaker. So, I do not know why, maybe she is making up, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is a simple Motion. I heard from the Member for Trincity/Maloney, they will support the Motion. It started underneath them. We are here under this administration to give affordable homes to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And that is the mandate under the Member for Siparia and the present Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Speaker.

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Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: What we will not stand for, Mr. Speaker, is to have a wastewater plant start at 3.6 and end up at 34 million, not underneath the Member for Siparia. It is not going to happen. And somebody has to answer for that, Mr. Speaker. And they will, Mr. Speaker, they will.

Mr. Speaker, in a few short days or coming weeks, you will hear a rollout of design/build/finance homes under the Member for Siparia. And we will tell this Government—this Opposition. We will—

Hon. Member: Raaaay! Raaaay!

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Lee: Under their administration, Mr. Speaker, for 10 years they built 3,400 houses. We will guarantee, we will surpass that and give homes to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very simple Motion, as I said. And I hope my colleagues on the opposite side will support it, not only Trincity/Maloney, because I do not think she speaks for the entire Bench. I do not think she speaks for the entire Bench. And I beg—and I have no more, Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

2:50 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Arouca/Lopinot.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Marvin Gonzales (Arouca/Lopinot): Thank you, Mr. Speaker for recognizing me, and I assure you that my intervention in this debate would remain very relevant—

Hon. Member: And short.

Mr. M. Gonzales:—and perhaps short. Mr. Speaker, I am forced to enter into this

debate based on some of the utterances of my colleague from Barataria/San Juan, but certainly from my friend from Caroni Central.

Mr. Speaker, I raised some objections during his contribution, when he was making reference to a Bon Air wastewater plant, and I want to tell the Minister and the Government, if there is any fraud, if there is any corruption with respect to the construction of any wastewater in Bon Air or in any place in Trinidad and Tobago, let the chips fall where there may, and take action where it is possible.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: “So, we eh fraid dat.” So do not come here talking about a wastewater plant moving from \$3.6 million to \$34 million, if there is wrong doing, we in the PNM, will support the Government and the police, and any relevant authority from taking the appropriate action against anyone who is involved in wrong doing.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, but there was a reason I was raising the Standing Order on relevance, because it so happens that that wastewater plant is in my constituency.

Hon. Member: Exactly.

Mr. M. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, if you know where Bon Air West is, and where Caura development is, I now understand why the Minister does not know what is taking place in his Ministry.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: He talks about feeling sorry for my colleague from Trincity/Maloney; I certainly feel sorry for him.

Hon. Member: Correct.

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Mr. M. Gonzales: I feel sorry for him, because for him to make that connection, between a plant in Bon Air West serving a community in Caura, Mr. Speaker, this Minister needs help in his Ministry.

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

Mr. M. Gonzales: He needs help, and I want to make it abundantly clear, Mr. Speaker, that that plant in Caura has its own wastewater treatment plant in the Caura area. Minister, you need to know your work.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, he claimed that very soon, we will be hearing the Government rolling out some PPP projects to build houses, but I want to warn the Minister that it is the same UNC Government that promised this country that when they come into office there will be 500 homes every week.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: So do not come, my colleague from Caroni Central, to boast about a PPP project that we are going to hear very soon. It is your Government, and it is your party that promise this country that every week there will be 500 houses, and up to now with three Ministers, wasting time in the Ministry, they cannot build not even an ajoupa not even a garden home. Nothing.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from—I feel sorry for Caroni Central, I will leave him for the afternoon. He cannot take all the licks.

Hon. Members: “Awww.”

Mr. M. Gonzales: He cannot take “too much ah licks” in one evening. I want him, as I close on my colleague from Caroni Central, to go and speak to your chairman and find out what is taking place in your Ministry.

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Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: And perhaps the hon. Prime Minister might assist you in that regard.

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

Mr. M. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Barataria/San Juan, he talked about two section 4 notices that were filed, and published for this development. I want to educate my colleague on why two section 4 notices were published for this development, because you see, Mr. Speaker, when a section 4 notice is published, the State has six months in which to acquire the land, and to apply for the public purpose for which it was published.

And there is a reason for that, and if at the expiration of that section 4 notice, and that six months' time elapse, then if you do not rescind this order and publish a new order, you run the risk of interest developing on those lands, and the State being placed at a serious financial risk. You see, we had a Minister, my colleague from Trincity/Maloney who was present, and knew what was taking place in her Ministry.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: And it is for that reason, and of course, with a chairman that she obviously had accounting to her, that at the expiration of that notice, a new notice had to be published in order to safeguard the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, let me tell you this, there is precedent for this, because it is the second week my colleague from Barataria/San Juan has come here pretending as though his party has a good track record with respect to land

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management, and land acquisition. I am saying that in the context of what he said, and why we had to publish two section 4 notices in relation to this project.

You see, Mr. Speaker it was not too long ago, between the period 2010-2015, when a lot of lands in south and central Trinidad, especially in south Trinidad, were acquired, utilizing the same avenues of section 3, and section 4 notices in order to construct a highway. Mr. Speaker, it was over 200 lots of land that were acquired under section 4, which turned out not to be needed in order to construct the highway that cost the tax payers of this country over \$0.8 billion.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: The Ministry of Works and Transport as it was then, had to expend over \$500 million, because these section 4 notices were served on these land owners, and it turned out that the lands were not required in order to construct the highway, and their record of land acquisition and land management cost the people of Trinidad and Tobago \$800 million.

Hon. Member: “It eh make no sense.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: So, do not come here and talk about that. It is as result of this, Mr. Speaker, for this Caura project, it was important that after six months the lands not being placed for the purpose for which the notice was published, a new section 4 notice had to be published, so that the affected land will not accrue interest, and cost the tax payers hundreds of millions of dollars. The reason why a section 4, and another section 4 notice were published in relation to the Caura land, it was to save and to protect the people of Trinidad and Tobago, my colleague from Barataria/San Juan. It had absolutely nothing to do with mismanagement. It had everything to do with a Minister who knew what was taking place in her Ministry.

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Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: We learnt from that experience with the UNC that cost this country \$800 million in mismanaging land acquisition, and as a result of that, in that Caura project, by the publication of another section 4 notice, it saved the taxpayers the potential for cost escalation with respect to land acquisition. It is good and proper management.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: I want to recommend that PNM-style, good and proper governance PNM-style, and I want to recommend that to my colleague from Caroni Central, who is lost at sea in the Ministry of Housing, and he certainly cannot turn to the two other Ministers for help, because they themselves need help.

So, Mr. Speaker, this Order, we support it, and it confirms the PNM long outstanding legacy in building homes for the homeless, and building homes for the underprivileged in this society, and regardless of whatever my colleague from Caroni Central may say, perhaps if you sit and you understand PNM policy in housing, you would not find yourself where you are today. I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Land and Legal Affairs and Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (Hon. Saddam Hosein): Mr. Speaker, I just want to inquire, again for my colleagues opposite, I am not certain if they are still supporting us. After I have listened to Trincity/Maloney and Arouca/Lopinot, I could imagine what they would have said if they were not supporting us.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. S. Hosein: But, Trincity/Maloney is quite an artist, she is, but before she

said she was an artist, she was an attorney-at-law. I just hope she paid her legal Law Association fees, Mr. Speaker, I hope that was covered. I hope that was paid, and you have your practising certificate. I hope so, because I think, Mr. Speaker, Trincity/Maloney was the first and only Attorney General in the history of our country without a practising certificate. She was, you know, she was.

So, Mr. Speaker, “the Member gone and speaking about” valuation issues, and that there were discrepancies in valuations and so on, and trying to link it with EMBDC and so on. Mr. Speaker, all of that is nonsensical, in fact those matters with respect to valuations and so on, these lands are owned by the CL Financial Group.

We all agree on that. There was a discrepancy in the value provided by the group, and there was a discrepancy in the valuation provided by the Commissioner of Valuations, but that does not prevent you from bringing the section 5 notice to the Parliament. It did not, because negotiations are, and can be ongoing, that is as clear as possible in the Land Acquisition Act, and I cannot understand how my friends opposite for 10 years could not understand that simple, simple legal exercise. They cannot, but they could have understood the exercise of negotiations for Kay Donna, that is what they could have understood, and they could have understood the exercise of Pical Services taking a piece of state land in Couva.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: And they could have understood why a sitting government Minister was getting hundreds of millions of dollars in the HDC, Mr. Speaker, and those contracts were awarded, you know how? Orally, pick up the phone, verbal contracts. So, my friends have no shame to come in this Parliament, and talk about this UNC Government. They have none.

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Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: I want to correct the record, Trincity/Moloney said that this project started in 2024. According to the HDC website the project started in November 2023. So get the little things right, and then you might earn some credibility in your contribution. Just get that right, because then Trincity Maloney comes to fear monger, “We are going to raise the prices on these houses”, and the Minister of Housing clearly said, “There will be no increase in the HDC units”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: There will be none. There will be none. So we cannot understand or take any iota of information that the Opposition is providing to this country, because it is all it is all fake news.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: It is fake news. And then the Member talked about a policy difference, and Mr. Speaker, I want to address this. The Member is comparing two separate regimes. The Member is comparing one, the Caroni lands, and then she is making a comparison to the HDC units. Those two things are two separate things. Caroni lands came from a court order based on a VSEP package that was offered by a then PNM government.

Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. S. Hosein: Yes? Mr. Speaker, 23 years they could not have settled the Caroni issues.

Hon. Members:—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, do you know that the Caroni workers took the PNM Government to court, to enforce that Order, and do you know what, they fought the Caroni workers tooth-and-nail. The Caroni workers succeeded, and commanded

the Government to distribute the lands. Mr. Speaker, you know they appealed the judgment of then Justice Deyalsingh to say that the judge was biased, because he was writing articles in the newspaper, and took it to the Court of Appeal. It took a Persad-Bissessar-lead administration to withdrawal that appeal.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: So that is why today, over 600 workers could have gotten their lands that were sitting there idle that they refused to distribute in ten years, and that is shame.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, HDC on the other hand—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Some of these people died.

Hon. S. Hosein:—they died. Their children came to these distribution ceremonies to collect the deeds on behalf of their parents, and Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you that not one group of persons were entitled to these Caroni lands. These Caroni lands were everybody who was at the time employed by Caroni. It is not for one group. I understand the dog whistle that they are trying to blow.

Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Because they were the ones who said, “It is Petrosingh yuh know, not we, yuh know”.

Hon. Member: “Mm-hmm.”

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, they were blowing dog whistles, and then comparing to HDC. HDC homes are meant for every single body.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: It is not for one particular group of persons, Mr. Speaker. It is to

target any person who is low or middle income earning. So stop the dog-whistling. Stop it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: We are hearing them loud and clear, you know, Mr. Speaker. The former Minister of Education was on Facebook yesterday, blowing a fuse, because three students got a scholarship at the UWI.

Hon. Member: “She vex for dat?”

Hon. S. Hosein: “She vex for dat.” Mr. Speaker, the dog-whistling needs to stop in this country.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: And I dare say, Mr. Speaker, today, I have no apologies for saying this, the race baiting must be stopped by the Opposition. Stop it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Our HDC distribution programme, our land distribution programme, every single citizen who is qualified and entitled will be given their lands.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, look at the mixture of the Bench of the Opposition. Look at it—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein:—we have everybody, we have everybody, Mr. Speaker. We have every single body. I did not raise this.

Mr. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, 48(1).

Hon. S. Hosein: You all are putting this up on social media.

Mr. Speaker: Okay. Member.

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Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Okay. Member. Let us stick to the issue. Move on a bit.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. S. Hosein: The thing is, Mr. Speaker, is that before an election they were trying to fool people with the allocation of these homes, only to know that none of them could have gotten their homes. You know why, you want to know why? Because the State did not even have the title to distribute those lands. You were allocating without even having title.

Hon. Members: “Ooh, ooh.”

Hon. S. Hosein: Could you imagine that. So not a single one of those persons you was trying to pad up in Tunapuna, could have gotten a lease. We have here now, a strong responsible Government that will ensure that the lands are vested, so that people who are allocated are not fooled, but they could actually have a titled document in their hands.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: We can give them security to take to the bank, and cash that, Mr. Speaker, that is what we can do. So do not come here with any nonsense about—do not come here with any nonsense, “and yuh blowing hot and yuh blowing cold, and yuh supporting”, but you have all of these things to say. But, Mr. Speaker, I do not want to have to “buss any mark” here today, but you see what Arouca/Lopinot talked about, you see what he talked about, he must explain to this House, Mr. Speaker, when he spoke about the wastewater plant.

Hon. Member: [*Laughter*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Why his subagent for the general election wrapped up millions of dollars in WASA contracts?

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Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Tell us that.

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

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Tell us that. No, tell us why the company Obzen, was able to rack up millions and millions of dollars in WASA contracts. “Tell we dat.” “Do not get up and talk about, “Take it to the police”. I have no power there, but I hope the police “doh show up by you”.

Mr. M. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, 48(1), because if he wants to debate on that, I am well prepared to do that tonight.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: All right. Let us skip the grand-charging. Member, move along.

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, time and time again, I have to correct Arouca/Lopinot on the law. Time and time again. Imagine Arouca/Lopinot was a legal officer in the Ministry of Works and Transport, and “doh” understand land acquisitions. Time and time again, I have to come to this House, and explain the law to my good friend from Arouca/Lopinot. He said, Mr. Speaker that, “It was not because of some mismanagement we had to republish the section 4 notice”. So let us go back to the basics. Section 4 notice means that the State is ready to:

“...take possession”—or occupation—“of the land...”

Simple matter.

3.10 p.m.

It was, in fact, published in April 2020, and it was republished on the 13th of November, 2020. The reason is because the State did not take possession of the lands. Now, if you had given me an excuse—because that was around COVID, I

would have understood, but you “gone down” in terms of mismanagement and so on.

So let me put the law in context of this. When the section 4 Notice is issued, the State, being the Commissioner of State Lands, has six months in which to take possession of the lands. If the Commissioner does not take possession of the land, the Order automatically lapses. There is no issue of rescission, none whatsoever. So I do not understand what Arouca/Lopinot was doing in the Ministry of Works and Transport at the time with land acquisition because he cannot understand these basic principles. And it is clear in the law, Mr. Speaker—and I want to read the law to you. Subsection (4) says:

“If the Commissioner fails to take possession of the land within six months of the publication of an Order issued under subsection (1)—

- (a) the said Order lapses and the powers of the Commissioner thereupon cease to have any effect; and
- (b) any person entitled to the land becomes entitled to repayment of all expenses reasonably incurred...”—during that period—“...as a result of the publication...under section 3(1)(a),”—notice—“up to the date of publication under subsection (2)...”—notice—“...but no compensation is payable in any such case for loss of bargain or for damages for breach of contract.”

So all that nonsense he is talking about with land acquisition on the expansion of the highway project, Mr. Speaker, it is clearly nonsensical. It is bereft. It has no legal basis. It has no logic whatsoever, Mr. Speaker. And I want to ask Arouca/Lopinot to just read the law before you come and debate. Just read it. It is simple. Just read it and understand it.

And in fact, the Ministry of Land and Legal Affairs has the laws online, so it is very easy to access. Pull up the Land Acquisition Act, go through the Act, read it, and then come to this House and make a responsible, accurate submission. That is all we are asking you to do. Do the bare minimum. Do the bare minimum, Mr. Speaker. But, Mr. Speaker, what their issue is, is that it takes a UNC Government to get these things done. That is their issue.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: That is their issue. So all what “yuh say today, all what yuh do today,” at the end of the day, these persons who are entitled to these HDC homes will now be able to get their deeds of leases prepared—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein:—and they will benefit, Mr. Speaker, from a UNC Government, led by the hon. Member for Siparia. And I beg to move, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Land Acquisition (Requisition) Order, 2026 be approved.

COPYRIGHT (AMDT.) BILL, 2026

Mr. Speaker: The Minister of Land and Legal Affairs.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Land and Legal Affairs (Hon. Saddam Hosein): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move:

That a Bill to amend the Copyright Act, Chap. 82:80 to extend the duration of term of protection for copyright and neighbouring rights for authors, performers and producers of sound recordings; to extend the duration of the

term of protection for moral rights for authors and performers; and to provide for related matters, be now read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, we are moving with rapid speed here—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein:—as I introduced the earlier Motion and matter before this House. Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Land and Legal Affairs is giving them performance.

Hon. Member: “On de move.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: “We on de move, Mr. Speaker.” And I want to thank my colleagues on this side of the Chamber for giving me the opportunity to bring this very important Bill to the attention of the nation and to the attention of this House. Mr. Speaker, I left the other place on Tuesday with this Bill, and I am happy to report that we got unanimous support in the other place for this particular piece of legislation.

Mr. Lee: Unanimous?

Hon. S. Hosein: Unanimous support, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, it is not only in this place that we are getting support, but I wish to read into the record, a press release issued by COTT, and the Trinidad and Tobago Copyright Collection Organisation, TTCO. It is a joint statement, Mr. Speaker, and I will explain the context of this joint statement after I place this on record:

COTT and TTCO welcome the extension of copyright, neighbouring rights, and sound recordings protection. The Copyright Music Organisation of Trinidad and Tobago and the Trinidad and Tobago Copyright Collection Organisation jointly welcome the recent legislative amendments passed by Parliament extending the duration of protection for intellectual property rights in Trinidad and Tobago.

The amendments provide for copyright protection for literary, musical and artistic works to last for the life of the creator, plus 70 years, and neighbouring rights protection, including the separate right in sound recordings and performances, to be extended from 50 years to 70 years. Both organizations express their full support for this progressive reform, which represents a fundamental strengthening of the legal and economic framework that supports creators, performers, producers and rights holders.

The extension of protection enhances long-term economic benefits for creatives by ensuring that works, performances and sound recordings continue to generate income over a longer and more meaningful period. It also formally recognizes sound recordings as a distinct and valuable intellectual property right deserving of strong and modern protection. This reform aligns Trinidad and Tobago with international best practice, strengthens global competitiveness, and supports improved international licensing and reciprocity. It also reinforces cultural legacy and generational benefit, allowing creative works and recordings to continue, supporting creators and their estates.

COTT and TTCO commend the Government and the Senate for taking this important step, and view it as an excellent and necessary advancement toward a stronger, fairer and more internationally competitive creative sector. Both organizations remain committed to working collaboratively with policymakers, stakeholders and the creative community to ensure that these enhanced rights translate into tangible and measurable benefits for all creatives in Trinidad and Tobago.

Signed by Levi Mayers, President of COTT, and Asten Isaac, Trinidad and Tobago Copyright Collection Organisation.

And, Mr. Speaker, those both organizations would have had their differences in the past. I can happily report that under the watchful eye of the Trinidad and Tobago Intellectual Property Office, they underwent a period of mediation. And today, they can issue a joint statement, commending the Government on this particular move.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: And, Mr. Speaker, I must commend also—and you know, when I was in the other place, they kept telling us that, “You know, you all praise your Prime Minister so much.” Sen. Al-Rawi was saying that. And I had to respond to him, Mr. Speaker, and say, “It is because we have a leader that we could boast on.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: We have a leader that we can be very proud of. We have a leader with a proven track record.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: And, Mr. Speaker, it is clearly a case of jealousy because they do not have a leader that they can boast upon.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, but you see, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, the Member for Siparia and Prime Minister, has shown her commitment to the area of intellectual property from very early in her ministerial career. Mr. Speaker, during the Panday-led administration, the Persad-Bissessar-led Legal Affairs Ministry at that time was able to pass several very important pieces of legislation, one being this very Copyright Bill that we are dealing with. That was passed in the year 1997.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: And, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Prime Minister, upon demitting

office in the period 2015, would have passed the revolutionary Trade Marks Act, 2015. That shows her commitment to the creatives, it shows her commitment to the talented people of Trinidad and Tobago, and it shows her commitment to the intellectual property rights in Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, this particular matter before us, while it may be a simple amendment, it will have far-reaching consequences in relation to the entire framework of the intellectual property division. And, Mr. Speaker, this Bill is aligned with our international partners and associations, and this Copyright Bill must be understood in the broader context of copyright reform during consultations with stakeholders from the private and public sectors, which informed the early amendments to the Copyright Act to incorporate the Marrakesh Treaty, to facilitate access to published works for persons who are blind, visually impaired or otherwise disabled—the Marrakesh Treaty and the Beijing Treaty on Audiovisual Performances. Further reform was requested to specifically extend the duration of copyright and neighbouring rights protection, and the Copyright Music Organisation of Trinidad and Tobago proposed this extension of the term of protection, which was widely supported by stakeholders.

This sentiment was also echoed by international stakeholders, such as the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry—and forms the basis of the Bill, which is presently before us—the IFPI. They supported this request and was helpful in providing the duration of protection across multiple jurisdictions, demonstrating that a 70-year term has become the prevailing global standard. Mr. Speaker, following this, the Office of the Chief Parliamentary Counsel—and this evening, I want to pay homage to our Attorney General for having this Bill drafted and being brought to this House.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: And they worked very closely with the TTIPO, Mr. Speaker, and they prepared the pertinent legislative amendments which are before this honourable House. And, Mr. Speaker, I want to indicate from the outset that this Bill was also reviewed by the Copyright Law Division of the World Intellectual Property Organization to confirm its conformity with international treaties and norms, and I can proudly say that this Bill reaches those international benchmarks as reviewed by the WIPO.

Particular attention, Mr. Speaker, was paid to the computation of time for copyright duration, ensuring clarity and legal certainty in determining when protection begins and when it will end. The computation of time is closely related to the question of the public domain, and according to WIPO:

“The public domain is generally defined as encompassing intellectual elements that are not protected by copyright or whose protection has lapsed, due to the expiration of the duration for protection.”

And whilst the public domain plays a critical role in education, research, innovation and cultural development, this Bill prioritizes clarity in the duration to avoid premature entry into the public domain, which can undermine the economic rights of creators and distort competition. Our IFPI consultant, Mr. Mayers, notes that sound recordings for iconic catalogues of work, such as “Jean and Dinah”, would have already entered the public domain.

This Bill, therefore, seeks to strike an appropriate balance between protecting creators and ensuring eventual public access. Mr. Speaker, the Government recognizes that IP protection must be further supported by mechanisms for valuation and commercialization. In this regard, the intellectual property valuations guidelines developed through an initiative involving the Inter-American Development Bank, the UWI St. Augustine Centre for Innovation and

Entrepreneurship, TTIPO, and stakeholders, such as First Citizens Bank are particularly significant.

These guidelines provide a structured approach to valuing IP assets. For instance, Mr. Speaker, I note our Government's support for our legendary calypsonian and I want to thank the Member for Moruga/Tableland for lending assistance to Timothy Watkins, also known as the "Baron".

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: This Bill thus goes to the heart of ensuring that our creatives can recoup compensation for the extended duration of protection of their works through valuation of their IP to access financing and investment. Mr. Speaker, this is what this Government is about. It is about allowing the creative industry to become a source of revenue generation for themselves, so that while all of us enjoy the sweet calypso, the soca, the chutney, and all other genres of music, Mr. Speaker, that those artistes can get their just due for what they have produced. This Government is intent on protecting that. We are intent on protecting their intellectual property rights.

This Bill further underscores the transformation of the music industry. Previously, revenue was generated through physical formats, such as vinyl records and compact discs. However, today, digital platforms are prevalent, such as Spotify, iTunes and Amazon Prime Music, amongst others, and it allows Trinidad and Tobago's music to reach global audiences instantly, but it will also require longer protection periods to ensure meaningful returns over time.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill ensures that our copyright framework keeps pace with these technological shifts. Our artistes in their golden years will now enjoy longer periods of protection, such as our legendary Tobagonian and "Calypso Queen of the World", Calypso Rose. And, Mr. Speaker, I dare say that the music in Trinidad

and Tobago is the sweetest music in the entire world. It is.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: We have, Mr. Speaker, the most talented people on the globe, and today this Government is recognizing their talent by lending this legislative support to extend the period of time of their protection. Mr. Speaker, this Bill also sits alongside other elements of the Government's IP agenda. In this regard, we continue to work together with the TTIPO and recognize its initiatives to support the creative ecosystem through WIPO's Creative Economy Data Model.

The Minister of Finance will be very happy to hear this, Mr. Speaker, that the WIPO and the Inter-American Development Bank are engaged in a process right now of collecting data and collecting information to value the cultural economy—what is the orange economy. And that is simple, Mr. Speaker, because it helps us now in terms of going forward with further policy directives and decisions to determine what percentage the orange or the creative industry will play in terms of our GDP.

Further, Mr. Speaker, what that will also do, in the evaluation of that, is that it is not only measuring the period of Carnival. Because we have a rich heritage in Trinidad and Tobago. We celebrate everything. We have Carnival, we have Divali, we have Christmas, we have Eid, we have Phagwa, we have Spiritual Baptist Liberation Day and we have Indian Arrival Day. Mr. Speaker, we celebrate everyone. We celebrate every occasion because on this side, as a government, we ensure that when UNC wins, everybody wins.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Everybody wins. So, Mr. Speaker, the Government remains firmly committed to the development and protection of IP as a strategic tool for economic growth, innovation and competitiveness, and this commitment extends to

the protection of geographical indications and certification mark. And, Mr. Speaker I am very happy also to report to this honourable House that only on Tuesday, we were able to have the trademark or the certification mark registered for the Trinitario cocoa in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Lee: Repeat that, repeat that, repeat that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: It is a significant milestone in our history in Trinidad and Tobago. And I want to commend the TTIPO office, together with the Cocoa Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago, that we are able to now have the certification mark. And what does that mean? It means that persons who want to export value-added products that use Trinitario cocoa, they get the certification in terms of standards, in terms of guidelines—

Mr. Lee: And quality.

Hon. S. Hosein:—and quality also, so that when those products go out into the market that certificate will now be printed onto their products, so that one will know it is genuine Trinidad and Tobago Trinitario cocoa. Because several jurisdictions have tried to copy it, but because of our soil, because of the gene bank, because of the indigenous features of the Trinitario cocoa, nobody could copy that. And it is the finest flavour in the entire world.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: It is the finest flavor. But what was disappointing was that my colleagues opposite did nothing. They did nothing for protection.

3.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to this Bill, in terms of protecting creative works—and Trincity/Maloney happens to be an artiste, so whatever work she publishes will in fact—you will benefit from this particular piece of legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I take it as a whole, the Bill will support fair remuneration and further stimulate innovation through the creative industries. It will also contribute to cultural preservation, economic growth and stability, as well as alignment with international standards, while striking the balance under copyright law.

This Bill, although few in clauses, is wide in scope and of significant national importance. This Bill is born out of the need to recalibrate our legal framework, so that it resonates with the realities of today's creative economy. As artistes' expression continues to evolve in form, reach and commercial significance, the safeguards that uphold it must evolve in tandem. The legislation therefore, redefines temporal boundaries of protection, expanding the lifespan of copyright and neighbouring rights, from 50 years to 70 years. In doing so, it casts a wider and longer shield over the fruits of creative labour, simply put, the main clauses, such as clauses 3, 4 and 5, will seek to amend sections 19A and 21(4) of the Parent Act, changing 50 to 70 in the extension of the term of copyright, neighbouring rights and moral rights.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to go into the clauses of the Bill. Clause 3 of the Bill, would amend section 19 of the Copyright Act, to extend copyright protection for authors from the current term of 50 years after the death of the author, to 70 years. In the case of joint authorship, the term is calculated from the death of the last surviving author. Familiar example, is where a lyricist and a composer collaborate, to create a single sound intended to be exploited as one musical work. Protection therefore, endures until:

“...seventy years after the death of the...”—last surviving author.

Thereby ensuring that the joint creative effort is fully safeguarded.

Furthermore, clause 3 also extends the term of protection for moral rights for authors for the same period, 70 years. Moral rights preserve the personal and

reputational connection between a creator and a work, including the right to be identified as an author and the right to object to derogatory treatment. For example, an author may object to alterations that distort the meaning, or integrity of literary work, even where the economic rights have been licenced or assigned. Clause 4 of the Bill, would amend:

“...section 19A of the Act to extend the duration of moral rights for performers...”—from the current fifty years to seventy years. Under the amendment, those—“rights...”—will—“endure until the...period of seventy years computed from the end of the...”—calendar—“year in which the performance was fixed, or...”—where—“the performance...was...”—“not fixed, from the end of the year in which a performance occurred.”

This ensures that a performer’s moral interest in his or her performance remain protected for a longer period, thus reflecting the enduring personal connection between performers and their performances. I take a moment to explain what “fixed” means. According to WIPO, “fixed” refers to “fixed and intangible form”. “Fixation” may mean, for example, “that the work is written on paper, stored on a disk, painted on canvas or recorded on tape”. For example, a work of choreography would only be protected once the movements were written down in dance notation, or recorded on videotape or more modern formats. Likewise, clause 5 of the Bill proposes to:

“...amend section 21(4) of the...”—Parent—“Act to extend the duration of neighbouring rights’ protection for performers...”—from 50 years to—“seventy years...”—as amended.

Those neighbouring rights, will subsist:

“...until the end of a period of seventy years, computed from the end of the year in which the performance was fixed, or...”—where the performance

was—“not fixed, from the end of the year in which a performance occurred.”

Neighbouring rights arise where a person contributes creatively to a work without being its author, such as a singer who performs a musical composition written by another. And the extension ensures that performers are able to benefit from and control the exploitation of their performances over a longer period. By way of illustration, a singer who performs a calypso composition written by another, enjoys neighbouring rights in that performance, separate and distinct from the composer’s copyright.

Clause 6 of the Bill, Mr. Speaker, seeks to:

“...amend section 22(2) of the...”—principal—“...Act to extend the duration of neighbouring rights’ protection for producers of sound recordings...”—from 50 years to—“...seventy years. Under the amendment protection—“endures until the end of...seventy years...from the year in which the sound recording was published, or...”—where—“the sound recording has not been published...”—from—“the end of...the year in which...”—it—“was fixed.”

This recognises the significant financial, technical and organisational investment, required to produce and distribute sound recordings and allow producers to better leverage those investments over time.

Clause 7 of the Bill, Mr. Speaker, would amend:

“...section 23(4) of the...”—parent—“...Act to extend the duration of neighbouring rights...”—relating to—“...equitable remuneration for performers and producers of sound recordings. The amendment provides that...”—where—“...sound recording is published for commercial purposes, used for broadcasting or public communication, or publicly performed...”—

the right to equitable remuneration subsists—“...for seventy years from the...end of the year in which the sound recording was published...”—where—“...the sound recording is not published, the protection...”—runs—“...from...fixation...until the end of a period of seventy years computed from the end of the year in which the sound recording was fixed.”

Clause 8, Mr. Speaker, would amend—

Mr. Lee: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 53, my friend from Arouca/Lopinot is disturbing me and I cannot hear my colleague. I know Trincity/Maloney needs to hear to respond.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, okay, I think that is unnecessary. Barataria/San Juan continue. All Members engage in crosstalk.

Hon. S. Hosein:—and for that, Mr. Speaker, I will now have to repeat.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Clause 8 of the Bill, would amend section 22(2)—

Mr. Speaker: If you feel compelled to do so.

Hon. S. Hosein:—as he was disturbing the Attorney General. Clause 8 of the Bill would amend:

“...section 24(2) of the Act to clarify the...”—calculation of—“...the duration of the...”—term—“...of the rights conferred under...”—that—“...section...and to ensure consistency with the...”—updated—“...language of...”—the amendments introduced—“...by this Bill.”

Section 24 of the Act sets out the exclusive neighbouring rights of broadcasting organisations, including the rights to authorize or prohibit, the rebroadcasting of a broadcast, its communication to the public, its “fixation” and the reproduction of any such “fixation”.

The amendment to this section does not alter the substantive scope of those rights or the existing 50-year term of protection. Instead, it clarifies the language describing the method by which that term is calculated. The amended language expresses the same legal effect, in clearer terms by providing that protection subsist for a period of 50 years computed, from the end of the year in which the broadcast first takes place. Thereby improving certainty in interpretations and consistency across the Act as amended.

Mr. Speaker, there are several comparative jurisdictions we can look at together with the international framework. I just want to ask, Mr. Speaker, what time do I end?

Mr. Speaker: You end at 3.58 p.m.

Hon. S. Hosein: At three?

Mr. Speaker: 3.58 p.m.

Hon. S. Hosein: 3.58 p.m., thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In Trinidad and Tobago, the Copyright Act as amended by No. 18 of 2000, Act 5 of 2008 and Act 14 of 2020, provides the minimum duration of the term of copyright protection for authors and performers, consistent with various international treaties which are administered by the WIPO. The Copyright Act is in conformity with provisions of the international legislative governing framework. This means that contracting parties such as Trinidad and Tobago are obliged to offer copyright holders the minimum protection provided for in treaties and convention. There are examples such as the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works.

You have Article 14 of the agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property; Article 17 of the WIPO Performances and Phonograms Treaty and the WIPO Copyright Treaty, in terms of comparative international framework, and Article 14, the International Convention for the Protection of

Performers, Producers of Phonograms and Broadcasting Organisations, or the Rome Convention.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at comparative jurisdictions under the United States of America and Europe, they are critical markets for copyright protected works, created by Trinidad and Tobago authors. Most publishers and authors consider it a measure of success to seek and obtain publishing contracts in those markets. So, we now have to make our own local market more competitive in this regard.

So therefore, Mr. Speaker, the current retention of 50 years of sound recordings will subject right holders to unfair competition in a fast, evolving, digital ecosystem, especially in light of the fact that a 70-year term of protection has now become the global standard norm. With at least 69 countries providing a term of protection of sound recordings of 70 years, including Jamaica, the United States of America, Canada, the United Kingdom, Singapore and the European Union.

Mr. Speaker, we have real life examples in terms of how this will affect some of our local talent. According to the International Federation of Photographic Industry, consultant, Mr. Mayers, in his letter to us dated in 23rd of October, 2020, the following information was presented: “Jean and Dinah”, 1956, composed by Slinger Francisco, performed by the Mighty Sparrow. The author is alive. The copyright will be protected for the author’s life, plus up to 50 years after the author’s death. The sound recording is 70 years old. At 50 years old in 2006, the sound recording went into the public domain on the 1st of January 2007, thereby losing protection. One of the most popular sounds in Trinidad and Tobago, and in fact, the Caribbean. The legislation is therefore urgent to prevent

other works from going into the public domain, meaning it becomes freely available for all to use without protection.

Tempo 1976, composed by the Maestro. The author died in 1977. The Copyright Bill will be protected for 50 years after the author's death, that is up to 2027. Thereafter, it will go into the public domain. The sound recording is 50 years old. In 2026, at 50 years old, after publication and being recorded, it will go into the public domain on the 1st of January 2027. The legislation is therefore to prevent this iconic work from going into the public domain.

Mr. Speaker, there are other examples, since every single author who is alive today, who has passed at least 50 years ago will benefit from this legislation. This includes, examples such as, the estate of Richard "Nappy" Mayers and his timeless catalogue. Mr. Speaker, what we are doing is that we are trying to ensure that these artistes get that necessary protection from their work going into the public domain and after their death, their families are the ones to continue to still benefit from this Bill.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill is very timely and important, especially in light of the fact that we are in the Carnival season. I want to tell you Mr. Speaker, that I listened to my friends opposite bad talking Trinidad and Tobago Carnival. "Dey bad talking it." I want to tell them, Mr. Speaker, firstly, around at this time, during this very good period, we are bringing a Bill to protect our artistes.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: That is the first point. Second point, Mr. Speaker, is that the Ministry of Culture and Community Development is about to host the greatest Carnival on earth, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: “My friend say Carnival buss, but, Mr. Speaker, it have ah few of dem in de fetes, and dey struggling to get tru de crowd”. Mr. Speaker, dey cyah make dey way tru de crowd”. I am told, that events are sold out. I am told that we have over 500—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein:—Carnival events for this season. Mr. Speaker, if my friends want to see action, I invite them to visit the Carnival Flava Village in the Queen’s Park Savannah.

Mr. Lee: Free of charge, free of charge.

Hon. S. Hosein: Free of charge, free-of-charge. Go to “Flava” that is the talk of the town. Mr. Speaker, the John Cupid Carnival Village, Mr. Speaker, that John Cupid Carnival Village was a tremendous success.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, I went to pan on the greens on Sunday, and it was traffic. It had so much traffic to get into Port of Spain. My friend from Couva South, Mr. Speaker, he reached an hour late because of the traffic. He told me get there at a particular time, he gone to CNC3 and tell them: I normally am late, but he was the one late this time, Mr. Speaker. But Mr. Speaker, it shows that this Carnival will be one of the best Carnivals ever hosted.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: And I want to commend my colleague, the Member for Moruga/Tableland, for that. Mr. Speaker, I am told also, that now I have responsibility for the Chaguaramas Development Authority, and we understand the traffic woes and so on, because of the events on that Peninsula, one way in, one way out. We held a meeting with all of the stakeholders, the TTDF, the TTPS, the

Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation, the CDA, and we were able to create a traffic management plan that we could ease the traffic in and out of Chaguaramas.

Mr. Lee: That is performance.

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, that is performance.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: That is performance. So while the Minister of Culture and Community Development is creating an environment for artistes to prosper, we are now creating a legislative environment for their works to be protected. Mr. Speaker, this Government is serious about business, we deal with matters holistically and I want to ask my colleagues opposite, to do the patriotic thing and lend your support to this piece of legislation and I beg to move, Mr. Speaker.

Question proposed:

Mr. Speaker: Member for Diego Martin West.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hans Des Vignes (*Diego Martin West*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the honour of speaking in this particular debate. Before I begin, I would like to say, in respect of Standing Order 44, I do declare my personal interest in this debate, as a cultural practitioner and one who has intellectual property. I thank you for the opportunity to rise, as we stand for every writer, every filmmaker, every mas maker, every pannist, arranger, artiste, producer, and every creative that contributes to the tapestry of our society.

Now we are in a time of creativity, where the Carnival time in Trinidad and Tobago, and it is unfortunate that is a contracted and scaled down version by the policies of this Government here.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: I will explain that some more, based on what the Member for Barataria/San Juan said. But I still celebrate our great award winnings, like our Grammy Award winners from Trinbago, Jolene Mendez and Kwame Ryan. Before I get deep into it, I would also like to quote Independent Senator, Anthony Vieira, who said: The Bill does not represent novelty, it represents continuity and years of advocacy by many.

So, while the Minister may come to the Parliament and pretend this is a novel contribution and a novel idea, it is not overnight. The heavy lifting, the hard work, the things that needed to be done before this, were done by the People's National Movement.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: I want to touch on some things that the Minister said, because he brought it into this debate, so let me deal with it. He mentioned the traffic plan to Chaguaramas. Let us talk about that a little bit. Let us talk about the fact that for the past nine months, the Western Main Road was in need of repair and barely anything was done and was ignored by the Minister of Works and Infrastructure. That is one. Two—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes:—when we are talking traffic plan, up to yesterday, I was contacted by the promoter of “Stink and Dutty” and “Soaka”—

Mr. Padarath: Mr. Speaker Standing Order 48(1). While the Member of Barataria/San Juan did mention it, we cannot be going into entire debate about a traffic plan on the Copyright (Amdt.) Bill, please.

Mr. Speaker: Well, the Member did mention it. I will give you a little leeway, but let us not take the entire time on our traffic management plan.

Mr. H. Des Vignes: Of course not, Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to touch and clear the air on who did what they did, and who did not do or what they did not do. That is all.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: That is all. I am done, that is all I have to say about traffic “Stink and Dutty” and “Soaka” came up with the traffic plan, not you. That is all I have to say.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: We speak about protecting our artistes, and the truth is, our artistes do not feel protected in this instance, and it is because when you look at the policies, it has contracted the Carnival industry and our Carnival festival for 2026. We see it in terms of our mas bands. You mentioned fetes being packed. Member for Barataria/San Juan, I know you get complimentaries. Promoters are giving out complimentaries because they need the numbers to appear to look good. Sponsors are pulling out. People are reselling their costumes. The creative industry is affected negatively by the Government’s policies.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: And anomalies are not norms. Let me explain something to you. You mentioned that, you know, these fetes are ram and these fetes are ram. Let us talk about the 100 and more fetes that have been cancelled this season.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: Artistes do not feel protected and the reason why I will tie it back, Mr. Speaker, when you look at one of the clauses that is being amended, clause 7, section 23(4):

“...to extend the duration of neighbouring rights, protection for equitable remuneration for performers and producers of sound recordings...”

The reason why it is necessary is because there are so many areas that have been affected by the policies of the Government. So okay, let us have one that can actually help the creative sector, and that is why we are in full support of this Bill, although we are not in support of many of the other things that the Government is doing right now.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

3:50 p.m.

Mr. H. Des Vignes: And anomalies are not norms. Let me explain something to you. You mentioned that, you know, these fetes are rammed, and these fetes are rammed. Let us talk about the hundred and more fetes that have been cancelled this season.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: Artists do not feel protected, and the reason why I will tie it back, Mr. Speaker— When you look at one of the clauses that is being amended:

“Clause 7 amends section 23(4)...to extend the duration of neighbouring rights’ protection for equitable remuneration for performers and producers of sound recordings.”

The reason why it is necessary is because there are so many areas that have been affected by the policies of the Government. So, okay, let us have one that can actually help the creative sector. That is why we are in full support of this Bill, although we are not in support of many of the other things that the Government is doing right now.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: Mr. Speaker, one of the simplest ways to test whether this Bill is reasonable is to ask if Trinidad and Tobago is being asked to do something unusual. The answer is no. Internationally, the Berne Convention sets a minimum

benchmark, the life of the author plus 50 years. But, it also expressly allows countries to provide longer protection in their domestic law. And, Trinidad and Tobago, being a signatory, we are fully entitled to modernize our term of protection in a way that reflects contemporary practice and the realities of creative work and commercial exploitation, going from 50 to 70 years, calculated, clearer end-of-year rules for certainty, all expressed.

If we look at the Commonwealth Caribbean practice, we see a range. That is exactly the point. Jurisdictions are already exercising the discretion Berne allows. The Bill's essential notes, for example, state that Antigua and Barbuda and St. Kitts and Nevis maintain life plus 50. Dominica extends to life plus 70. St. Vincent and the Grenadines goes further at life plus 75. So the move to 70-plus years is not a move out of the norm when it comes down to the Commonwealth Caribbean practice on our spectrum. The real policy question for this House, though, is can we do it? How do we balance stronger protection with access, education, and public interest?

So there was a mention of artistes and artistes knowing. We have a Ministry of Public Administration and AI, and I do hope to see the Government find some ways to include AI in actually educating the artists and possibly even recording these works of art. Those are the things that we look forward to seeing, and we look forward to seeing the Minister, actually, you know, doing something, because he is kind of quiet these days. So public explanations offered during and around the Senate debate emphasized protecting creative labour for longer, especially in a digital streaming-driven music economy, and aligning Trinidad and Tobago with major markets where longer terms are common.

I wish the Member for Barataria/San Juan had spoken a little bit more about the streaming platforms and the way this will affect other things, and hopefully, in

his wrapping up, he will mention these matters. Now, this reform recognizes creative work as real work with lasting economic value, not a hobby that expires after one generation. So one of the people that I am really excited for this is Full Blown Entertainment, the grandsons of Eddie Hart. Reason being, I see in the future that when they have their grandchildren, their grandchildren will be able to benefit from their creative work.

I say this to bring it back to Eddie Hart, where we are in a situation where a Senator has taken the league that he created and transformed it into something else and branded it as his own. These kinds of things are what we want to see copyrighted and protected. This modernizes our law in line with the global direction of travel on copyright terms for authors and performers. It represents targeted, sensible updating, and not a major structural overhaul. This is not what this is. It is a step in the right direction, but there are many steps to be taken still.

During the debate in the Senate, Sen. Faris Al-Rawi mentioned that we should have an intellectual property authority and not just an organization. I commend that contribution and I also commend the Minister for her contribution to Baron, who was ailing. I commend the Minister for that contribution, but what I will say is that we need to get certain things right in terms of Trinidad and Tobago and collecting royalties and dues. When you look at Christmas time, there are about 12 songs that you hear on repeat, and you all know these songs. We all know these songs in this Parliament. It is about 12 songs. Three of them are by Scrunter.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: Three of them are by Scrunter, three of them are by Baron, and the other six of them are from various artistes. If we were to really get the collection of royalties for intellectual property right in Trinidad and Tobago, there

would not be the need for us to give Baron a grant. He would be collecting that amount from royalties and contributions.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: So again, we welcome it, but we welcome better education, better enforcement, and all in all working with the stakeholders. One of the major stakeholders that this is going to affect, again, and we are not talking to them—the Minister of Culture and Community Development had a meeting with them and she never showed up—are the promoters of Trinidad and Tobago.

So let me quote something that I found on the World Intellectual Property Organization's website. It is called "How to Make a Living from Music" by David Stopps. When you look at the ways they mentioned; income from public performances on radio, television, downloads and streaming, online live performances, concerts, bars—of which we have over 40 shut down—hairdressing salons and any location where a work is played or heard in public. What we need to really do is work with these different agencies that are continuously being closed down by this Government's policies. Prevent it and find ways to adjust and work with them so that our intellectual property providers—our people, and our creatives that are contributing to our intellectual bank—are awarded and rewarded for what they are putting in.

So, a central pro-Bill narrative is that revenue patterns in music and increasingly other digital creative markets are no longer concentrated only at release. Catalogue consumption is persistent and streaming has become the dominant format globally. The IFPI reports that in 2024, global streaming revenues exceeded US \$20 billion and represented about 69 per cent of total recorded music revenues. For those of us that listen to music online and pay attention to the figures, Mr. Speaker, you would notice that legacy music earns

more than music of the current day. That is why this is so important. A 20-year extension is represented and presented as a way to ensure Trinidad and Tobago creators or their families' estates, where applicable, are not cut off from income streams prematurely, particularly where exploitation is international and catalogue-driven. We all know the story of "Rum and Coca-Cola" and how that affected the true creators of that work of art.

The national IPO reports that, in 2011, the contribution of copyright-based industries in Trinidad and Tobago was estimated at 4.8 per cent of GDP and 5 per cent of employment. Today, it can account for a lot more. Government-linked presentations also cite more recent CSO figures suggesting that the creative sector generated approximately \$393.8 million in 2019, and in 2020, just before the pandemic, \$394.6 million. Again, the Member for San Juan/Barataria spoke about the orange economy and that in the past, economic benefit was undermined. I want the Member to please note and meet with the stakeholders in terms of culture, in terms of the entertainment industry and reverse some of the policies of the Government that have affected them negatively. Speak to the promoters.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: So again, I urge you all, in terms of education, there is a lot of licensing confusion. In terms of writers and producers we even have some artistes who are sometimes advantaged by producers who may find ways to work around their knowledge and really take advantage of them. So we are asking again, education, education, education. This Bill is not a handout. It is not a handout. Do not put it as a handout to the creatives and stuff. It is not a handout. What this is, is a measured update that reflects streaming-era economics, affirms that creative labour is labour, supports a sector with documented economic weight, and reduces cross-border mismatch where our creators seek international income

while leaving broadcasting rights, duration and change, and making only a clarifying adjustment there.

I want to touch on something else. There was a mention of Carnival Trinidad and Tobago 2026 being the richest Carnival, and that we expect the most visitors. Again, speak to the stakeholders, speak to the real estate agents. They will tell you how many carnival rental properties are still on the market. Speak to the airlines, look at the fact that you can still get a ticket to Trinidad and Tobago from New York today for next week. That is not a norm. That is not a norm.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: Trinidad and Tobago Carnival is the greatest show on earth, and if we continue along these lines that we are going right now, we will not be. We have global competitors, competitors within the region, Jamaica, Barbados. They are putting their carnivals out there and doing the necessary. They are not increasing alcohol prices. They are not increasing taxes on promoters and taxes on people in general. They are not doing it. They are encouraging the entertainment sector and the creatives in their economies. Yes, again, we are saying we support this Bill because it does that, but we are asking for the other policies to be considered and for this Government to take into consideration the people in the creative sector in a real way.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Des Vignes: So yes, this Bill is well-intentioned. But, it extends exclusivity in a way that may, in some ways, if we do not get it right, delay cultural access. It could worsen orphaned works and licensing uncertainty and impose economy-wide costs while offering no guarantee that working artists, especially those without strong bargaining power, will actually see meaningful gains, absent parallel reforms on transparency, enforcement and fair contracting.

Again, to this Government we say, yes, we support this Bill. Yes, we acknowledge that work was done before that brought us to this point. We acknowledge all of the creatives, we acknowledge COTT, we acknowledge all the copyright agencies all over the world, and the World Intellectual Property Organization for their hard work. We support it, but we ask that we do our best as a country to enable our creatives and cultural practitioners to be as strong as possible. Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Moruga/Tableland.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Culture and Community Development (Hon. Michelle Benjamin): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to join this debate. And of course, it is to correct some things that my colleagues put on this record. I must come and sanitize this record. Firstly, let me commend the Minister of Works and Infrastructure for the tremendous job that she is doing with regard to the parade route—

Hon. Member: [*Interruption*]

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin:—and there was no advocacy from any Member on that side, but because NCC saw it fit to make sure that the route and everything that we are responsible for is well done. What I want to tell—

Mr. H. Des Vignes: That is not true.

Hon. M. Benjamin: Hon. Member, I was quiet when you were contributing, all right? So I expect the same respect. I want to tell—Trincity, you now come back, relax.

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

Hon. M. Benjamin: I want to tell that hon. Member, relax, relax, relax. All right?

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

Hon. M. Benjamin: What I always ask when I take to my legs—I am one Member of this House who hardly interferes with any other Member on that side. When I take to my legs to do the business of the people, you are going to sit on that side and listen.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: I am here to tend to the business of the people. I want to sanitize the record and things put on the record by the Member for Diego Martin West. All right?

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: That Member—

Mr. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 53(1)(e), please. We would like to hear the Minister of Culture make her brilliant contribution in silence.

Mr. Speaker: Let us [*Inaudible*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: The Member stood on his legs and had the audacity to ask Members on this side for things they had 10 years to do.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: That Member now wants to see AI. That Member now wants to see this legislation in place. That Member now knows that artists are being treated wrongfully. Member, were you sleeping for 10 years?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: I want to tell this honourable House what that Member was doing for the last 10 years.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: Now, he was right to declare his interests with regard to this

Bill. Now, that Member, my Ministry has records, all right?

Hon. Members: Yes.

Hon. M. Benjamin: I did not come here to discuss that Member. What I came here to do is to thank my colleague, the Member for Barataria/San Juan, and the hon. AG for noticing what we inherited—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin:—in which artists are not prospering underneath the current legislative arrangement. I want to thank the hon. AG.

The Member, he did something. He thanked me for doing my job and he thanked this Government for doing what they could not do in 10 years, which is actually honouring any of the existing icons. For that Member, on this side, we do our job and it did not take us 10 years. It did not take us 10 months. Notice the timeline. The UNC Government delivers.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: I listened to the debate, Mr. Speaker, in the other House. That Member stood here and had the audacity to mention his colleague, who is a former Member of this House. That Member, Faris Al-Rawi, Senator, had the audacity to say that this Carnival is subdued. The only thing subdued, Mr. Speaker, is the access that that Member has to the Treasury since April 28th.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: And I want to say that that Member is hurting, similar to that Member that was speaking.

Mr. Hosein: “Huttin”

Hon. M. Benjamin: Yes, he “huttin” in local parlance. “It hurting dem. It huttin dem. Because you know what is hurting and huttin that Member?” Had he not been on that side—When I took office, I mandated my board, the NCC, to make

sure that artists prosper; that this Carnival creates opportunities for artists to earn. So had he not been sitting on that side, he would have gotten a DJ job in Flava.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: Because for you to sit down here and to say that things have been curtailed, then you have not been noticing what is happening at the Savannah.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: The records show—and you could call the fire service and pull the numbers—we are not even nowhere close. We are two weeks approximately away from the greatest show, Monday and Tuesday, and we have already surpassed the numbers recorded on the Savannah. Flava alone—and I stated this when I was in a press conference. Flava alone has 150,000 thus far.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: The success that is being recorded—my colleagues, have you ever seen anyone storm a free fete?

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: Wednesday, we had to close down. We had to close down Flava. The numbers inside, the numbers outside, the fire service said, “There is no way we could accommodate or secure.” You must learn to acknowledge when you see greatness, and when you see a working Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: Far too long, this Opposition’s Government liked to act like they are the saviour of culture. Far too long, far too long, this Opposition. PNM—

Hon. Members: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: No. PNM people, they like to feel that culture belongs to them. Culture belongs to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

4.10 p.m.

As my colleague rightfully said, in another debate in this same House today, there is no space for race-baiting. I want to read into the *Hansard* an extract from a press release put out because another Member is taking a national festival this coming Saturday, and you know what he posted? He said:

Wear red.

He put the balisier, that same thing they wear on their tie when they come to this house—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order, 48(1). I do not know what the Member is speaking—that has to do with relevance to this Bill.

Mr. Speaker: The difficulty with that—

Mr. Hosein: Diego Martin West opened that debate.

Mr. Speaker: That is the point. Diego Martin West opened up the floodgates.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Having said that, Moruga/Tableland, I do not require you to spend a lot—I wish you do not spend a lot of time on this. You are entitled to a fair and proportionate response, but not a lot of time.

Hon. M. Benjamin: I thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the record of this House, and for the viewing public, TUCO put out a release, and I just want to read a portion of that:

“The organization strongly denounces any attempt to mobilise or portray Calypso Fiesta as a political rally...”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin:

“...or a politically aligned event.”

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Mr. Speaker, I rise on 48(1). We are speaking about a

copyright Bill.

Mr. Speaker: Overruled.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: Mr. Speaker, I could tie in that statement. Because those on that side, even that Member, say that—

Mr. Manning: Which Member?

Hon. M. Benjamin: The one that spoke. San Fernando East, I know you want to—

Mr. Manning: No, Minister, which Member?

Hon. M. Benjamin: San Fernando East, I know you want to join the debate. You could do so after, right?

Mr. Manning: My fault, sorry.

Hon. M. Benjamin: Diego Martin West, right? He said this Bill is commendable, and it is to protect the artistes and their work. But I remember January 9th, when I looked at the daily news, it was printed in the *Guardian* and also in the *Newsday* that back then they were competing—they were not in Trinidad, eh. They were in the sister island, and I remember seeing Prince Swanny, I believe, the leader for the PNM business in Tobago. I think he sampled Prince Swanny's song, and he did not give any credit, nor did he pay. So that shows the respect they have for the art-form on that side. All they do is use it on the campaign trail and use the artiste. That is all they do, the Members on that side. Strangely enough, sometimes when I listen to that Member that is walking out of this House, as a former culture Minister, and a former Minister of Education, "Oh, my lord". "Oh, my lord, Oh, my lord." But, Mr. Speaker, I thank you—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: "Oh, my lord." "Oh, my lord." Mr. Speaker, sometimes I

have to ask myself if these people that are Members of the Opposition on that side are serious about culture. Mr. Speaker, what I have inherited in my Ministry are artistes that have not been prospering. I challenge them to name between 20 to 30 artistes that are doing well, and I mean calypsonians. The Soca, they have charted their ways, but I mean, calypsonians. All they know how to do is to use the Calypso fraternity to throw political banter. That is all they know to do, and to wave the balisier, and to mobilize toilet paper.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: But I want to put on this record that this Carnival—

Mr. Manning: Be careful in the park tomorrow, eh.

Hon. M. Benjamin: Now, now, San Fernando East, the Member for Moruga/Tableland did not mobilize 500. You know what I crossed the margin by? 3,000.

Hon. Member: 3,000!

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: So be careful when you see Moruga/Tableland. Be careful when you see Moruga/Tableland. My mobilization skills are second to none, not what you are trying to accomplish with that flyer. Be very careful when you see Moruga/Tableland, and love, love will be—

Hon. Members: Love, love, love, love, love.

Hon. M. Benjamin: Love, love will be Skinner's Park tomorrow.

Mr. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, 48(1). Let us have some order inside of here.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Yes. Moruga/Tableland, I have given you a lot of leeway. Can we just skip along now to the more relevant parts?

Hon. M. Benjamin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also just want to correct one more thing before I take my seat.

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: San Fernando East, I see you are not heeding the warning.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, since you brought it up, could you please explain the warning to me—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: I trust you would have had difficulty in understanding. I do not think comprehension is your forte.

Mr. Manning: That is why I was asking for your assistance, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Sit down.

Mr. Manning: Okay.

Mr. Speaker: Sit down.

Mr. Manning: Sorry.

Hon. M. Benjamin: Mr. Speaker, I think I would have accomplished my task. So with that being said, this Bill is not charity, and this Bill is not a favour. This Bill says the next generation must inherit something better than struggle. That is what you left on the book—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin:—but we are doing better on this side. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Malabar/Mausica.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Dominic Romain (*Malabar/Mausica*): Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to join this debate, and just to share a few thoughts.

Hon. Member: A few, eh.

Mr. D. Romain: Yeah, just a few. Mr. Speaker, in the insurance industry, we

have a saying that the cemetery is the wealthiest place in the world, and we say that because we recognize that cemeteries across the world, Mr. Speaker, hold, perhaps, trillions of dollars in unrealized income-earning potential, intellectual property. We have novels, best sellers that were never written, Mr. Speaker. We have chart-topping songs that were never sung, Mr. Speaker. We have blockbuster movies that we never produced, Mr. Speaker, and so many others like that, intellectual property.

So, we commend this Bill, today, Mr. Speaker, because it provides an opportunity to have a little less intellectual property reside in the cemetery, and it could benefit the families of our creatives after they pass. So good initiative on the part of this administration. But, Mr. Speaker, in order for creatives to be able to realize the benefits of their creative genius, they must create. If you create nothing, then what are you going to get intellectual property copyright on, Mr. Speaker? I could say, Mr. Speaker, contrary to what we have heard from some Members opposite with respect to how their policies have benefited our creatives, the facts would bear something different, Mr. Speaker.

Now, this particular Bill, I consider it to be the backbone of the orange economy. In fact, I recall in 2020, when Members opposite were on this side, the *National Economic Transformation Plan* spoke a lot about the orange economy, and they recognized the income-earning potential that that particular sector has, and of course, it covers the creatives, and so on. But since taking office, Mr. Speaker, this Government has initiated several fiscal policies which are inimical to the well-being of the creative sector.

This Minister spoke a lot about Flava—no, well, since Flava was launched, we have heard a lot. In fact, on the first night, I believe it was, we saw where the Chairman of the NCC received a less than favorable response from the audience,

and they claimed that the PNM paid people to go there and boo; nothing could be further from the truth, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hosein: And, since then, raving reviews.

Mr. D. Romain: Yeah, okay. Since then, raving reviews. In fact, the Minister spoke about the traffic on Wednesday to get into Flava, and they had to shut it down because of the amount of people. Mr. Speaker, I was caught up in that traffic as well. Yes, I was caught up in the traffic.

Hon. Members: “Ohhh.” [*Inaudible*]

Mr. D. Romain: No, you all should have told him that. I was caught in the traffic on my way to the Savannah, Mr. Speaker, but I was not going to Flava. I was heading to the Grand Stand to take in the launch of what is, perhaps, the single event for our Carnival, the mas component. The preliminaries of the Kings and Queens competition.

While Members are boasting about how Flava had so many people, just a few yards away in the Grand Stand, Mr. Speaker, three-quarters of the seats were empty. Ninety-six competitors, 48 kings and 48 queens, and only one-quarter of the seating occupied to take in that show, Mr. Speaker. All of these costumes, thousands of dollars spent on these costumes to create these beautiful works of art, and only one-quarter of the seats were filled to be able to view them. So when the Minister speaks about there were so many people, and they had to shut down and turn away people, you all should have told them to take a walk across in the Grand Stand, because there were things to see there too. But we are so focused on Flava, John Cupid Village doing so well.

Hon. Member: Cobweb in the Grand Stand.

Mr. D. Romain: Yes, cobweb in the Grand Stand, cobweb in the Grand Stand, Mr. Speaker. And there will be other mas events taking place, and I verily believe

that we will see a similar turnout, but maybe the Government might take heed and probably make it a free event, NCC, so that people can come in, because, of course, Flava would be oversubscribed. When it is, people lose their jobs, and they do not have money to go to fetes, and something free presents itself, well, yeah, you will take advantage of it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Romain: So good on your part. Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Hosein: “But you was in the Grand Stand, and you have a wuk.”

Mr. D. Romain: Yes, I attended, not because of it being free. From 2003 until 2023, I was an NCC adjudicator, alright? Since 2019, I have been a TUCO adjudicator, Mr. Speaker. So I have a vested interest in the culture, alright? And I did not just start to go because I am a Member of Parliament, as some people on the other side would have done, you know? For the last 10 years, the Savannah has not seen you all. But all of a sudden, now, every night you all are there.

Mr. Marcel: “Some ah dem now learn Carnival in town.”

Mr. D. Romain: Yeah, yeah, yeah. They now realize something. Mr. Speaker, the Member for Barataria/San Juan spoke about some—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. D. Romain: Mr. Speaker, if Members—

Hon. Members: [*Continuous crosstalk*]

Mr. D. Romain: Members, members, please. The Member for Barataria/San Juan spoke about there being some 500 Carnival events. This Carnival is doing so well. I want to read an article, Mr. Speaker, with your permission:

“Promoters up for smaller fetes amid cost surge.

Two new Carnival fetes are emerging at a time when several established events have been cancelled, underlining the financial strain now reshaping

the business of Carnival.

Promoters are contending with venue shortages....”

Of course, we know that this administration took the decision to ban Carnival fetes taking place at certain venues, which would have thrown many promoters in a tailspin, given the time that it would have taken place, mere months or weeks, Mr. Speaker, before the Carnival season really came into full swing:

“...a 100 per cent increase in alcohol prices, higher food costs and rising infrastructure expenses, forcing a shift away from large-scale formats toward smaller, premium and tightly managed offerings.”

To address the 500 events that the Member for Barataria/San Juan spoke about, according to data compiled by the Ticket Federation, Carnival 2026, fewer than 150 fetes are expected to be staged for Carnival 2026. That represents a significant contraction from Carnival 2025, when 254 fetes were held across the season.

Mr. Gosine: Mr. Speaker, 48(1), relevance.

Mr. Speaker: I think both Moruga/Tableland and Barataria/San Juan allowed that. Overruled.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Romain: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, as pointed out by the Member for Barataria/San Juan, it takes a significant financial outlay to create content, calypsos, and soca songs. Many of our creatives, despite the fact that they have the ability to create maybe five or even 10 songs in a season, may only have the funding to produce one or two, and there is no guarantee that these songs are going to be hits. You might have a very good year now, and next year, nobody knows who you are, barely any mention of your name, and it is a typical thing, Mr. Speaker.

What these fetes do is that they provide an opportunity, an occasion for our creatives to earn money, and also for them to showcase their talent, and to be able to market their music, Mr. Speaker. So, they might get a gig, they are booked for a fete, a few fetes, and this provides them with that opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to be able to earn that money and to promote their music, which then they could look for to record or register for intellectual property. But when you have such a scaled-back Carnival as we just read there, so few fetes, opportunity is lost. As we know, Mr. Speaker, this is a very fickle industry.

In fact, recently I saw one of our creatives, a soca artiste took to social media to lament the fact that all he had was \$5 to his name, Mr. Speaker. This is somebody who enjoyed a couple of good years for Carnival, “When last yuh take ah wine on ah town ting”. That was a big song. But today, Mr. Speaker, \$5 to his name, facing eviction. This was not a good year for him.

So I wonder about this legislation, Mr. Speaker. It is good, and we support it, but have our creatives really been benefiting? This legislation is not new, as the Member for Barataria/San Juan spoke about; the Member for Siparia would have piloted legislation '96 and '97. So, it has been around for about 30 years. But, yet still, we see so many of our creatives struggling. It is typical that we see our bards of old. Many of them face the same situation in their twilight years, stricken with illness and having to seek the help of the State, to seek the assistance of the public to be able to pay medical bills. We saw it, as was mentioned, Timothy Watkins, and I am glad that the Member for Barataria/San Juan got it correct this time. In the Senate, it was Timothy “Walkins”. So I do not know who drew it to his attention, but very good.

We saw it with the Original De Fosto while he was in the hospital. He was calling for politicians to come and visit him, and so on, to see his plight. The

Mighty Terror, when he was stricken with throat cancer, he too, was seeking the assistance of the public, and so many others like that, Mr. Speaker. So there seems to be a disconnect with respect to this legislation and its ability to realize its true and fullest potential in terms of generating passive income for our creatives.

So, by itself, Mr. Speaker, this legislation, definitely, is insufficient, and it requires a support framework. What does that support framework entail or include, Mr. Speaker? Well, first of all, one of the things that we need to look at is IP literacy, which I think is very important. There is a necessity for IP literacy, not just for our creatives, but for the wider society. Because, Mr. Speaker, as we see different social media platforms evolve—now everybody knows how to do a “live”. We see people are doing lives with music playing in the background, and all they do is put a disclaimer saying I do not own the rights to the music being played. They believe that that absolves them from copyright infringement. Now, I am not an attorney, but I do not think it does. But it keeps happening a lot. And if the Government is serious, Mr. Speaker, about—

Mr. Speaker: Member, perhaps, before you move on to your next point, it is 4.30, I propose to take the tea break. Before we formally suspend, having regard to the state of the debate where we have arrived, I propose not to take the 45 minutes today, but to take half an hour, and we return at 5.00. Subject to the agreement of Members of the House. Okay, so we suspend until five o'clock. Thank you very much.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Speaker: Malabar/Mausica.

Mr. D. Romain: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Can I remind you that you have 13 minutes of regular time?

Mr. D. Romain: Yes, thanks.

So, Mr. Speaker, before we went to the break, I was making the point about the support structure for the legislation that is before us today. And without that support structure, Mr. Speaker, today's exercise really would be one in futility, where we would simply be seeking to align statutes with international treaties. And this legislation essentially is going to end up being just, as I would say, sedentary legislation, meaning it does precious little and it goes nowhere, Mr. Speaker.

And I was making the point of the necessity to facilitate IP literacy, not just for the creatives but also the wider society, and I gave the example of persons who have been using social media, unaware of the implications of the use of what might be material that might be copyrighted. And when one looks at the parent Act, Mr. Speaker, the penalties for copyright infringement are significant. And that is, of course, separate and apart from the legal remedies that the offended party also has to seek redress when it is that they find themselves the victims of copyright infringement. And one such example, Mr. Speaker, that stood out for me was an article that I came across from the 20th of May, 2025:

“Stalin’s wife seeks to overturn judgment for unauthorised use of photo”

And it reads, Mr. Speaker:

“The...”—wife—“...of five-time Calypso Monarch Leroy ‘Black Stalin’ Calliste is seeking to overturn a default judgment of over \$300,000 obtained against her by a photojournalist for the unauthorised use of a photograph of her late husband.

...last year, Angelo Marcelle, trading as Trinirazzi HD, sued Janet Calliste after the image he took of her husband at De Nu Pub in Woodbrook in 2011 appeared on promotional material for a Black Stalin-themed concert on

October 4.

Marcelle claimed that Calliste's wife did not seek his permission before permitting the use of the photograph, which was published by the T&T Newsday newspaper..."—without—"...his approval.

Although Marcelle challenged the position before filing the lawsuit, the photograph was not removed from television and social media advertising, and the concert was eventually held at the Southern Academy for the Performing Arts...

Marcelle claimed over \$360,000 in compensation, which was based on his daily fee for use of an image on television and social media.

'The unauthorised use of the claimant's copyrighted work has caused the claimant to suffer loss,' his lawyers claimed."

So, Mr. Speaker, I am certain that Mrs. Calliste was not aware that she may have been infringing copyright law. And even so, wanting to use that photo, one questions, would she have known where to go? How would she reach out to the photographer? Did she know who the photographer was? And this is a scenario that could play out for any ordinary citizen, Mr. Speaker, who may not be familiar with how copyright works, how intellectual property law works, and may very well find themselves before the courts, either being the subject of a lawsuit, or facing the penalties as prescribed in the parent legislation. So I am seriously advocating that going forward, the Government looks at putting in place some sort of programme that treats with IP literacy.

Mr. Speaker, another pillar of the support infrastructure for this legislation, I would say, is providing financing mechanisms specifically tailored for the creative industry. And just permit me to quote, Mr. Speaker, from a post from FilmTT, which is one of the entities that is engaged in the orange economy, and one of the

entities that would subscribe to this particular legislation that we are treating with today.

“To ensure the continued growth and success of the orange economy we need increased investment in the industry, including funding for artists and creatives, infrastructure, as well as education and training programmes. We must develop policies and regulations that protect intellectual property rights and prevent copyright infringement. This will help to ensure that artists and creatives are fairly compensated for their work and can continue to innovate and create.”

Now, Mr. Speaker, we are fully aware that the legislation that is before us today is not meant simply for persons who are currently engaged in the creative sector, but for future creatives as well. And I had the privilege, Mr. Speaker, since 2019, of being a TUCO judge, and I would have also had the privilege of adjudicating the Junior Calypso Monarch, the different stages, preliminaries, semi-final and finals. In fact, last week I would have judged the preliminaries, and we had 67 competitors, excellent calypsos Mr. Speaker. And we know that Machel Montano, when he sang “Too Young to Soca”, I believe he was—how old? Was it eight or 12? Not too sure. But a lot of our competitors were within that age bracket, and I can tell you a lot of the conversations that we heard, Mr. Speaker, could certainly have rivalled that song.

Unfortunately, many of those songs will never be heard again because they would have been written, they would have been composed specifically for this competition for this year. And if some of those people do not make it to the finals, then that is the last we will hear of it because, obviously, some of them may not have the money to be able to produce the song and to record it. And when we look at the turnout at the competitions, at the earlier stages, Mr. Speaker, it was really,

really abysmal. So these young ones do not even have that support at that level.

And so we are advocating, again, that the Government seek to put something in place that would allow for these artistes to be showcased, Mr. Speaker. But even if it is that the Government is unable to do so because of financial constraints, they have a responsibility to ensure that they foster an environment where the private sector could perhaps step in and fill the gap.

But again, Mr. Speaker, because of certain economic policies that have been taken by this administration in the last nine months, we have seen where even funding from the private sector has dried up, because with businesses having to grapple with the fallout from some of the policies, increase in taxes, landlord surcharge, bank levy and other things, what in previous years would have been opened palms are now tight fists. And I will give you one example of that, Mr. Speaker, a letter that was sent to me in my capacity as the Member of Parliament for Malabar/Mausica, seeking sponsorship, dated the 4th of February, 2026:

Re: Partnership Opportunity, TCA in Hollywood, 2026.

We are reaching out with an opportunity to partner with a dynamic group of teen pioneers in the film industry.

—one of the industries that applies to this legislation that we are dealing with here today, Mr. Speaker, and it is one of the major industries identified as part of the orange economy that could boost diversification for us in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Teen Creators Academy is a not-for-profit initiative of the Caribbean Film and Media Academy. The programme helps teens to build not only filmmaking skills but also general life skills, such as resilience, leadership, teamwork, conflict resolution and confidence that comes from creating something meaningful.

In just a few months, the results have been remarkable. Three original short

films, *Carnival Chaos*, *Her Smile Was Backwards* and *Play Date* have completed the international festival review process and are scheduled to screen at the Pan African Film and Arts Festival StudentFest in Los Angeles, California, from February 11 to 16, 2026.

That is next week.

The teens also planned and hosted their red carpet premiere at Theatre 2 UTT campus at NAPA, and the films are focused on local traditions and folklore and include local actors.

This is a list of our young filmmakers...

—and, of course, they gave the names of the young persons.

And it is a chance for Trinidad and Tobago to stand proudly as cultural ambassadors on the world stage.

Mr. Speaker, I am advised that this group would have sought support from the State—several state enterprises in the past would have given sponsorship—and they were told that given the change in government and the new management, the new boards on some of these state enterprises, that their sponsorship policies are being reviewed, and so at this time, they would be unable to assist. They would have also sent correspondence, I was told, to the Ministry of Culture and Community, and they were advised that their correspondence would be passed to the relevant authorities for them to look into it. But to date, they have not had any positive response, and with the event starting next week on the 11th, it is clear that several of these students will not be able to attend this event, unfortunately.

But, Mr. Speaker, these are our future creatives. I recall as a child growing up in the late 80s/early 90s, enjoying local series like: *Turn of the Tide*, *No Boundaries*, *Calabash Alley*, *Beulah Darling*, *Sugar Cane Arrows*. And even now, Mr. Speaker, where we see sometimes TTT would revive those archives—I am

always excited when I am going through the guide and I see one of those shows pop up, happy to look at it, it brings back memories of my childhood.

Mr. Hosein: What about *Mastana Bahar*?

Mr. D. Romain: If what?

Mr. Hosein: *Mastana Bahar*.

Mr. D. Romain: Yeah, we could include *Mastana Bahar* too.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. D. Romain: *Rikki Tikki*—yeah, I love *Mastana Bahar*, “pick a pan”. “Ayeee,” that was the thing.

Mr. Hosein: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. D. Romain: “Ayee.” [*Laughter*]. But the thing is, Mr. Speaker, these are our future creatives, and this is the time when they are in the embryonic stage of their creative genius that it needs to be encouraged. And so, the Government needs to be mindful of its policies and the impacts that it could have, because the private sector, corporate social responsibility now is difficult to come by. And also too some of our creatives, who do not have funding capacity to be able to record their music and so on, sometimes they might have a little event and they look to the private sector for some level of sponsorship to host a little concert to generate income to be able to record their work, so that they could take advantage of the very that we are dealing with here today, Mr. Speaker.

I saw one young lady, I think her name is “J Angel”, was on social media literally begging the so-called “soca mafia” to play her music. She spent all of her money recording music. She sold her car. That is her situation, and her music is not being played. What is she to do after labouring 12 long years in the vineyards and she still finds herself in the situation that she is in, unfortunately?

We then have, Mr. Speaker, another event which provided an opportunity

and a platform for our up-and-coming creatives to be able to exploit their creative genius.

“Ultimate Soca Champion competition shelved due to funding woes

After a successful debut last year, Carnival will unfold without the Ultimate Soca Champion...a competition organisers say helped propel emerging artistes onto national stages but has now been shelved due to a lack of funding and official support.

Founder and producer Jerome ‘Rome’ Precilla said that organisers approached the Ministry of Culture and Community Development and...”

—right, for support and to date, they have not received a response. He goes on to say, I was—well:

“He said platforms such as...”—the International Soca Monarch—“...and Synergy Soca Star historically served as launchpads for young artistes, many of whom later transitioned to international stages.

Soca artiste Christo, whose real name is Jahmike Bonas, yesterday said the...”—Ultimate Soca Champion—“...played a key role in elevating his profile.

‘I was disappointed when I heard that they did not...budget for this year because I was really looking forward to it and its vibes and getting my face more known...’—out there.

“The...”—Ultimate Soca Champion—“...was widely regarded as a successor to the International Soca Monarch...”

—and then they go on to say:

“Precilla described the cancellation as a setback for organisers and performers, noting that USC was designed as a developmental platform. Despite its single outing, he said the competition produced tangible results.

Giving some youth examples, he said Sucre has since become a frontline singer with the Evolution band and scored a hit this season and Paris Coutain, who did not place in the Youth category, later secured a collaboration with Machel Montano after showcasing...”—his—“...talent, while Anika Berry has become a consistent presence in this year’s Carnival. Precilla said artistes were informed through word of mouth, as organisers did not want to create unnecessary tension.”

So, again, Mr. Speaker, competitions such as these the private sector would close fists because of their circumstances in trying to treat with government policy and are now holding back. And when it is that we have state enterprises that previously would have been very generous in supporting events such as these, are now saying, “Well, we are not a charity,” withdrawing sponsorship for steelbands and so on, that also have the capacity to be able to avail themselves of this legislation.

I will give you an example, “Woman on the Bass”, that was played by—was it Massy All Stars? Yeah, I mean that is the ultimate close-off for a fete. When you hear that, you know the fete is done, Mr. Speaker.

In my own constituency, Mr. Speaker, I have one steelband, Arima Angel Harps, which placed fourth in the semi-finals of the medium bands, so they are looking forward to their showing on Monday, they too have reached out to me for support—financial support to assist with the purchase of some additional instruments, with uniforms, to assist with providing meals and refreshments for the players and so on. I could tell you, Mr. Speaker, they sound really, really, good. I think this is the highest they have reached in a long time. And what is particularly interesting is that the majority of the players are young people, teenagers in the main, who love the craft and they want to see it develop. They are so looking

forward to a good showing on Monday, Mr. Speaker, and I had no qualms in dipping into my own personal funds to be able to assist them, not just in my capacity as a Member of Parliament, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Romain: And even now, I continue to reach out to my professional network to see what other assistance I could get for them.

Mr. Speaker: Can I just remind you that you have one minute?

Mr. D. Romain: In regular time?

Mr. Speaker: Unless you want the 15 minutes.

Mr. D. Romain: Yes, Sir. I would not use the entire 15, but yeah.

So, Mr. Speaker, again, if it is that we wish to see the culture flourish—I heard the Member for Barataria/San Juan say that we have the sweetest music in Trinidad and Tobago, and it is perhaps one of the very few things he said in this Chamber that I can agree with, with him. And I want to see Trinidad and Tobago showcased greater on the international stage as well. We saw two of our countrymen who would have received Grammy awards recently, Mr. Speaker, a testament to the talent that resides in Trinidad and Tobago, contrary to those who may say all sorts of things about the country. But we know differently.

Hon. Member: Lawless dump.

Mr. D. Romain: Yes, lawless dump.

Mr. Speaker, we also lament the fact that this legislation is not being made retroactive, when we see—there are so many iconic pieces of work, calypsos of yesteryear, which will soon fall outside of the 50-year statute and they would go into the public domain. Within recent times, we have seen a number of soca songs sampling some of these older songs. For instance, we saw last year this hit song from Freetown Collective, “Take Me Home”, where they would have sampled

from David Rudder's "High Mas". And then we have this year, my colleague spoke about Full Blown and their song, "Respectfully Yours", where they would have partnered with Edwin Ayoung's—"Crazy"—"Cold Sweat". We have examples of Mical Teja and others. So they are recognizing, Mr. Speaker, the potential of some of these songs that would have gone dormant for years, and are now seeking to capitalize on it.

In fact, recently I was listening to a particular radio station, and I heard a calypso from the Mighty Shadow that I had never heard before, and I fell in love with the song one time. Of course, I went to try and find it on YouTube, could not find it, and googled it, could not find it. So I do not know if it is that, you know, wherever it resides, Mr. Speaker, it has not been converted to a format that persons can readily access, which is unfortunate. And how many other songs like that exist? And we must take note of the fact that when we speak to the issue of neighbouring rights, we are not just talking about the performers themselves, but all of the other creatives who would have been involved in the development of that particular piece of work. So we have the songwriters, we have the composers and so on, who may share in the profits to be derived from that particular piece of work, who are impacted on, Mr. Speaker.

My colleague for Diego Martin North/East, in fact, a couple of days ago, he reminded us of another iconic song, the "Bed Bug", by the Mighty Spoiler. Some of the younger Members of Parliament may not be familiar with that. I know it from the Mighty Bomber, he used to sing it a lot, Mr. Speaker. But clearly, these songs still have significant earning potential. When we look on the international stage, we see artistes like Michael Jackson, Luther Vandross, the artiste formerly known as Prince. We read often that the type of moneys that their catalogues continue to generate, Mr. Speaker, long after they have gone to the great beyond.

And so why can some of our artistes, who have also gone to the great beyond, not benefit from—

Mr. Hosein: Zandolie?

Mr. D. Romain: Zandolie, yes, another good one. Of course, of course, Maestro.

Mr. Hosein: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. D. Romain: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

5. 20 p.m.

Maestro. And we are advocating for this, Mr. Speaker, not because we believe that the PNM owns calypso. Alright? If we did, we would avail ourselves of this copyright law and we would be making a lot of money from it, despite representations made by supporters opposite.

So, Mr. Speaker, as I said, we support this legislation, but clearly the legislation needs support itself. If it is that it is to realize its true and fullest potential in terms of protecting our creatives, in terms of incentivizing current and future creatives to do more, yes, this legislation is coming, as the Member for Barataria/San Juan would have mentioned, at an opportune time, it being Carnival. But this year being a very short season, Mr. Speaker, and we know what tradition holds. Effective midnight on Carnival Tuesday, you turn on your radio, you are going to hear R&B, you are going to hear dancehall, you are going to hear reggae. Yes, yes, but we will not hear calypso.

And for those of us who would have grown up in a Catholic background, you know, that effective Ash Wednesday for that 40 days of Lent to hum, to sing, to whistle, any type of secular music, including soca and calypso is sacrilege. If your grandparents still around you could get a backhand slap for doing that, so you are advised to—and it is unfortunate that a lot of our creatives create music for a

specific season, Carnival, and thereafter, the next time we will hear some new offerings will be probably November or December this year, when they put out music again for the next Carnival season. So what we need to do, Mr. Speaker, is to create an environment where there are opportunities year round for our creatives to create new music, because they have the potential, they have the ability, as I said, to provide them with the funding, because it is not cheap to record music. And if they could get that support, I think it would definitely go a long way.

We see our music being appreciated throughout the world and we need to enhance our appreciation for it here in terms of supporting. Because just yesterday, I would have gone on Apple iTunes and I purchased a ringtone, Mical Teja's "Last Train" and it cost me US \$1.29. So I put some money in Mical Teja's pocket, so he will benefit from the legislation already. Yes, but I was looking for some of the other creatives and unfortunately they are not yet on that platform. So hopefully—

Mr. Speaker: I have given you 15 minutes, but let us just move along now. I think we have been—

Mr. D. Romain: So I am just reinforcing, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker:—regaled enough.

Mr. D. Romain:—reinforcing the legislation that is before us. Again, we commend the Government for bringing this legislation at this time. It is most timely. And with those few words, Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Caroni East.

The Minister in the Ministry of Health (Hon. Dr. Rishad Seecheran): Thank you, Mr. Speaker for allowing me to contribute in the Copyright (Amdt.) Bill, 2026. To begin, Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend firstly, the Minister of

Land and Legal Affairs, Mr. Saddam Hosein, for the yeoman service that he is currently doing in that Ministry, as well as his contribution here this afternoon. He is following in the footsteps of our Prime Minister, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, when she first piloted this Bill in 1996, roughly 30 years ago.

I would also like to commend the Minister of Culture, Michelle Benjamin, for the work that she is currently doing and her contribution here this afternoon. Mr. Speaker, what she has done thus far in culture in 10 months, those on that side could not do it in 10 years.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Seecheran: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin West has made the statement this afternoon that Carnival has contracted. And I would like to refute that statement thus far. Mr. Speaker, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has thus far pumped \$137 million into Carnival and nearly 2,000 new jobs have been created.

Mr. Speaker, with regard to the Flava Village alone, over 150,000 patrons have visited the Flava Village. And the John Cupid Carnival Village recorded more than 45,000 patrons, representing an 18 per cent increase over the previous year. And I would like to thank the Minister of Culture for her work in this regard.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Seecheran: Mr. Speaker, the Ministry has projected 37,613 visitors for this Carnival season, which represents a 10 per cent increase in Carnival tourism. Hotel occupancy was reported as fully booked, contributing to employment and revenue within the hospitality sector.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin West went on to say that artistes are not feeling protected. Member, the purpose of this Bill is to recognize, protect, and to monetize creative endeavours in a modern, cultural, economic environment.

This will benefit musicians, writers, visual artists, filmmakers, designers, choreographers, and other persons in this industry. These persons will be afforded legal ownership of their original work, enforceable rights to earn a sustainable living, as well as allow the creatives among us a fighting chance to succeed.

The Member went on to state that the Bill does not help those with regard to the digital platforms that are currently available internationally. Mr. Speaker, the United States of America and Europe are critical markets for copyright-protected works created by Trinidad and Tobago authors. As such, an extension of the term of protection would be in line with international best practise, whilst ensuring that our authors benefit in international markets.

The extension of the term of protection would enable authors, performers, and producers of sound recordings to benefit from growing digitization of music exploitation for at least another 20 years. A term of 50 years inevitably impedes record companies and artistes, and acts as a disadvantage to record holders in Trinidad and Tobago.

So, Mr. Speaker, the Member obviously did not read the Bill. He went on to say that persons that are willing to come to Trinidad and Tobago from New York City can easily access a flight. And in that regard, I would like to thank the Minister of Finance, through his portfolio in CAL, for finally making CAL a correct and efficient working company. Kudos to you, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Seecheran: Mr. Speaker, the Member from Malabar/Mausica, my friend and fellow class colleague from St. Mary's, mostly supported this piece of legislation. And he went on to state that this legislation would form the backbone of the orange economy. And I agree with him fully, Mr. Speaker. Then he went on to state that in some cases, artistes are left impoverished where they may have

only one hit. Mr. Speaker, that is the purpose of the Bill. It is to provide the legal rights for the families as well as the estates of the performers as well as the authors of these musical recordings.

Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago has immense talent in terms of its cultural diversity and creation. For example, one of the most popular hits that we ever had created from Trinidad and Tobago was, in fact, created by Anslem Douglas. And it was the Baha Men version of “Who Let the Dogs Out”. And this became an international hit. It actually appeared in the film Rugrats in Paris and it peaked at No. 2 in the UK singles chart, as well as topping the charts in Australia and New Zealand. It was in the top 40 in the United States and it was the fourth best-selling single of 2000. It almost reached No. 1 in the US charts. The track went on to win the Grammy Award for the best dance recording at the 2001 Grammy Awards. Mr. Speaker, if it were not for copyright legislation piloted by Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Mr. Anslem Douglas would not have seen much of this money.

Mr. Speaker, culture is a defining national asset and the creative industries within Trinidad and Tobago contribute roughly 4.8 per cent of GDP and approximately 5 per cent of total employment at the last count. A robust copyright legislation and framework is indispensable. Mr. Speaker, most importantly, this Bill serves as a nation-building function. Calypso, for example, has long functioned as social commentary. Steel pan emerged from resistance and resilience. And Carnival, of course, represents freedom, diversity, and creativity. So what we are saying here today, Mr. Speaker, is that cultural labour is valued and worthy of legal protection.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Seecheran: Mr. Speaker, this reinforces national pride and affirms that creative expression is not marginalized.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Legal Affairs spoke about the T&T Intellectual Property Office and the fact that we have had buy-in from many, many stakeholders. A lot was said today, Mr. Speaker, about the various soca artistes that would benefit from this Bill. But we also have many, many genres of music that would benefit as well. We have many chutney artists: Drupatee, Rikki Jai, Ravi B, KI, Neval Chatelal. We have classical artistes, Mr. Speaker: Mr. Gangadhar Jagroop, Mr. Rana Mohip. We have many parang icons and their estates: Daisy Voisin, the Lara Brothers and Charlene Flores.

So, Mr. Speaker, here in CARICOM, we are obviously influenced by the Berne Convention, and many CARICOM countries follow this Convention. And the current benchmark of 50 years is not a flaw. It is the minimum, and it is not the ceiling to which we can go. We are given the discretion, as a sovereign nation, to increase the number of years in which we can protect our artists. What we are doing here today demonstrates a 70-year model, which is consistent with the European Union harmonization, while remaining compliant with many of the treaties that we have thus signed as a nation and it allows our nation flexibility to exceed minimum protection.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill addresses many of the moral rights, which are of particular importance to artistes and are closely tied to their personal identity and cultural heritage. And many of these moral rights protect the rights of attribution as well as the rights of integrity of their work.

For Trinidad and Tobago, this ensures that our artistes are properly credited and their works would not be distorted or mutilated according to the parameters in which they are set out. And it aligns performers' rights with the rights of authors and their moral rights. And Caricom, this is the standard in Caricom, and it will provide a coherent and adequate protection for these performers.

Mr. Speaker, the most important aspect of this Bill is that it would afford legal protection, and it defines the fact that creative works would now be regarded as property. And this legal recognition is critical. Artistes invest time, they invest money, they invest skill, they invest their intellect, and personal resources into creating many of these works. And what we are doing here today is allowing them not to be exploited.

This Bill, therefore, establishes exclusive rights, including the right to reproduce, to distribute, to perform, to communicate, to adapt, as well as the ability to licence their works. Mr. Speaker, they will now be able to control how their creations are used, and to negotiate the terms in which they are used. And most importantly, Mr. Speaker, their dependents will be able to benefit from this legislation here today.

Mr. Speaker, most importantly, what we are looking for is intergenerational wealth transfer, and the ability for these artistes to have some level of estate planning and stability in their lives. They will have additional support for their dependents, and greater alignment with author rights, and the potential for increased royalties over time.

Mr. Speaker, clause 5 of the Bill, it states that it will now affect neighbouring rights for performers. And Mr. Speaker, this is in line with many Caricom countries, such as St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Mauritius and other Commonwealth countries also follow a 50-year calendar plan. And what we are doing here today is we are going above this, which is the general minimum in all Commonwealth countries. But, Mr. Speaker, most importantly, as the Member for Malabar/Mausica said, enforcement is the most important issue. And what this Bill does, it sets out clarity in the legislation, and allows enforcement and dispute resolution to be of a rights without enforcement would be meaningless, Mr.

Speaker.

So legal remedies against infringement, this would include civil actions, injunctions, damages, as well as criminal sanctions in cases where their rights are infringed. This will encourage respect for copyright laws, as well as a culture of legality and fairness in the creative sector. Mr. Speaker, the case law is extensive in this regard in the United Kingdom. Two cases being *Fisher v Brooker*, as well as *Confetti Records v Warner Music*.

But Mr. Speaker, what this Bill also allows, it allows the collective management organizations that exist worldwide to have some level of confidence in Trinidad and Tobago. And thus, they will be able to invest in our artistes. Platforms such as streaming services, online marketplaces, and social media rely on long-term licensing structures that often exceed 50 years. And Mr. Speaker, what we are doing here today is we are allowing us here in Trinidad and Tobago to be compatible with digital licensing practices.

Mr. Speaker, clause 7 allows for the right of an equitable remuneration. And it is to align Trinidad and Tobago with the copyright regime in international and Commonwealth standards around the world, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the European Union has harmonized the term of protection for sound recordings at 70 years and this is under Directive 2011/77 of the European Union. And 70 years has become the de facto international norm among developed countries in terms of copyright legislation.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill will improve income generation and economic security for artistes. Privacy, unauthorized digital sharing have eroded many artistes' earning potential. And this Bill ensures that artistes are paid when their works are consumed. This, of course, would include royalties from radio and television stations, live performances, as well as streaming services. And this, Mr.

Speaker, is critical to modern economies. This will attract investments to this sector, as well as stimulate local industry growth from foreign entities. And this is a framework for ancillary markets in terms of merchandising, franchising, and licensing.

Mr. Speaker, clause 6 will affect the neighbouring rights of producers and sound recordings. And, Mr. Speaker, here as well, we are in compliance with all Commonwealth countries. And in many cases, we will be exceeding their standards, Mr. Speaker.

As an outlier, Jamaica, in just one regard, has their Copyright Amendment Act, and it was extended to 95 years. Most other Caricom countries are currently at 50 years. But, Mr. Speaker, one of the most important aspects of this Bill is that it would allow our creatives incentives to create, encourage creativity, as well as cultural production, and that they will be more likely to invest in producing new works.

And, as you know, Mr. Speaker, culture in Trinidad and Tobago is central to national life. What we are allowing here, Mr. Speaker, is to allow professionals to have a vibrant and vigorous professional life, with exclusive economic rights for a defined period. They can expect a longer return on investment, as well as the ability to stimulate investment in high-risk, high-reward creative ventures.

5.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, this of course, will rebound specifically with a focus on our musical industry, be it soca music. In terms of fixed recording of sounds, this is not the melody or the lyrics. Those are separate copyrights. But, it would be in regard to a studio master, a live performance recording or a DJ mix recorded sound, and it would fit into the economics of soca music.

Mr. Speaker, what we are doing here today also, is we are balancing the rights

of the artist versus the public interest. While this grants strong protection for creators, it also provides certain limitations and exceptions, such as fair dealing for education, research, as well as news reporting. This will allow Trinidad and Tobago to balance this crucial role in terms of supporting schools, universities, and libraries.

Mr. Speaker, I would not like to take up my entire length of time here, but what I would like to say, in summary, is that the purpose of the Copyright (Amdt.) Bill in Trinidad and Tobago, is to protect creative ownership, it is to allow secure and fair compensation, to promote cultural and economic sustainability, and to align within local law. This Bill seeks not merely to regulate, but to empower the creative industry while providing tangible benefits. By raising copyright terms, we are offering substantive advantages to legal, economic, cultural, and technological dimensions. This will ensure balanced access while preserving robust rights protection. Mr. Speaker, a 70-year-old term reinforces a forward-looking competitive, and an innovation-friendly intellectual property regime. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

The Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Culture and Community Development (Dr. Narindra Roopnarine): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I rise to make my maiden contribution in this honourable House—

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine:—I do so with profound humility, gratitude, and an unwavering sense of duty to the people of Naparima.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: Permit me, Sir, to begin by congratulating you on your election as Speaker. I also wish to express my heartfelt appreciation to the hon. Prime Minister, and Member for Siparia, for her visionary leadership, her unmatched dedication to service, and her belief in the transformative power of good governance.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: It would certainly be remiss of me not to say a special thank you, to the hard working, resilient, and patriotic people of Naparima—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine:—from the east, from the west, from the north, and from the south of this great constituency; from Lothians to Ste. Madeline, and from Gasparillo to Barrackpore for placing their faith in me. I am here because of you, and I am here to serve you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: Mr. Speaker, I rise today as the Member for Naparima, and the Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Culture and Community Development, to give my full and unequivocal support to the Copyright (Amdt.) Bill, 2026.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: I want to commend all of my colleagues on this side who came before me today, on this Bill. Mr. Speaker, “culture” simply put, is the practice of customs with pride, purpose and passion, and that is what we Trinbagonians are known for. Culture does not exist in isolation from law, nor does creativity flourish in a vacuum. Culture lives in communities. It is born in panyards, in mas camps, in dance studios, in recording rooms, in villages and neighbourhoods where stories, rhythms and traditions are shaped by ordinary

citizens whose talent becomes national heritage.

The Ministry of Culture and Community Development sits precisely at this intersection where creative expression meets community life, and where intellectual property ceases to be abstract law and becomes lived experience. When a calypsonian writes a song; when a spoken word artist performs a piece; when a community theatre group stages a play or when a young producer records a track in a bedroom studio, what they are creating is not only art, but value, real value, tangible value. The role of the Ministry is to ensure that this value is recognized, protected and allowed to mature into sustainable livelihoods. It is for these very reasons, that I commend the Prime Minister, the hon. Member for Siparia, for her foresight, and her steady leadership in advancing this reform.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill did not arise by accident nor is it a matter of convenience; it reflects a long-standing understanding demonstrated consistently throughout the public service that culture is not peripheral to development, but fundamental to it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: The Prime Minister has always recognized that intellectual property is one of the most valuable assets of a modern knowledge-based economy, and that if we fail to protect it adequately, we do a disservice not only to our creators, but to future generations who inherit their work.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill is not an isolated act. It is part of a coherent vision, one that understands that creative labour must be matched with legal protection, that promises must be anchored in policy, and that policy must ultimately be translated into law. In advancing this Bill, the Prime Minister, once again, demonstrates that when leadership is informed by foresight, governance produces results, and when the UNC governs, culture is not merely celebrated, it is secured.

Because, Mr. Speaker, when UNC wins, culture and talent win.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: This Bill, Mr. Speaker, is about who we are, who we value, and whether we are serious, truly serious, about protecting the intellectual, and creative labour of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: Mr. Speaker, there is an old Latin maxim, *ars longa, vita brevis*; “Art endures, life is short”.

Hon. Member: “Aye, yai, yai”.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: Yet until today, our law has been as though the opposite were true, as though art should expire quickly, while its commercial value continues to circulate freely in the hands of others. This Bill corrects that imbalance.

The Copyright (Amdt.) Bill, 2026:

“...amends the Copyright Act, Chap 82:80...to extend the duration of...copyright and neighbouring rights for authors...performers and producers of sound recordings;”—and—“to extend...moral rights...”—accordingly.

Mr. Speaker, it also clarifies how these periods are computed, ensuring coherence and certainty within the statute. In plain language, Mr. Speaker, this Bill says to our creators: “Your work matters, your name matters, and your legacy matters.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine:

“Clause 3”—of this Bill—“amends section 19 of the Act to extend the”—duration of copyright—“protection”—for—“authors’ rights from fifty years to seventy years...”

...after...death”.

“...in the case of...joint authorship”—protection now endures—“...for seventy years after the death...

“...of the last surviving author...”

Let us consider, Mr. Speaker, what this means to the Trinidad and Tobago author who died in the early 1970s. This gives the estate more protection. Currently, at this time, under the old regime, the law would say, “Thank you very much, your time is up.” For the creator, their legacy would be cut short. Crucially, the same extension applies to moral rights; the rights of an author to be identified as the creator of a work, and to object to the distortion, mutilation or derogatory treatment of that work. Why does that matter, Mr. Speaker? Because moral rights are not about money alone.

Hon. Member: Tell them.

Dr. N. Roopnarine: They are about dignity. They are about honour. They are about reputation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: They are about ensuring that a calypso, a novel, a film or a poem is not stripped of its soul long after the author has passed on. As the old people say, “Your name better than money”. This Bill protects both.

Clauses 4 through 7 of this Bill extend similar protection to performers and producers of sound recordings. These clauses increase the duration of moral rights, and neighbouring rights from 50 to 70 years, whether calculated from the year of fixation, performance or publication. This is not an academic theory; this is real life. Mr. Speaker, they say, “Where there is right, there must be a remedy”. This Bill supplies that remedy. Clause 7 in particular:

“...extend the duration of”—the—“rights’ protection for equitable

remuneration”—where—“sound recordings”—are used for—“commercial purposes...broadcasting or public communication or...publicly performed.” .

It ensures that performers and producers continue to receive fair compensation for 70 years. That is not generosity; that is justice.

Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: Mr. Speaker, clause 8 amends Section 24(2) of the Act to clarify the computation of protection for broadcasting organizations. It retains the 50-year period, but clarifies that it is computed from the end of the year in which the broadcast first takes place. This may sound technical, Mr. Speaker, but clarity in law is not trivial; ambiguity benefits only those who can afford to exploit it. Certainty benefits everyone.

Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: This Bill is not a sudden awakening. It is continuity. It is follow-through. It is what happens when promises are not merely made, but kept. And let me say this without apology again, Mr. Speaker. When the UNC wins, culture wins.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: Under the UNC administration, culture is legislated, not lip-serviced. We do not discover artists during election campaigns and forget them after. Mr. Speaker, we do not chase headlines or pose for photo-ups. We rewrite the rules when reform is necessary.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: We tackle the tough unglamorous work by modernizing outdated laws, raising standards to meet the world, and safeguarding rights that

outlive election cycles. The Berne Convention, established in 1886, and ratified by 181 States—to which Trinidad and Tobago is a proud signatory—establishes the minimum protection of life plus 50 years. But Article 7(6) of the Convention, expressly allows states to grant longer terms. Many have done so. Mexico provides life plus 100 years; Guatemala provides life plus 75; Dominica provides life plus 70; St. Vincent and the Grenadines provides life plus 75; Trinidad and Tobago under this Bill chooses life plus 70 years. This is not radical. It is responsible. It is competitive, and it signals to the world that Trinidad and Tobago respects intellectual property as a driver of economic growth.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: Mr. Speaker, let us be frank in this honourable House, and let us speak truthfully. The PNM may come from time to time to give calypsonians a little mamaguy, a photo-up, or a fleeting handshake, a passing mention during carnival season, but when it comes to meaningful and structural protection of creative labour, they fall short.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: They dabble in culture. They treat it as an accessory, a decoration for the cameras or a talking point for the headlines. The people saw this clearly, and it is no coincidence that they voted them out on April 28th last year.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: Mr. Speaker, I want to put on the record, and answer the Member for Diego Martin West, my colleague on the other side. He claimed that they on the other side care for culture yet they did not see fit to bring this amendment in the last 10 years.

Hon. Member: [*Interruption*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: You also claim that we on this side had nothing to do with

the traffic plan. But I was present for those meetings. “Ah doh know.”

Hon. Member: Tell them. Tell them.

Dr. N. Roopnarine: Mr. Speaker, this UNC Government is different. We are not here to offer crumbs or appearances, we are here to rewrite the rules, not willy-nilly, but where they need to be, to ensure that intellectual property rights for authors, performers, and producers are robust, enduring, and most importantly, enforceable.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: We are giving creators what they truly deserve, legal protection that matches the value of their work. This is not tokenism, this is transformation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: And that, Mr. Speaker, is why the people placed their trust in us, and why this Bill representatives promises made and promises kept.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: Others before me have said, “Culture is not charity”. The Member for Moruga/Tableland, my sister, also mentioned this. Culture is commerce, it is tourism, it is branding, it is soft power, it is GDP, and if we want our creative industries to thrive, we must give them a legal environment that does not expire before the value does.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: The Opposition may scoff, they may heckle, and they may attempt to reposition our history, as they are prone to do, but the people know that empty vessels makes the most noise. Delivery makes the difference. This Government is delivering. This Bill is delivery. This Bill is proof that when the UNC governs, legislation follows intentions, and action follows promises.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: So, Mr. Speaker, I say this plainly and proudly. This Bill honours our past, protects our present, and secures our cultural future. It recognizes that art outlives administrations, and therefore deserves laws that do the same. Mr. Speaker, this Bill proves a simple truth. When the UNC wins, creators win. Performers win, producers win, and culture wins under the UNC Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: Copyright law was born here in Trinidad and Tobago. Trademark law was modernized, and today, copyright protection is strengthened again. Promises made, promises kept.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: Not slogans, not soundbites, statutes and reforms, Mr. Speaker. This Bill is about legacy. It is about ensuring that when a calypsonian, a songwriter, a filmmaker, a producer or a performer creates something timeless, the law does not abandon them while the work continues to earn. It is about recognizing that culture is not charity; it is capital.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: As I wind up, Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind this House that integrity simply is a state of being complete, whilst innovation is the introduction of something new. Mr. Speaker, we on this side know that integrity without innovation is stagnation, and innovation without integrity is chaos. Right here we have integrity and innovation hand in hand, side by side, working together perfectly balanced.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. N. Roopnarine: This Bill strengthens creators' rights, and it illustrates

leadership that understands that nation-building includes culture-building. This is how, we in the UNC build communities, constituencies, and our beloved country. For all these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I give this Bill my full, unapologetic, and enthusiastic support, and I stand firmly in support of its passage. I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Before I call on the Member for Barataria/San Juan, I wish to join the entire House in extending congratulations to the Member for Naparima for his maiden speech. I want to ask all the Members of the House to give the Member rousing congratulations.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Barataria/San Juan.

6.00 p.m.

The Minister of Land and Legal Affairs and Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (Hon. Saddam Hosein): Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, after that passionate—

Hon. Member: Eloquent.

Hon. S. Hosein:—strong,

Hon. Member: Yeah.

Hon. S. Hosein:—eloquent

Hon. Member: Yeah.

Hon. S. Hosein:—serious

Hon. Member: Reflective.

Hon. S. Hosein:—comprehensive—

Hon. Member: Articulate.

Hon. S. Hosein:—articulate contribution and intervention by Naparima, “I dunno what else tuh say”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: I too, Mr. Speaker, would like to congratulate my colleague from Naparima on such a brilliant maiden contribution.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: And that is the talent we have on this side, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: That is the talent.

Hon. Member: Others cannot compete with that.

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, this is an important debate. We are talking about talent and culture. We had about four speakers on this side, and they could put up two very weak speakers, who made no contribution to the law, and no contribution to the Bill. I was disappointed, especially in Diego Martin West, coming from the entertainment industry.

Hon. Member: That is where he comes from?

Hon. S. Hosein: I think that is where he came from. But his contribution was lacking; it had no analysis, and it was just full of politics.

Hon. Member: Thank God for Naparima.

Hon. S. Hosein: Full of politics. I am so happy for my colleague from Naparima—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein:—who sits in the Ministry of Culture and Community Development, for clearly putting this entire Bill in perspective for the Member for Diego Martin West. So, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin West said we did not do anything unusual. He said that we are not doing anything unusual. Mr. Speaker, I want to say it is a UNC Government in 1997 that passed the Copyright Act to give those persons protection.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: And now, when we return to Government, we realize they need more protection, and that is what we are doing here today, Mr. Speaker. You all did nothing for 10 years; absolutely nothing, but then say you all support the entertainment and talent industry? You all politicize certain sectors of it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Then the Member spoke of arrivals and so on in the country.

Hon. Members: Give him some numbers.

Hon. S. Hosein: Well, I have to give the Member some numbers that I got from the Airports Authority. Mr. Speaker, in 2022, there were about 26,955 arrivals in Port of Spain. In 2023, 29,854. In 2024, 72,146. January 2025—this is January alone—75,747. January 2025—“leww reach” to January 2026: 76,479 persons entered Trinidad for this period.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: “So, allyuh could jump high, yuh could jump low, yuh could say this, yuh could say that.” The facts speak for themselves, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: The facts speak for themselves. But then they talk about, “Oh, we must give more protection for our artistes and so on, because you know, we have to protect the talent of this country”. I think my friend from Malabar/Mausica said that the cemetery has more wealth than any place in this world. I think he said it has more intellectual property there.

Hon. Member: “It have more than by them.”

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Now, if you all are playing in the political graveyard, do not put us there. “Doh put us there.”

Hon. Member: It have more than by them.

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, do you know that all that they are talking about protection for the creative industries, and we must protect copyrights and things— Mr. Speaker, I want to take you to a *Guardian* article dated the 10th of January, 2026.

The *Guardian* is titled:

“PNM threatened with legal action over alleged unauthorized use of song.”

Hon. Member: What?

Hon. Member: “Dey tief ah song?”

Hon. S. Hosein: The article says:

“A copyright dispute has emerged in the final days of the Tobago House of Assembly campaign, with attorneys for a US-based music production company warning of imminent court action against the People’s National Movement.”

Hon. Member: Oh, my.

Hon. Member: What page it is?

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, what they were doing is that they were stealing people’s copyright. They were breaching copyright. They were breaching copyright, Mr. Speaker. Until I saw another article now, dated the 10th of January from the *Newsday*:

“...PNM agrees to drop campaign song after legal threat.”

That is an admission that they breached the copyright, and that they stole the song.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: “Mr. Speaker, if they could tief ah song, I doh know what else they will tief.”

Hon. Member: “Ah song and ah dance.”

Hon. Member: If they could steal a song—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. S. Hosein: It is amazing. I thought my friends opposite could not surprise me anymore—

Hon. Members: They did.

Hon. S. Hosein:—but you did. But you did. So, the Member said that he recommends that we must have more IP, intellectual property literacy. I think the first people to enroll in that class will be the PNM. They will be the first people. And, Mr. Speaker, I then heard a comment about, why is this thing not operating retroactively. Now, they are taking advice from a fella called Sen. Al-Rawi.

Hon. Member: “Ohhh, no.”

Hon. S. Hosein: Now, you all be very careful with taking advice from that fella. He caused a CEPEP contractor to have to pay about a quarter million dollars in legal costs for losing a case, you know. So be very careful of the legal advice you are taking there.

Mr. Speaker, the other point is that we have been guided by the experts. I said this when I piloted the Bill, that the WIPO, when looking at the legislation, advised us against this thing applying retroactively. What you will do is you will open a floodgate of litigation. We on this side are acting responsibly. We are not going to allow that to happen. The Bill is not operating retroactively.

Then I saw an amendment being circulated by my friend for Arouca/Lopinot. He wants to insert a new clause so that the Bill operates retroactively. And it says that:

The Act is deemed to have come into force on the 6th day of February 1975.

Hon. Member: What?

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, I was not born as yet, right?

Hon. Member: Neither me.

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, you know what is the comical thing about this? The first Copyright Act in this country came into force in 1985.

Hon. Member: What?

Hon. S. Hosein: It was then repealed in 1997 and replaced by the 1997 Act. So they are asking us to go back even before the first Copyright Act was passed in 1975. Mr. Speaker, I do not know where they are getting legal advice from. Where are they getting legal advice from?

Hon. Member: Faris.

Hon. Member: I feel it is Diego Martin North/East.

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, I want to put it on the record for all to know that the Bill cannot operate retroactively. We are not going to allow a floodgate of litigation to open. We are taking a responsible decision, Mr. Speaker, as we are.

So, Mr. Speaker, with these few matters that I wish to end my contribution, I also want to say that on this side, we have some very talented Members also. I know my colleague, Dr. Moonilal, the Member for Oropouche East, and the Minister of Finance are very good singers. You would have seen them perform in many public functions and so on.

So, Mr. Speaker, this Bill may protect their work also. It will protect the work of many of our talented sons and daughters of the soil. Mr. Speaker, we on this side are ensuring that we lend as much protection as can be possible to the creative industry in Trinidad and Tobago, and I beg to move.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.

House in committee.

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

New clause 2.

New clause 2 read the first time.

Question proposed: That new clause 2 be read a second time.

Question put and negatived.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, no, no. Can we ask the Government, please, why would you not want this Bill to be retroactive?

Mr. Hosein: You cannot introduce just the clause—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: No, the clause—

Mr. Imbert: I would just like to know please.

Mr. Chairman: No. I think the procedure is, for I am advised by the Clerk, that once it is voted against being read a second time, there is no discussion.

Mr. Imbert: I want to comment before the vote is placed.

Mr. Chairman: No. well, I think that the way the procedure is, is that there is no comment once there is a vote against it being read a second time.

Mr. Imbert: Well, I wanted to comment before the vote is placed.

Mr. Chairman: Well, I do not think that there is power to comment before the vote. That is the point that I was making.

Mr. Imbert: Therefore—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: No. It is a new clause. It is not an amendment. There is a difference.

Mr. Imbert: You are saying, procedurally—

Mr. Chairman: That is what I am advised by the Clerk.

Mr. Imbert: You are saying procedurally, that if the Opposition wants to propose an amendment to introduce a new clause, once the Government says no, there is no debate or discussion on this? That is what you are saying, Sir?

Members: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Imbert: “Ah not talking to allyuh. Ah talking to him.”

Mr. Chairman: I am advised that the current question is that there is no debate on this, that it be read a second time.

Mr. Imbert: What about a discussion of it itself in merits of the proposed amendment?

Mr. Chairman: If it is agreed to, I am advised.

Mr. Imbert: But why would the Government not want to explain why they voted against? This is to help artistes. There is a particular famous calypso “Jean and Dinah” which was first sang in 1956 and the 50 years will run out this year. I would just like an explanation. That is all.

Mr. Chairman: Without venturing to get into the free of it, I think the mover of the Bill was very clear in his winding up. You are a Member with some experience in law so make what you wish of it. I think the public would—

Mr. Imbert: So you are saying Mr. Chairman, that the Government is not willing to explain why they do not want to make this Bill retroactive.

Mr. Chairman: No, I am saying that I think the explanation for the current purposes proffered by the mover of the Bill and the relevant Minister is sufficient for the current purposes. That is all I am saying.

Mr. Imbert: I got that, Mr. Chairman, but what I want the Minister to say—

Mr. Chairman: Right, so let us not prolong the issue. Let us move on.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, this is to protect artistes from Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Chairman: All right. We have heard all that. Let us move on now.

Mr. Imbert: They do not care.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, this is not the time or the place.

Mr. Imbert: It is favouring foreigners who have stolen copyright from Trinidad

and Tobago citizens. That is what you are doing.

Mr. Chairman: Diego Martin North/East.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: All right, stop it. Stop this unnecessary crosstalk at this stage. There is absolutely no need for that.

New clause 3

New clause 3 read the first time.

Question proposed: That new clause 3 be read a second time.

Question put and negatived.

Mr. Imbert: There you go again. You do not want to explain yourself; a secret government.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Hon. Members, all the clauses have been dealt with. I propose to put the question.

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

House resumed.

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

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, there is a matter that qualifies to be raised on the Motion for the adjournment.

The Minister of Public Utilities and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Barry Padarath): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to a date to be fixed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before I put the question on the adjournment, there is a matter which has qualified to be raised on the Motion for the adjournment. I will now call on the Member for Arima.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Shortage of Social Development
Staff (Need for Government to Address)
Ms. Beckles (cont'd)

2026.02.06

6.20 p.m.

**Shortage of Social Development Staff
(Need for Government to Address)**

Ms. Penelope Beckles (*Arima*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know that in terms of the time for this, it is just 10 minutes, okay? So, it is not a matter that I intend to be very long, but it is a very important matter. If I can just indicate to the House that it is the need for the Government to address the shortage of social development staff in the Arima and surrounding offices, which is disrupting service delivery to vulnerable residents.

Mr. Speaker, in so doing, I am raising this Motion because of the several complaints that I have had over the last, I would say, two years from several residents from my constituency. Mr. Speaker, the complaints have increased and I would say that—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Ms. P. Beckles: My colleagues can laugh if they wish. This is a very serious matter. Okay?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: It may be that they do not have those complaints in their constituencies, but I have. And I am saying two years—I am not afraid to say two years, because it is not that it has not existed before, but within those last two years, it has increased considerably, and I would say in the last couple months, it has gotten even worse.

Now, why am I raising this complaint? I am raising this complaint because of the number of persons that have indicated that the length of time that they are taking to get their pension and several other—whether it is public assistance. I can say, Mr.

Shortage of Social Development Staff
(Need for Government to Address (cont'd)
MS. Beckles (cont'd)

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Speaker, that while several of my constituents have given me consent to actually call their names, I think that in their interest, it may not be the best thing to do. But what I would, Mr. Speaker, with your leave, ask your permission to make reference to, is to the Ombudsman's report, which was laid in the Parliament quite recently. Mr. Speaker, this really has to do with persons from Arima and environs, coming to the office and indicating that they have filed applications in 2023, 2024, 2025. It is not that previously there were not persons that have raised those complaints.

Mr. Speaker, I served as Minister of Social Development in 2022 to 2023, so that I am aware that some of these complaints happen from time to time, that people go to the office, and they go on a second occasion, and they may meet a different officer. They go on a third occasion, they meet a different officer. So we are quite aware of that, and that is not only in Arima and environs, that is in other places. But my concern is specific because of the length of time that it has been taking.

Mr. Speaker, with your leave, as I said, I want to make reference to pages 23—pages 13 and 14, more specifically, of the report. The complaints:

Prolonged delays in processing Senior Citizens' Pension, disability grants and other social assistance.

Repeated requests for the same documents, often requiring multiple visits.

Lack of clarity on appeal rights and procedures.

Inconsistent application of eligibility criteria.

Mr. Speaker, it goes on to say—and I am making reference at page 14. Page 14 says that:

St. George East district covers several large and geographical dispersed communities, including Arima North, Arima South, Arouca, Curepe, La

Shortage of Social Development Staff
(Need for Government to Address (cont'd))
MS. Beckles (cont'd)

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Horquetta/Talparo, Malabar, Maloney, D'Abadie, Trincity, Tunapuna North and Tunapuna South. The size and distribution of the population across these communities make every stage of the social welfare process, verification assessment, follow-up, and file management particularly difficult, especially in a system that remains largely paper-based.

Mr. Speaker, the reason why I made reference to the two years is because I am using that time frame for some of the persons who have come in quite recently, having applied for pension in 2023, 2024 and 2025. That is related to the fact that the officers, who were assigned at that time to deal with these particular districts, have been appointed or transferred to another area, and since then, no officer has been appointed. So, I hope my colleagues who are laughing understand what I am saying. Since that period, there has been no officer appointed.

So, I can give—I have in my possession at least six complaints that I want to make reference to, and in all of these cases, pension applied for 2024, June '24, June '25, October, May '25, December '24, March '24, be it pension, disability. So, I am really speaking specifically about the fact that nobody has replaced that officer.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let me make it abundantly clear that this is not a matter that necessarily only exists in this Government. We have had the situation as well because those persons are appointed by the Public Service Commission, and that is where the challenge exists. I mean, we also have a situation where there are other members of staff, contract officers, where their contracts expired in May of 2025, and that those contracts have not been renewed.

So, you have a situation where, in some instances, you are talking about contract employment, and in some instances, you are talking about officers who

the Public Service Commission has not appointed. But the main ones that I am dealing with is those not appointed by the Public Service Commission, which all governments cannot necessarily address in a very easy way, because it is really left up to the Commission. But at the end of the day, it does not mean that it is a matter that you should not raise. So you have applicants who simply go to Tunapuna, and they say to them, “We do not have an officer. We do not have anybody to be to investigate your pension, your disability,” and these persons have been waiting over that period of time.

Then other officers—contract officers, as I understand it, since last year, where all of those contracts ended, none of those contracts have subsequently been renewed. So, Mr. Speaker, what I would say is that there was an agreement or a decision taken in 2024. A resolution was approved pursuant to the Public Assistance Act, Chap. 32:03, to divide the St. George East District into two separate districts: The Local Public Assistant District of Arima and the Local Public Assistance of Tunapuna. And in truth and in fact, until such time as that is addressed, there will be a difficulty for this matter to be resolved.

So, what is says is that the system for processing social welfare applications remains slow and outdated. Most procedures are still manual and paper-based, forcing applicants to visit several offices and present the same documents repeatedly. Although a digital data sharing arrangement exists between the Social Welfare Division and agencies, such as the National Insurance Board and the Immigration Division, it does not appear to operate reliably. Applicants are still regularly told that the division is awaiting information from other public departments and are left to act as messengers between these agencies.

Shortage of Social Development Staff
(Need for Government to Address (cont'd)
MS. Beckles (cont'd)

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So, Mr. Speaker, I am asking the hon. Minister to investigate this matter with a view to doing what is within her power to address the situation. Where the issue of contract officers is possible, where the Minister has control, I am asking the Minister to look very closely into that matter. I am also asking, as the Member of Parliament for Arima, that there was an office that was completed, and I know that during the last budget debate, the Minister indicated that the possibility existed that that office will be opened this year. So, I speak on behalf of the hundreds of persons, or shall I say—

Ms. Ameen: [*Inaudible*]

Ms. P. Beckles:—the thousands of persons in these respective areas who are not able—Mr. Speaker, could you ask the hon. Member for St Augustine to stop distracting me, please? Okay?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: [*Inaudible*]

Ms. P. Beckles: Mr. Speaker, I simply ask my colleague, if my colleague could do what is within her power to have the matter addressed. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Minister of the People, Social Development and Family Services.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of the People, Social Development and Family Services (Hon. Vandana Mohit): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, let me say at the outset that we welcome scrutiny of the social welfare system, because this is a system that is supposed to help the poor and vulnerable. That aside, Mr. Speaker, where was the scrutiny before May 01, 2025?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Shortage of Social Development Staff
(Need for Government to Address (cont'd)
Hon. V. Mohit (cont'd)

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Hon. V. Mohit: Mr. Speaker, this Motion invites the public to believe that staffing shortages in Arima and the surrounding districts somehow materialized recently under this administration. Mr. Speaker, that is clearly false. I heard the Member said that it increased recently. If you all were not listening, I was listening. All right? So, Mr. Speaker, that is clearly false. What this Motion is plainly inconsistent with is evidence.

Mr. Speaker, between 2015 and 2025, under 10 uninterrupted years of PNM rule, the very Social Welfare Division was subjected to a deliberate, silent hiring freeze, not declared, not debated, not defended, but enforced. Vacancies were left unfilled. Retirements were not replaced. Requests to Service Commissions Department were delayed. Acting appointments were allowed to stagnate indefinitely. All of this occurred while caseloads exploded. The Member mentioned that over the last two years, that this would have been occurring, but then she mentioned, 2023, '24, '25, and I am glad she corrected herself during the contribution, because it is more than two years that this has been occurring.

Mr. Speaker, I want to share with you what we inherited. The current staffing position with respect to St George East (Tunapuna) Local Board: Established staff, the approved staff is one Social Welfare Supervisor II; current staff, one Social Welfare Supervisor II. The approved staffing for Social Welfare Advisor II, four; current staffing, two; two vacant offices. The approved staff for Social Welfare Advisor I, 10; current staffing, four Social Welfare Advisor Is; six vacant offices. That is established staff.

Mr. Speaker, let us be very clear about what the Opposition conveniently ignores. Social welfare offices are not optional conveniences. They are statutory bodies mandated by the Public Assistance Act, Chap. 32:03, to assess, improve and

Shortage of Social Development Staff
 (Need for Government to Address (cont'd)
 Hon. Mohit (cont'd)

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administer grants to the poor, the elderly persons with disabilities and families in crisis. You cannot freeze staff in a legislated system without paralyzing it, and that is what they did, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: So, when they speak now about disruption in service delivery, you created that and now we have to fix it. But, Mr. Speaker, I assure my friend, it will be fixed.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Mr. Speaker, the eastern corridor—Tunapuna, Arima, Sangre Grande—has, for years, carried some of the heaviest social welfare caseloads in the country. By 2023, Tunapuna had 29,421 active cases. Caroni had 29,205 active cases, while the national average stood at just over 15,000. Mr. Speaker, what the now Opposition did as it relates to that particular eastern corridor—Tunapuna, Arima, et cetera—let me share with you, colleague. What you all did, you all opened Arima Social Services Centre in April 2025, in the height of the general election, without staffing it and without outfitting it, so now I have to do it. We have to do it and, Mr. Speaker—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit:—I give her the commitment that we are doing it. Go into the office and you will see for yourselves.

Mr. Speaker, further, they leased a building which served no purpose.

Ms. Ameen: Who is the owner?

Hon. V. Mohit: Let me not speak about who is the owner.

Mr. Sturge: “Oh God, tell meh.”

Shortage of Social Development Staff
(Need for Government to Address (cont'd)
Hon. Mohit (cont'd)

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Hon. V. Mohit: But the particular man, he wrote me a letter asking when I am opening it. That same guy, Saddam.

Hon. Members: *[Interruption]*

Hon. V. Mohit: Mr. Speaker, I just want to share with my colleague that we have been dealing with backlogs. You spoke about the Ombudsman report, I have been responding as it relates to any matter that comes from the Ombudsman. We understand these matters are of utmost concern to the public, and we are dealing with it. We are dealing with backlogs from NIB, Immigration, the Central Board that you all left over 200 cases not deliberated on. I will tell you about all local boards in the future, because we are dealing with that as well. So you all allowed backlogs to pile up, pension applications to languish, frontline officers to drown, and now you are coming to say to us that we sent home staff when their contract positions ended. Mr. Speaker, that is totally untrue.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. V. Mohit: Mr. Speaker, when contracts ended, I knew of the concerns because we were getting it—several MPs raised that with me. And you would recall, Member, at the Standing Finance Committee, I said, “If I am to send home anyone, all of you would be calling me.” When those long-term contracts ended, I spoke with the PS and said, “PS, bring it as short term, we cannot leave it so.” And there were still areas existing without officers. So, Mr. Speaker, I want to share with you what we have been doing since we assumed office.

We have actively engaged the Service Commissions Department to fill the Director of Social Welfare and Deputy Director of Social Welfare positions.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Shortage of Social Development Staff
(Need for Government to Address (cont'd)
Hon. Mohit (cont'd)

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Hon. V. Mohit: We have also actively engaged Service Commissions to fill long-standing vacancies. We have also redeployed staff to stabilize frontline services. We have continued temporary and short-term officers to address immediate pressures. That is how we were able to deal with over 6,000 cases backed up at the NIB, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Mr. Speaker, and I want to share with my colleague and all Members of this House, where we are lacking officers, we have identified it and we are almost finished with a recruitment process for 25 officers, where there are no officers to help deal with these cases. So, I want to assure the public that we do not intend to add to your stress, we are trying our best to resolve this issue. Arima, we have 25 short-term officers coming on board to deal with these matters, not just in Tunapuna, throughout our nation. So, all of our MPs can breathe a sigh of relief.

Mr. Speaker, we are not about encouraging delays within the social welfare system. I want to assure all colleagues, who are representatives and facing these issues—I myself face these issues because after Tunapuna, it is the Caroni Local Board, the second largest. So, we have the issues existing, but we are not sitting on the issues, Mr. Speaker, we are dealing with the issues. I ask the members of the public to exercise some patience with us. Just like we cleared the backlogs, just like we are giving disaster relief and home repairs—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit:—which they left and they never give to the people, we will give the people their pension, we will give them their disability, we will give them their Public Assistance Grants, once they qualify and they meet the criteria. I assure

Shortage of Social Development Staff
(Need for Government to Address (cont'd)
Hon. Mohit (cont'd)

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them of that. I assure all colleagues that we are fixing it, and very soon, all of us and the public will breathe a sigh of relief. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 6.39 p.m.