

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, March 13, 2026

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**LAW REVISION (AMDT.) BILL, 2026**

Bill to amend the Law Revision Act Chap. 3:03, brought from the Senate [*The Minister of Land and Legal Affairs and Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries*]; read the first time.

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

Question put and agreed to.

PAPERS LAID

1. Thirty-Eighth Annual Report of the Integrity Commission of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended December 31, 2025. [*The Deputy Speaker (Dr. Aiyana Ali)*]
 2. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended September 30, 2022. [*The Minister of Finance and Minister in the Ministry of Planning, Economic Affairs and Development (Hon. Davendranath Tancoo)*]
 3. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended September 30, 2023. [*Hon. D. Tancoo*]
- Papers 2 and 3 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.*

UNREVISED

4. Audited Financial Statements of the Vehicle Management Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2017. [*Hon. D. Tancoo*]
5. Audited Financial Statements of the Vehicle Management Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2018. [*Hon. D. Tancoo*]

Papers 4 and 5 to be referred to the Public Accounts [Enterprises] Committee.

PRIME MINISTER'S QUESTIONS

Mr. Speaker: Member for Arima.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Inflationary Impact of Increased Fertilizer Prices (Government's Plan to Address)

Ms. Penelope Beckles (Arima): Thank you kindly, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to the hon. Prime Minister: Given international reports of a sharp increase in fertilizer prices due to the Middle East conflict, what is the Government's plan to insulate the local farming industry and domestic food prices from this inflationary impact?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

The Prime Minister (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have been informed by the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries that that Ministry is currently monitoring the ongoing situation and is working together with the local farming community, Minister, MP, as well as all stakeholders to mitigate the impact of any price increases.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Arima.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

**State of Emergency
(Number of Persons Detained)**

Ms. Penelope Beckles (Arima): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, to the hon. Prime Minister: How many persons have been detained under the current State of Emergency?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Prime Minister (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC): I have been informed, hon. Speaker, by the Minister of Homeland Security, that 373 persons have so far been detained.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Arima.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

**Blueprint Investment Plan
(Status of)**

Ms. Penelope Beckles (Arima): Thank you kindly, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to the hon. Prime Minister: Given the Government's recent Ministerial engagements and foreign trips to the Gulf States, including the United Arab Emirates, to source financing for the Blueprint Investment Plan, how has the current Middle East conflict impacted these arrangements?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Prime Minister (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC): Mr. Speaker, our Blueprint Investment Plan is being rolled out—especially by the Minister of Works and Infrastructure—and has had a tremendous impact. We are being asked now about the impact following what is happening in the Middle East. So, I would be happy to report that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has received 965

expressions of interest—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—for our Blue Print Investment Plan from across the globe, with one requirement being the need for the companies themselves, who are expressing interest, that they must be able to identify capital financing.

Further, I have been informed by the Minister of Works and Infrastructure that the current situation in the Middle East has not impacted any of these arrangements or expressions of interest to date. None have been fractured.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Malabar/Mausica.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Digital Arrival/Departure Platform (Cybersecurity Infrastructure)

Mr. Dominic Romain (*Malabar/Mausica*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. Prime Minister: With the full rollout of the digital Arrival/Departure platform just days away, can the Prime Minister assure the public that the cybersecurity infrastructure is robust enough to protect sensitive passenger data from breaches?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Prime Minister (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC): Mr. Speaker, I was advised to just say, yes. I will say, yes, but also that this is a very important initiative. It should have been rolled out years, years—a decade ago. So I am very happy that my Government, through the Minister of Homeland Security, is now rolling out this package. The answer to your question, Sir, is, yes.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

URGENT QUESTIONS

Mr. Speaker: Member for Arima.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

**Arima Boys' Government Primary School
(Resumption of Operation)**

Ms. Penelope Beckles (*Arima*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. Minister of Education. In light of the closure of the Arima Boys' Government Primary School since Tuesday March 10, 2026, what immediate action is being taken by the Ministry to ensure that the school resumes operations?

Mr. Speaker: Minister of Education.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Michael Dowlath): Thank you for the question, Member. Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Education was informed that the Arima Boys' Government Primary School experienced an interruption to its potable water supply due to a malfunction in the school's water pump system. The situation was assessed by the officers of the education facilities, Planning and Programming Division, who confirmed that one pump required replacing, while the other required repairs. The matter was logged in the school's infrastructure management system and arrangements have been made to undertake the necessary repairs.

I am advised that the required works will be carried out on Monday, and the school is expected to reopen on Tuesday once the potable water supply has been restored. In the interim, the Ministry has ensured that all necessary arrangements are in place to facilitate students preparing for the SEA exams, so there will be no disruption in their preparation or examination arrangements. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

**Vessigny Secondary School
(Security of Students and Staff)**

Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly (*St. Ann's East*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to the hon. Minister of Education. In light of recent reports that ammunition was discovered on the compound of the Vessigny Secondary School on Wednesday March 11, 2026, can the Minister advise what immediate steps are being taken to ensure the safety of students, teachers and other staff at the school?

Mr. Speaker: Minister of Education.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Michael Dowlath): Mr. Speaker, I have been advised by school officials that immediately upon discovering the items in accordance with established protocols: One, the TTPS was contacted and officers attended the school to secure and remove the items. Secondly, the matter was reported through the Ministry's school supervision and safety channels. Thirdly, the Ministry continues to work closely with the police as investigations proceed. Important to note, Mr. Speaker, the initial assessment indicated no immediate threat to the safety of students or staff and teaching and learning activities were not disrupted. The Ministry of Education will continue to monitor the situation and will take any further necessary steps to ensure that Vessigny Secondary School remains a safe environment for students, teachers and staff. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, is there a current investigation going on as to where the ammunition came from?

Mr. Speaker: I think if you look at your question:

“In the light of the recent reports...”

The gravamen of the question is:

“...what immediate steps are being taken to ensure the safety of students, teachers and other staff at the school?”

You can ask about the investigation in a different forum or in a different way. Thank you.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Mr. Speaker: Leader of Government Business.

The Minister of Public Utilities and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Barry Padarath): Thank you kindly, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs has been prepared for weeks to answer these questions. These questions are probably stale-dated, but I am sure the Minister will provide answers.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. B. Padarath: The Minister is prepared to answer all; weeks now.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

TN Ramnauth and Company Limited (Number of Lease Operator/Farm Out Agreements Granted)

44. Mr. Stuart Young SC (*Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West*) asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs:

Can the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries state how many Lease Operator Agreements and/or Farm Out Agreements has Heritage Petroleum Company Limited granted to TN Ramnath and Company Limited and/or any of its associated companies since May 1, 2025?

Mr. Speaker: Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal):

Mr. Speaker, in response to this question, may I advise the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West that the answer to this question is already in the public domain, indeed on the *Hansard* record, on March 6th, 2026.

Mr. Young SC: That is not an answer. Mr. Speaker, supplemental. For the viewing members of the population and the public who would like to know the answer, would the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries please read the *Hansard* that he allegedly has?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, may I again advise the hon. Member that the viewing public, so to speak, has had about three opportunities to view the contribution of last week Friday, 6th 2026. It has been aired repeatedly on the Parliament Channel and in the media. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: So, Mr. Speaker, is it that the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries is refusing to tell the House how many leases and farm-outs Heritage has given to his friend TN Ramnauth?

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: I think we can bring this fast developing—hang on a second Oropouche East. I think we can bring this fast—what threatens to be a fast-developing charade to an end, okay. Let us look at the Standing Order. The Standing Order says this is a question on notice. Member for Oropouche East, I would be very grateful if you could pay some attention to this. I would be very happy. The problem with adopting the position, which you have adopted, is that you have to remember this is a question on notice. If Ministers are free to answer

the question on notice prior to the 21 days, what happens is it undermines the ability of the House to receive the answers. I am merely going to ask you, if you could simply—if you are inclined—to repeat the answer, which would be on the public record, so that we can get on with it. It is a long day ahead, but you see I think if you adopt that position what happens is that it undermines the purport of the rule in 28, for questions for which notice is required. Because if we look at it in any other way, a Minister receiving a question on notice can simply avoid answering the questions by putting the answers on the public record. That then undermines the purport of the Standing Order.

1.45 p.m.

So, can I just ask you, so that we may save some time, if you may simply wish to repeat the answer which you gave on the *Hansard*, thank you very much.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At the risk of repeating what is already in the public domain, I have no difficulty with presenting an answer, the Member has asked a question. Mr. Speaker, Heritage Petroleum Company Limited, has granted one lease operator, operatorship agreement to T. N. Ramnauth and Company Limited.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Is he your friend?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Originally—no friend of myself or anyone on this side, Mr. Speaker—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: I intended to deal with that and ask the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, to withdraw that part.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:—originally granted on April 01, 1996.

Hon. Members: “Ohhh.”

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Originally granted, April 01, 1996. Mr. Speaker, I just

want to repeat what I said last week, since the Member is encouraging me to do so. Mr. Speaker, it was on the 6th of May, 2021, that the legal department at the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, presented to the former Minister from Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, recommendations for the issuance of lease operatorship agreements. I want to repeat, May 06, 2021, six entities were recommended, I will list the six:

Touchstone Exploration Limited

Oilbelt Company Limited

Lease Operators Limited—is that your friend or family?

Mr. Hosein: Who is that?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:—Lease Operators Limited

T.N. Ramnauth and Company Limited

Petroleum Contracting Services Limited

Moonsie Oil Company Limited

Six entities recommended. Mr. Speaker, what did the former Minister do? On the 10th, four days later, the Minister approved five out of the six. Approved five out of the six, four days later. And stated, and I am reading from the minute sheet of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, which I have here:

I have executed all sub-licences but one. This particular sub-licence is of concern to me and I will conduct enquires first.

This is on the 10th of May, 2021. Mr. Speaker, '21 finished. Now, in four days he conducted enquiries on five but one had enquiries which he has stated here and signed, properly.

2021 finished, 2022, finished, 2023 finished, 2024, finished, 2025 began and the former Minister was still conducting enquires, that is the level of malice and

vindictiveness and “wickedity”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, having entered office on the 3rd of May, 2025, after three months, on the 14th of July, 2025, I placed on the minute sheet:

I have enquired. Approved, Roodal Moonilal.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, when I asked the legal department whether the Minister made any enquiry, raised this matter, the answer was a categorical, no.

Mr. Hosein: He signed half of it.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: You have to sign in duplicate, he actually signed one and refused to sign the next one. This is the only sub-licence where two Ministers of Energy, have signed the same licence. And I refuse to sign the first one as a brand new print. I said if the Minister from Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West signed one, and that was good enough then, we signed the second one, that is the status of this matter. And the Member should really apologize to the House and the country, why he possessed such vindictiveness and malice.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: I think you have sufficiently answered. Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, is the Member for Oropouche aware, that he, along with T.N. Ramnauth are defendants in a corruption matter by—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Not allowed.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Not allowed.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Question No. 45. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

**Phoenix Park Gas Processors Ltd
(Payment of Dividends)**

45. Mr. Stuart Young SC (*Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West*) asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs:

With regard to the payment of dividends by Phoenix Park Gas Processors Limited since May 1, 2025, can the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries indicate the following:

- i. the total amount of dividends that have been paid to date; and
- ii. in what currency were the payments made?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal):

Mr. Speaker, we are informed, Mr. Speaker, the total amount of dividends that have been paid since May 01, 2025, is US \$50million, United States dollars.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: The reason for the payment of this dividend was to comply with PPGPL's dividend policy and to safeguard the funds in the accounts of the company from the continuing loss, in excess of \$1billion that occurred during the past four years. That threat has now been averted by the prudent actions taken by the present board.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Payment was made in United States dollars.

Mr. Speaker: Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

**National Gas Company Limited
(Payment of Dividends)**

46. Mr. Stuart Young SC (*Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West*) asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs:

With regard to the payment of dividends by the National Gas Company Limited since May 1, 2025, can the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries indicate the following:

- i. the total amount of dividends that have been paid to date; and
- ii. in what currency were the payments made?

Mr. Speaker: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal):

Mr. Speaker, in response to Question No. 46, the total amount of dividends that have been paid since May 01, 2025, is TTD \$666,965,900, payment was made in Trinidad and Tobago dollars.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much. Through you, Mr. Speaker, when were these payments or this payment made?

Mr. Speaker: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, if the Member would file a question to that effect, we will be pleased to answer.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Mr. Speaker: I think there are outstanding questions on notice, Leader of the House—written questions.

The Minister of Public Utilities and Minister in the Office of the Prime

Minister (Hon. Barry Padarath): Hon. Speaker, I am advised that before the end of today's Sitting, the answers to those questions will be circulated to Members.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Office of the Attorney General (Retention of Lawyers)

49. Mr. Stuart Young SC (*Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West*) asked the hon. Attorney General:

With reference to the attorneys-at-law who were briefed and/or retained by the Office of the Attorney General (including the Solicitor General's Department) for the period May 1, 2025 to January 31, 2026, could the Minister provide the following:

- a) the number of matter/s each attorney was briefed and/or retained for;
- b) the matter each attorney was briefed and/or retained for; and
- c) the amount paid to each attorney for each matter?.

National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited (Retention of Lawyers)

50. Mr. Stuart Young SC (*Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West*) asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs:

With reference to the attorneys-at-law who were briefed and/or retained by the National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited and each company in the NGC group of companies for the period May 1, 2025 to January 31, 2026, could the Minister provide the following:

- a) the number of matter/s each attorney was briefed and/or retained for;
- b) the matter each attorney was briefed and/or retained for; and
- c) the amount paid to each attorney for each matter?.

Heritage Petroleum Gas Company Limited

(Retention of Lawyers)

51. Mr. Stuart Young SC (*Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West*) asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs:

With reference to the attorneys-at-law who were briefed and/or retained by the Heritage Petroleum Gas Company Limited for the period May 1, 2025 to January 31, 2026, could the Minister provide the following:

- a) the number of matter/s each attorney was briefed and/or retained for;
- b) the matter each attorney was briefed and/or retained for; and
- c) the amount paid to each attorney for each matter?.

National Petroleum Marketing Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited
(Retention of Lawyers)

52. Mr. Stuart Young SC (*Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West*) asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs:

With reference to the attorneys-at-law who were briefed and/or retained by the National Petroleum Marketing Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the period May 1, 2025 to January 31, 2026, could the Minister provide the following:

- a) the number of matter/s each attorney was briefed and/or retained for;
- b) the matter each attorney was briefed and/or retained for; and
- c) the amount paid to each attorney for each matter?.

Natural Gas and Oil
(Monthly Projected Production)

53. Mr. Stuart Young SC (*Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West*) asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs:

Can the Minister provide the monthly projected production of natural gas and oil for Trinidad and Tobago from November 2025 to September 2026

that would have been provided to the Ministry of Finance for the preparation of the 2026 National Budget?

**CLICO Lawyers and Accountants
(Details of Payment)**

55. Mr. Stuart Young SC (*Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West*) asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs:

With reference to the Attorney General's statement in the House on Friday January 16, 2026, that \$3 to \$4 billion was spent on matters relating to the collapse of CLICO on lawyers and accountants, could the Minister provide the following information with regard to payments made:

- a) the names of the persons and/or entities that received payments;
- b) the date/s when each payment was made;
- c) the amount paid to each person and/or entity; and
- d) the service provided for each payment made?

Awaiting submission of written answers.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Mr. Speaker: Leader of the House.

The Minister of Public Utilities and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Barry Padarath): Thank you kindly, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, by consensus, the Opposition has agreed for the Prime Minister to make her statement until her completion, beyond the 10 minutes allotted.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

**Shield of America Summit
(Coalition)**

The Prime Minister (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC): Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Statement by Minister
Shield of America Summit
(Coalition) (cont'd)
Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC (cont'd)

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you all very much, thank you, Mr. Speaker. On March 07, 2026, the President of the USA, President Donald Trump, invited and hosted, selected leaders from across the western hemisphere that included Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: On that day, we held together from the hemisphere, the inaugural Shield of the Americas Summit, in Doral Florida, that was a very historic moment.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Trinidad and Tobago stands very proud to be part of a new partnership, the Americas Counter-Cartel Coalition, which is a very strategic alliance designed to confront cartel violence, through coordinated security, through coordinated intelligence sharing, and joint operations across the Americas.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Mr. Speaker, for about one decade, whilst those on the other side, the PNM were in Government, blood flowed on our streets, that was driven by violent gangs fighting for turf to sell illegal arms and narcotics, trafficked into our country by the drug cartels.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Whilst that was happening, many in the PNM hierarchy fattened their pockets from their local drug mafia financiers, while the people of this country, our country, suffered.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Statement by Minister
 Shield of America Summit
 (Coalition) (cont'd)
 Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC (cont'd)

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I say, Hon. Speaker, a short distance away from this building, the new blood red Balisier House, stands as a gravestone to drug money, paedophilia and theft.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: For almost a decade, for almost a decade—

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 48(4) please.

Mr. Speaker: Prime Minister, can I ask you to use more neutral language as we move on?

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Okay, Mr. Speaker. I did not name anyone. It is a class of persons—

Hon. Members: Correct.

Mr. Padarath: “If it fall in de garden.”

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: If it falls in your garden, in your front yard, so be it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Between 2010—thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Member: She was there, so she would know.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Between 2015 and 2025, do we remember? We need to remember these things, you know—there were 124,062 crimes under your watch. You were there, under your watch, this one you can take in your garden. Over 5,000 persons were murdered violently, over 9,000 were brutally raped or sexually assaulted, and over 11,000 persons were robbed of their hard earned possessions under that former government and they did nothing, they did nothing.

Statement by Minister
 Shield of America Summit
 (Coalition) (cont'd)
 Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC (cont'd)

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I think, sometimes, that they seem to take perverse pride in the fact that PNM strongholds—

Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—have amongst the highest crime rates, the highest unemployment, the lowest educational attainment, the lowest opportunities and the worst infrastructure in the country—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—under their watch, under their watch.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And you know what, Mr. Speaker that is why you hear some of them on the other side, everyday crying, like cry-babies, crying, crying, crying, everyday about radars, about US troupes, about US lists. I do not know if they are worried, hon. AG, if maybe some of their names are on that list, I do not know, I have not seen the list. Worried about lists, about radars, about the US troupes. The PNM, some of them, their local drug mafia financiers; some of them, their paedophile lodge friends and their fake “eat ah food” elites, clearly view—

Ms. Beckles: Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. Beckles: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 48(4), please.

Mr. Speaker: I do not think it is offensive and insulting—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker:—directed to a Member of the House. It is not directed to a Member

Statement by Minister
Shield of America Summit
(Coalition) (cont'd)
Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC (cont'd)

of the House.

Ms. Beckles: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, you are saying that statement is not directed to a Member of the House?

Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: There is no Member to whom it is directed. It is directed at an entity.

Hon. Member: Do not worry, let them continue.

Mr. Speaker: Which all Members are entitled to. The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West just asked the Member for Oropouche and put it like that, I am not going to repeat it but it is not directed at a Member of the House.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: You know, Hon. Speaker, the Member for Arima and I were in the law class together, so you know how to craft your statements as a good lawyer. I have not named anyone. If you want to take ownership for it, take it but I have not named anyone, not one.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So, today—that is the history, Sir, and I will move on. Today, history is moving forward. I have just set out what we inherited when we came, over that almost one decade. History today is moving forward, and I stand today to let the people of our country know—you know, they keep saying the Prime Minister must do this, the Prime Minister must do that, the Prime Minister must do that; you cannot tell me what I must do.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Statement by Minister
Shield of America Summit
(Coalition) (cont'd)
Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC (cont'd)

2.00p.m.

It is only the people of the country. It is only the people of our land. The electorate who put us here. This is our mandate, and I will answer to them. And that is what I am doing today. I am answering to the people of Trinidad and Tobago—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—because this is the people's House.

So today, I want to say to the people of Trinidad and Tobago that our continued partnership with the USA, and now not just the USA, but partners from across the hemisphere, Latin America, partners from the US and from the Americas, I want to say that this partnership can only augur well for our nation, especially in this very critical area of crime and security. Many people do not yet fully understand the significance of the coalition we have formed in the region. It is a shield—I want to repeat. People think it is offensive. Yes, it is an offensive against persons who are not law-abiding. But this coalition is a shield for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I repeat, for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And so I take this opportunity today to extend my deep gratitude to President Trump—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—for including T&T in this very historic coalition. And this coalition comprises nations across the hemisphere, not just here, across the Western Hemisphere. They include, of course, the host, the USA, and, of course, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, the

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Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Panama and Paraguay. These were the ones who met as selected invitees to the summit held in Doral, Florida, recently.

Now, I want to make it very clear. You know we have an expression, “No man is an island,” therefore, our crime crisis cannot be solved in isolation. It cannot be solved alone.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: History reflects that in the almost decade they were there, they could not solve it, whether alone, and they refused to partner with anyone. They stood alone, and we failed and our people suffered. Our crime crisis cannot be solved in isolation. It cannot be, and let me tell you why. The dangers posed by illegal drugs, illegal firearms, organized gangs are not only local problems. They are not just a Trinidad and Tobago problem. They are part of a transnational criminal system, stretching from South America and throughout the Caribbean, right up to North America and also into Europe.

So these networks, they move cocaine, they move heroin, they move synthetic drugs, what is called fentanyl, I think, they move them through our waters and ports, and what happens in return? In return, while these are moving, illegal firearms, arms trafficking, illicit money flow back into our communities. Understand this, this is not T&T alone. You want a crime plan, you want a crime plan. Here is part of the crime plan. You could never do it. We will do it, and we are doing it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: For small island states, like Trinidad and Tobago,

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the consequences are exceedingly severe. Across the Caribbean, gangs now operate with sophisticated financing, advanced weapons and international criminal connections. And so I say, again, this is not just a local problem. It is a hemispheric challenge requiring a joint effort, an international effort, an international response. And that is why, upon assuming office, my Government made it very clear that T&T would stand firmly with the USA and our regional partners in targeting narcotics traffickers, arms traffickers, all the other illegal things coming down into our land. And so we have to dismantle international, transnational criminal networks. Understand that, Mr. Speaker. I ask those who are listening to us, understand this is not a T&T problem. This is a transnational criminal network problem.

For decades, Caribbean nations have complained that they are not heard on the global stage. We are too small. We are not heard. This time, we were heard. This time, we were heard, T&T. This time, we were seen, T&T. This time, we were invited to participate.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: President Trump indicated in his address that US Secretary of War, Pete Hegseth, established a coalition, this coalition. A pledge from leaders and reps from 17 nations in the Americas demonstrated that our hemisphere is ready to deal and use hard power to defeat threats to our security and our civilization. These dangers will be addressed using every necessary resource and every legally available authority in the partnership that we formed with our allies.

The proclamation signed on March 7th makes this very clear what it is we all

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agreed to; all these nations in the hemisphere. One, criminal cartels and foreign terrorist organizations in our hemisphere, the Western Hemisphere, must be fully dismantled. Two, the USA and its allies, including T&T, will coordinate to deprive these organizations of financing, resources and territory, because they come and they build territories in our states and our nations. Three, we will partner with nation militaries to be trained and mobilized to dismantle cartel networks and prevent the export of violence. And four, this hemisphere, we pledged to stand together to keep malign external influences from destabilizing our country and the region. So, for T&T, the benefits for Trinidad and Tobago are very substantial.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: One, stronger intelligence sharing. Cartels operate across borders. They know no borders. They are borderless. And through this coalition that we have formed, law enforcement agencies will share real-time intelligence on trafficking, on trafficking routes, on gang leaders, on financial networks and weapons shipments. And so with better intelligence sharing, our forces here in security can act faster and more effectively.

Two, enhanced maritime and border security. We in the Caribbean, we in T&T, we sit along some of the world's busiest drug-trafficking corridors. Again, I said, I do not know if people understand. We sit along some of the world's busiest drug-trafficking corridors. Through joint operations, surveillance support and coordinated interdiction efforts, coalition partners, all of us who signed on, can disrupt shipments before they reach our shores.

Three, direct support in combating illegal firearms trafficking. We do not make guns here, you know. We make no arms in this country. But then you see

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these photos of people with huge, long, big, small, every size you can think of. I think some people, maybe not in this House, but there are some persons who have one of each, and some persons actually returned one when they found it was illegal to have it.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I think that fella was a Minister. It was a gift. He had to return it back to law enforcement. I will say no more. That was a very young Minister, by the way. So here we go.

Mr. Hosein: “It fall in de garden boy.”

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Direct support in combating firearms trafficking. One of the greatest threats, Mr. Speaker, facing our nations in the Caribbean is the flow of illegal guns. Many firearms used in regional crimes do not come from here. They originate outside the region. Through coordinated enforcement and investigative cooperation, the coalition members, all of us who met, and others who want now to join in, they can help stop these weapons before they reach our streets.

And four, training and technology sharing. Training, technology, capacity building. We can help each other in the hemisphere with these matters. So, Mr. Speaker, our police and defence forces will benefit from joint training, advanced technology and international cooperation. This certainly will strengthen our ability to dismantle gangs, investigate financial crimes and prosecute organized criminal networks. And so the coalition that has formed, Americas Counter Cartel Coalition, now becomes a powerful new instrument in our national security arsenal.

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Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I know some of my friends on the other side are very concerned if I met Trump or did not meet Trump. Let me say it very clearly. During the summit, I had the honour of speaking directly with President Trump and thanking him for his support of Trinidad and Tobago and the region.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I reaffirmed the commitment of Trinidad and Tobago to working together in the interests of the people of T&T and the people of our Western Hemisphere. We also met with the summit's special envoy, Kristi Noem, to discuss border security and ongoing cooperation.

Let me come now, Mr. Speaker, of the build-up to where we were on the 7th of March, the Americas Counter Cartel Conference. Prior to the summit that I attended, before that, on March 5th, our Minister of Defence, Minister Wayne Sturge, attended the Americas Counter Cartel Conference, hosted by the Secretary of War of the US, Pete Hegseth, and I commend him for his representation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: At that conference, Minister Sturge, on behalf of Trinidad and Tobago, he placed the challenges facing us here in T&T directly on the table. He made it very clear, we are on the front lines of this fight. We need stronger support to disrupt drug cartels, gun running and so on, narco-trafficking, and to protect our national interests, including our very vital energy sector. Thank you, Minister Sturge, thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Then, Sir, prior to the summit I attended, a Joint

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Security Declaration was signed by 17 countries from the hemisphere. In that, we reaffirmed our shared commitment to peace, to sovereignty and stability in the region. I want to repeat, Sir. That was a commitment to peace, sovereignty and stability.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I repeat, and some seem to misunderstand, when we partner with people, they think we are giving up our sovereignty. No, we are partnering. It is a partnership, it is a coalition for joint interests and to protect the people of our land. So I repeat, commitment to peace, sovereignty and stability. T&T's sovereignty remains strong and firmly intact.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Our participation in the Americas Counter Cartel Coalition reflects our commitment to regional cooperation in tackling transnational crime, whilst, at the same time, we maintain full control over our national decisions and policies. So we maintain that sovereignty.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And so sovereignty is never weakened by partnerships, Mr. Speaker. It is strengthened when nations work together to protect their people, to protect borders and our democratic institutions. That is what it is. It is a partnership. It is not a surrendering of sovereignty.

I move further, Sir. Any actions undertaken through this collaboration will be guided by law, ensuring that use of force and all operational measures remain lawful and accountable.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC (cont'd)

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I have a very good AG on my side; a very good AG. I have many lawyers on my side. We will operate within the rule of law and democratic institutions. So T&T's diplomatic successes continue thereafter the summit on the 7th.

2.15p.m.

At the Summit—and that very same day, it was a very long day, Sir, I think the agenda changed. First, we were invited to come there about midday. Then it was changed to come at 7 a.m., and we worked through the whole day and night. So what we also did, in the formal and informal settings there, for that whole day up into the night, we held several bilateral meetings, Mr. Speaker, with senior US officials. I think this is the first time this may have happened. Indeed, I am told, and maybe those on the side can correct me, this is the first time in 50 years that a Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago was invited by the President of the United States, first time.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So we held bilaterals, all of us, 12, 13 nations, leaders from the free world, in this part of the world, in this hemisphere, we held these bilaterals. So, we met with the US Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, always a pleasure to meet him, a very bright man, very willing to listen to problems in our region and in the hemisphere. We met him. We also met with his Deputy Secretary of State, Christopher Landau, and we discussed further engagement for our region, including, of course, developments involving our neighbour next door, Venezuela.

We also met with the US Secretary of Energy, Chris Wright, to talk about

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cooperation in the energy sector, including gas fields, which involves Venezuela and interests in refinery and tank-farm infrastructure. In that meeting, Secretary Wright produced almost immediate results. Within hours, energy giant Chevron reached out expressing interest in doing business in Trinidad and Tobago, within hours.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: We also had very productive talks with US Secretary of Commerce, Howard Lutnick, and we talked about US-based companies interested in here; in Trinidad and Tobago, investment, infrastructure, rehab projects in Trinidad and Tobago. We also met with the trade representative, Jamieson Greer, US Trade Representative, and there, we talked about tariffs and the potential impact on energy commodities. Not only did we meet all these American counterparts at the highest level, that is, the Cabinet of the USA—most of them we were able to meet when we were there in Florida—but we also used that opportunity to have bilateral discussions with those other leaders from the hemisphere: Latin America from the Americas, from our hemisphere.

We held discussions then also with several Latin American Presidents. We spoke with Paraguay's leadership regarding T&T's application to become an associate member in MERCOSUR. Now, some may know, and some may not know—very important. If we become a partner, that is another partnership, another alliance, strategically that we have asked to join, that grouping, MERCOSUR, which takes up the Latin American countries. We held talks with leaders from Argentina, Chile, the Dominican Republic, Panama, and others on trade and national security cooperation. So, in and all, in that one day, we probably held more meetings than

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 (Coalition) (cont'd)
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we hold in a week here, and they were very successful. I want to thank all those countries who engaged with us.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Following on that Summit on March 9th—so the Summit was on the 7th. You were asking about the 8th. I will tell you about that in a minute. I think one of the Members was very interested in Joy's Roti Shop. So I will tell you about that in a minute. So let me speak about—

Mr. Padarath: I do not know what they have with roti.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I do not know what is—oh, they always have a roti issue. You know why? Because it is very delicious, very delicious.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So, on March 9th, now—so that Summit was on the 7th—I had the privilege and the honour of being invited by the United States SOUTHCOM, Southern Command, to their base in Florida. So I visited them on the 9th, which was the Monday, I believe. I met with Commander General Donovan and his team, and, of course, do not get vex, but I did extend an invitation to Trinidad and Tobago, because we all like everybody to visit our home. So we asked them, anytime they are ready, please come. They have been here before, and we asked them: Here is an invitation to visit T&T anytime, and I think the General gave an undertaking, I will not say a promise, that they will try before the end of the year to visit us.

There, our discussions are focused on strengthening defence cooperation, combating designated terrorist organizations and drug cartels operating within the Caribbean. Once again, as I said, I used the opportunity like Minister Sturge did

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when he made the plea for help for us in this region, and especially, here in Trinidad and Tobago. Again, I took that opportunity to make our case directly. Trinidad and Tobago needs greater support in areas such as cybersecurity, forensics, ballistics, and, of course, intelligence. That follow up, that was on the 9th.

Then we continued, and this is the one, I think, some Members from the other side, maybe not in this House, maybe the other House, had real problems that I went to Joy's Roti Delight, but they call it "Joy's Roti Shop." It is called Joy's Roti Delight. You know, we should be proud of those people.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: We should be proud. We should be proud. Did you know that Minister Saddam's mom runs a roti shop? Did you know that my mother ran a roti shop? So I am proud of all the roti makers.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I am proud. They took real umbrage. They were so angry that we went to Joy's Roti Delight, "Joy's Roti Shop", whatever. But I will tell you, when you go up there, all the diaspora people from T&T, they go there. They are all there. I have met hundreds of people there at this diaspora event. You know, I really did not intend to spend so much time, but somebody told me last night that somebody from their side was quarreling that I went by Joy's Roti. Well, I will urge any Trini that goes in that part of the world you should go visit Joy's Roti Delight—because it is not only roti, you know. By the way, they do not only have roti, you know—but you all have a problem with roti, but you will eat it every day.

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Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Let me move on. Mr. Speaker, I drifted a bit. I will come off, okay? So, I went to that diaspora event. It is in Lauderhill, Florida, and I urge anybody visiting that part of the world to please go to Joy's Roti Delight in Lauderhill, Florida. Then they said that the Government is being run from Joy's Roti Shop. "Wow, Sheila, you reach far." I have not visited there in maybe two or three years. So whatever lies your narrative is, please change them.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: But you will not change, so continue. Whilst I was there, I had the great honour and privilege of meeting Mayor Denise Grant.

Hon. Member: She was there.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: She was there, and not only was she there—

Mr. Padarath: She likes the roti—

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: She liked the roti, too. And not only was she there, but she issued a proclamation of honour to me.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And the proclamation from the Mayor there in Lauderhill, whom I have never met before personally, and that proclamation was to name March 8th, Kamla Persad-Bissessar Day.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you, Mayor. Thank you, Mayor. Thank you so much, Mayor. Of course, I also want to thank and honour this businesswoman. Now Joy—what is her husband's name? He has now passed, God rest his soul, and his wife runs the business; her name is Sheila Sawh, and I

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want to thank her and her family—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—for opening their doors to us and members of our diaspora, our community. You know, I was shocked—Minister Saddam, you are watching me closely because you were also there, were you not? When you get the chance. I was surprised, pleasantly, at the amount of persons who came for this diaspora event. They played tassa. They played steelpan. They sing, some dance, I did not, sorry, but Sheila danced, by the way. She did a little something. It was amazing. So I want to thank them all. It was very moving to me, and those in the delegation with me, to see so many T&T nationals fly over in South Florida, there, in Lauderhill. We congratulate them all. They have made a new life, but their liver-string is still bearing in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And they tell me, always, that those who eat the cascadura, the legend says, no matter where you may wander, your home is Trinidad and Tobago. You end your days here, and many of them would like to come home, many excited about coming home, and I am inviting them, come, let us build our nation together. Many had fled, many had left.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Then, on my last day there, on my way leaving, I also took the opportunity to visit our consulate, to thank our very hard-working staff—why are you looking so worried, Ma'am? St Ann's East looks very worried. I visited the consulate.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I am enjoying the contribution.

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Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: You know what, Ma'am? Can I tell you? Maybe you do not know. They said the last time a Prime Minister visited the Trinidad and Tobago consulate in Miami was when I visited them in my first incarnation as Prime Minister.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I thank that very hard-working staff at the consulate, not one was picked by me or us in this Government. They were all picked under your Government, but they said, "No Prime Minister—

Mr. Padarath: They do not care for people.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: —no Prime Minister". The last time a Prime Minister came was when I visited in my first incarnation as Prime Minister. I thank them for their hard work. They represent our country abroad with dedication and pride, and I thank them on your behalf, on my behalf, and the people of T&T. So, as I close, Mr. Speaker, this trip was not just a diplomatic visit. It was not just "go there, we shake hand and smile and walk away". No it was not. It was a strategic victory for Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: It was a win for security and safety. It was a win for our economy, our economy, you know, because of the partnerships. It was a win for the future of our nation. T&T's Government was present. T&T's Government was heard. T&T's Government will continue to stand strong in defence of law-abiding citizens. When the UNC wins, law-abiding citizens win. I thank you very much.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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 (Coalition) (cont'd)
 Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC (cont'd)

Mr. Speaker: One question for elucidation. Diego Martin North/East.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Colm Imbert (*Diego Martin North/East*): In light of the allegations made, is the Prime Minister aware that the US sought the extradition of two UNC operatives because money stolen in the controversial Piarco Airport project was flagged by the DEA as being sent to a drug cartel in Colombia by those UNC operatives?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you very much. MP, no. I am not aware, but you know what I know?

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

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: No, no, no. What I am aware of is that drug money finances the Balisier house.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous laughter and desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Can I speak, Sir? Can I be allowed to speak?

Mr. Speaker: Can we get some silence? Stop arguing across the corridors, Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: I will send you the expedition warrant.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I do not want to see it. You know what I will tell you? I am aware—and we now have lists, remember? Homeland Security has lists.

Hon. Member: Send them the list.

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Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Okay, I will send you the list. Maybe your name is on the list. What I am aware of is that drug money financed Balisier house.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

2.30 p.m.

LAW REVISION (AMDT.) BILL, 2026.

Mr. Speaker: Minister of Land and Legal Affairs.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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. Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that a Bill entitled:

A Bill to amend the Law Revision Act Chap. 3:03; be now read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, before I begin, it is my honour and my privilege to stand as a Member in this House under the leadership of the Member for Siparia—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein:—who is taking our country into high places after 10 years of being stagnant under incompetent leadership—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein:—by my colleagues from the other side. In 10 years, Mr. Speaker, they had two Prime Ministers and nothing to show for that. Nothing to show for that except 5,000 persons being murdered. We now have a Prime Minister who is taking the leadership in this fight against crime to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago is safe. While I am on that point, Mr. Speaker, this Bill deals with progressing and modernizing the legal system to ensure that citizens can now have official versions

of the law available online so they can know what the law is. This move, Mr. Speaker—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein:—comes at a very timely occasion, because as the Minister of Land and Legal Affairs, entrusted with the responsibility of the Law Revision Commission—the statutory body with the ability to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago maintains official versions of the law—we are now taking a simple but very progressive step to ensure that the official versions of the laws are made online, and you do not have to have these large, bound printed copies of the laws as the only official version. But, Mr. Speaker, I want to be absolutely clear, we are not, at this point in time, getting rid of the printed copies. The printed copies will remain as official versions together with the online version. There are particular clauses in the Bill I will address, Mr. Speaker, with this particular procedure in terms of which version of the law will take precedence.

Mr. Speaker, the Law Revision Commission, which is established by the Law Revision Act, is currently in the process of revising our laws. The reason why we are dealing with this exercise is because: One, you have the ability to access laws online. Two, it will now be cheaper for Trinidad and Tobago. And, three, modern democracies allow for citizens to have free and available access to the laws. It is a simple, basic principle that any democracy should be based upon, that citizens who are governed by laws must understand the laws that they have to be governed by.

So, Mr. Speaker, there are three particular processes in this matter. One, you have the consolidation of the laws; two, you have the revision of the laws; and then you have three, the supplements of the revised laws. The consolidation takes place on an ongoing basis, Mr. Speaker, and I want to explain this. When the Parliament

passes various pieces of legislation, you can do two things. You can introduce a new Act of Parliament, or you can have an Act of Parliament that amends an existing Act. The Law Revision Commission will consolidate those amendments and place them within the parent Act, and therefore, you have consolidated versions.

The difference between the consolidation and the revised law is this: In the revised under section 4 of the Law Revision Commission Act, Mr. Speaker, it is the law being revised at a particular date, which is the revision date and placed in printed form. There have been three revised laws so far based on our—two, sorry, Mr. Speaker. We have the 1980 revised laws, then you have the 2006 revised laws, which were published in 2007, and then you have the supplements to the revised laws. So, at the date of revision, you would have further supplements that would come to replace the bound copies of the law.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform the House of what the costs to the taxpayers of these revised laws are. In 2006, the *Revised Editions of the Laws*, which was printed in the year 2007, cost the taxpayers \$13 million. The first supplement to the 2006 *Revised Edition of the Laws* in 2010 cost the taxpayers \$2.8 million. In 2012, we had the second supplement to the 2006 *Revised Edition*, which cost \$3 million. The third supplement to the 2006 revised laws, which was printed in 2014, and cost the taxpayers \$1.82 million dollars. The fourth supplement to the 2006 *Revised Edition of the Laws*, printed in 2015, cost the taxpayers \$1.85 million. And, the fifth supplement to the 2006 *Revised Edition of the Laws*, printed in the year 2019, cost \$1.9 million.

Mr. Speaker, you being a very trained, celebrated practitioner in the legal framework and profession of Trinidad and Tobago, would understand that these printed versions of the law—you often see them in the red binders in lawyers'

chambers—that you have to manually update the laws. So when the revised laws are printed and placed in these binders, and the supplements come, you have to physically take out the pages of the law and replace them with the new pages of the law, which, at this point in time, with all of this modern technology, should not be happening. So, therefore, this particular piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, will ensure that that does not happen because you will now have online versions of the law. But this project, Mr. Speaker, started with a UNC Government in the period 2010 to 2015.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Many of us, Mr. Speaker, many of us used the *Digital Legislative Library* website to download versions of the law. That, Mr. Speaker, was launched under a Persad-Bissessar administration in August 2015 for the first time, bringing those laws to a modern website; 11 years ago, Mr. Speaker. And what happened then—we are now progressing because that system would have been outdated and so on because of the passage and the fluxion of time. So, Mr. Speaker, we are currently in the process at the Law Revision Commission of creating consolidated versions of the law because it is the intention of this Government to have a new or revised edition of the law, and that announcement will be made very soon. So we will have these new online versions of the law being placed on a new website and so on.

Mr. Speaker, when one looks at the various clauses of the Bill, being a very short Bill itself, at clause 1 of the Bill, provides for the short title of the Bill to amend the Law Revision Act. And, the effect of the amendment would be to put in effect the electronic version of the law on an equal footing as its printed counterpart; both would be official and authoritative.

At clause 2 of the Bill, Mr. Speaker, we are placing a proclamation clause on

the Bill, and I will explain why. You see, Mr. Speaker, the Bill provides for various security measures and so on that would have to complement the publishing of the official versions of the law. And, at this point in time, the Law Revision Commission is in the process of having these systems in place, so therefore when these security measures and features are placed and confirmed, there will be a proclamation of the Act. And, at that date, it will be an official publication of the online versions of the law. So, what we are creating now, Mr. Speaker, is the legislative environment or the framework to ensure that the Law Revision Commission can complete this new mandate because this is a new mandate that the Commission is being given.

Mr. Speaker, at clause 4 of the Bill, clause 4, deals with the amendment to section 2 of the Act in terms of the definition section where we are now going to include the—

““designated website”—which—“means the website specified in an Order”—made—“under section 5A(1);”

And we now have the definition of PDF as the laws will be published in a PDF format. But, when we go on to clause 5, you will see that the Minister can create any other format, and this must be done by Order. Mr. Speaker, at clause 5 of the Bill:

5A. (1) The Minister...by Order...”—will—“...designate a website as the sole official website for the publication of electronic versions of the...”—law.

At subclause 2:

The—“...electronic version of the...”—law—“...that is published on the designated website shall be in”—the—“PDF...format...”—or it will be in a format that can be designated by—“...the Minister...”—but it must be

done—“...by Order...”—which is approved.

Also:

The—“...electronic copy or printout of...”—the—“...electronic version of...”—the Law—“...unless the contrary is proven, be deemed to be the official and authoritative if:

The conditions are:

- “(a) it is accessed or downloaded from the designated website;
- (b) it is in PDF...”—format.
- “(c) it meets the prescribed requirements with respect to-
 - (i) the manner in which the electronic copy or printout is created, recorded, transmitted, stored, authenticated, received, displayed or perceived; and
 - (ii) any statement, mark or certification associated with the creation, recording, transmission, storage, authentication, reception, display or perception of the electronic copy or printout.”

All that simply says, Mr. Speaker, is that there will be a certification mark on the document to determine the printout.

Mr. Speaker, currently, you have the Judiciary that would issue orders—court orders—n electronic versions. You can have probate grants being issued electronically now. And on the side of the document, on the margins of the document, you will see QR codes, you will see E-Vrfy systems, and so on, which will determine the authenticity of that document that is being presented or printed out. And that is a similar model or format which the Law Revision Commission, in this instance, and in this particular clause, will be empowered to do to ensure that the laws that are published online will, in fact, be official, and can be

authenticated. Because, Mr. Speaker, we all know that there is mischief out there, and we are, at this point in time, preventing any mischief from occurring.

At the new clause 5(B), Mr. Speaker, this says:

“5B. On or after the coming into operation of the Law Revision (Amendment) Act, 2026, where there is any inconsistency between the Laws published under section 5 and...electronic...”—versions—“...of the...”—law—“...published under section 5A the electronic version of the...”—law—“...shall prevail over the Laws published under section 5 to the extent of the inconsistency.”

Why, Mr. Speaker? Because the online versions of the law will in fact be a more up-to-date version of the law as compared to the printed counterpart so therefore we are using—and the policy direction is that we are using the laws that are more up-to-date as the one that shall prevail. At 5(C), Mr. Speaker, the Law Revision Commission has the power to change or correct:

the “...law which is already published on the designated website, the Commission shall publish on the designated website, a notice of the change or correction.’.”

So if any changes or corrections are made to any of the laws, a notice must be placed on the website indicating to the public that this is in fact a correction or an amendment—a change, sorry, not an amendment, a change or correction to the law, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, those are the relevant clauses of the Bill. It is a very short Bill, a very have progressive Bill. But what we have done, Mr. Speaker, is we have learned from other jurisdictions in terms of how they would have managed a similar system. For example, we have countries like Singapore, Canada and Australia that already have their laws online. And, Mr. Speaker, the Parliament,

you can find Acts of Parliament online, but they are not official. You can, in fact, you can have a court hearing or a court sitting online, but the laws are not being made online in terms of an official copy.

Mr. Speaker, all of us, all of us in this Parliament, rely heavily on the Digital Legislative Library, but we cannot use it as official versions of the law. So, for example, in Canada, under their Legislation Revision and Consolidation Act 1985, has allowed for official online versions since 2009 via the Justice website. And most provinces have adopted similar legislation, including the Ontario Legislation Act of 2006. The Department of Justice regularly updates consolidated laws on the Justice Laws website, and these online versions are legally authoritative for court purposes. Section 31 of the Legislation Revision and Consolidation Act provides that:

“31 (1). Every copy of a consolidated statute or consolidated regulation published by the Minister in either print or electronic form is evidence of that statute or regulation and of its...”—content—“...and every copy purporting to be published by the Minister is deemed to be so published, unless the contrary is shown.”

In Singapore, Mr. Speaker, the Revised Edition of Laws 1983 Act by the Electronic Gazette and Legislation Act 2025 (No. 5 of 2025) gives authoritative status to electronic versions of revised editions and provides that they are to be judicially recognized.

2.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, in Australia, the Federal Register of Legislation provides authoritative whole-of-government digital access to Commonwealth laws. Under their Electronic Transactions Act 1999, it ensures that electronic communications and documents are as legally and valid as paper-based versions. If the electronic

copies accessed at or downloaded from an approved website in a format prescribed by the rules, that is similar to what we are doing in this Bill, and two, either the website or electronic copy indicates in a way prescribed by the rules that such a copy is an authorized version. This is in Australia. A printed copy of an electronic version of a revised law or compilation of laws is also recognized as an authorized version of the law if the copy indicates in a way prescribed by the rules that is an authorized version and that is based on their section 15(z).

Mr. Speaker, this particular piece of legislation, in order for it to be a success, there are many moving parts. The Parliament alone is not where legislation starts and ends. It starts, Mr. Speaker, at the stage of sometimes consultation. It goes into policy, from policy into the Cabinet, from the Cabinet into the Office of the Attorney General for drafting, from legislative language into the Parliament for passage. After passage here, Mr. Speaker, it goes to the President's Office. From the President's Office, it goes to the Government Printery before it can, in fact, be law.

So, therefore, we have several moving parts that have to move in synergy before this particular piece of legislation can, in fact, be properly enacted, and that is what we are doing, Mr. Speaker. We are at this point in time creating the legislative environment to make this piece of legislation work.

And in fact, I heard recently one of my colleagues on the other side complained that they have no official, no consolidated versions of the law, and so on, and it is difficult to manage, especially when we are dealing with miscellaneous provisions Bills. And even when I was in Opposition, Mr. Speaker, I complained bitterly that when you have miscellaneous provisions Bills, amending other miscellaneous provisions Bills, you have to now track language, you have to track various pieces of legislation, and it is sometimes very easy for an error to be

made. Even the CPC's department sometimes would pick up errors, in terms of typos or cross-referencing errors. Many times it came to this Parliament, because it is very difficult to track these amendments, and so on. So this, Mr. Speaker, will make the job of all parliamentarians much easier. So I think you all should thank the Government for that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: So, Mr. Speaker, this is a very progressive move by this Government. I am happy to report that this Bill was passed in the other place, and we received unanimous support for this Bill, and I hope that this is in fact the intention of this House also, Mr. Speaker, and I thank you very much. I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Stuart Young SC (*Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I sat there and I listened with interest to my friend as he piloted this, and the term that came to mind that is quite a topic right now in the United States, is filibustering.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill is a short one and proposing very progressive amendments to the parent legislation that is the Law Revision Act, and I can say at the outset that as we have always given the commitment on this side, the PNM Opposition, we will support progressive law and good law, and today we will do so.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: But it is necessary to put things in context, as Mr. Speaker is very well aware. As I listened to my friend from Baratavia/San Juan speak about the red books, some of us practitioners in here would recall the black books that came way before the red books, and the painful exercise as young as—

Mr. Speaker: Some of us recall the brown books too, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. S. Young SC: Well, you are ageing yourself now, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. S. Young SC: The brown books are the ordinances.

Mr. Speaker: The brown books are the 1950 laws.

Mr. S. Young SC: Correct. But those we inherited as our ordinances. Mr. Speaker, there were a few, I believe, not intentional, but a few submissions made by the Member for Barataria/San Juan that may mislead the population. So I would like to just start with that.

What is being proposed here today are specific amendments to the Law Revision Act. When one looks at the Law Revision Act, and carefully, at the start, it is:

“An Act to provide for the Revision of the Laws of Trinidad and Tobago and for matters connected therewith.”

And in particular, “Laws” carries the definition and it is not being amended here today:

“‘Laws’ means the revised edition of the written laws of Trinidad and Tobago referred to in section 4;”

So it is not that laws that are passed in the House and in the other place and that are assented to, et cetera, immediately can just be put up on the official designated website. It still has to go through the process as set out in the Law Revision Act. And in particular, when one looks at section 4 of that parent legislation, it states, and this has to be followed:

“The Commission shall prepare, publish and maintain a revised edition of

the

written laws of Trinidad and Tobago (to be called the Laws of Trinidad and Tobago) in accordance with the provisions of this Act.”

And in particular, what this Bill—when one looks at it and puts it into its right context—is about, is really fulfilling the legal requirements for the use of online printed versions of the law in the courtroom. And that is why it really is—it talks about laws now published on the official website shall be subject to judicial notice and no longer require the court to certify it and for you to walk with a certified copy. But I just caution my friend that in implementing this piece of progressive legislation, you still are required to go through and make sure that you have in place first the published, the hard copy published versions of the amended legislation before you can upload it to become the official law.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: Another area of concern that we will flag is, it does provide that the Minister may make regulations prescribing any of the matters in the new subsection (3)(c) of the new 5A. And those regulations, it would have been particularly useful for us to have had it before us so we could have looked at it, maybe assisted, especially from a practitioner’s point of view, as to some of the safeguards that should be taken into account and put in place. So I am looking at the new amended 5A(3). You will see subsection (4) refers to:

“The Minister may make regulations prescribing any of the matters in subsection (3)(c).”

And (3)(c) is the access to a download from a designated website; that it is in PDF form. I assume that there are other areas of technology, especially that are evolving beyond PDF, but that would suffice for now and if it needs to be amended in the future, or maybe in considering and drafting the regulations. You can leave

it open enough there for other technological advances.

Mr. Hosein: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. S. Young SC: Well, correct, so you may do it via order at 5A(2).

So, Mr. Speaker, another area of concern for us is when one looks at your new proposed 5B, 5B, the new 5B:

“On or after the coming into operation of the Law Revision (Amendment) Act, 2026, where there is any inconsistency between the Laws published under section 5...”

—which are of course the hard print laws, and:

“...an electronic version of the Laws published under section 5A...”

—and this is the language that we must be particularly careful about:

“...the electronic version of the Laws shall prevail over the Laws published under section 5 to the extent of the inconsistency.”

And now, Mr. Speaker, in looking at that, I remind of my earlier submission that the laws that will be published online have to have gone through the process to become official law under section 4 in the first place. So one questions why is this provision in here, in particular? And if it is that there is in fact an inconsistency, the dilemma that one will face and can potentially face in litigation before a court.

So for example, if one is relying on the online version on the designated website, and that is incorrect, because some error has been made, God forbid it is hacking or whatever it is, but put that aside, that an error is made as we know happens, very frequently happens here when we are amending laws, that an error is picked up, and that is published now, and that is now the electronic version of the laws. And one goes to court on the basis of that, because not everyone has the privilege and the benefit of sitting as we do in this House, and some in the other place, to know what is the current state of laws and what is being amended. So a

practitioner picks up the law, advises the client on the online version, which is actually incorrect, but on an interpretation, a literal interpretation of this new section 5B, that electronic version now will prevail over the published law, and to the extent of the inconsistency. This has very, very far-reaching and dangerous consequences if such an occurrence takes place, Mr. Speaker.

And I would ask my friends on the other side to consider that very carefully, because it can lead to litigation against the State. It can also affect in litigation between private parties, if a party is relying on an incorrect version of the law that is the electronic version, and it is inconsistent to the correct version which is the printed version. How does this apply? How does that work?

So I understand why a draftsman may have thought they are foreseeing a potential difficulty where the online version is advanced, because the use of technology, they have literally hustled the process and published it electronically online, which is why I started by saying, but hold on, cautiously, that will not be an official law. Because you still have to go through the process to qualify under section 4 of the Act. So I flag that for my friends on the other side.

There is another issue that I believe should be looked at, which is take a look at section 10 of the parent legislation, the Law Revision Act. And section 10 says, 10(1):

“The Commission shall cause a copy of every page authorised to appear in the Laws to be delivered as soon as practicable after publication to the Attorney General, to the Clerk of the House of Representatives, to the Clerk of the Senate, to the Registrar of the Supreme Court and to the Government Archivist.”

How does that now sit as well? I assume that that obligation will continue, and what we really have to do is make sure, those in my friends' department, have to

make sure that the process is almost, if not completely, a simultaneous process. So do not put the cart before the horse. Do not jump ahead.

Now, the online version that you are providing for here today, certainly makes life a lot easier, a lot simpler, especially when it comes to the consolidation of legislation. However, what you have proposed here today does not remove the obligations of the parent legislation. It does not just dispel it. So it is not one—one may think that with the passage of this Bill here today, once we agree to legislation, and as you use the miscellaneous provisions Act, that we have frequently done, one of the last occasions we were here was to deal with FATF, or other occasions we are amending a number of pieces of legislation. That is then done online, and then you can immediately publish it on the website, and that becomes the official law.

3.00p.m.

According to what you have proposed, it is not that simple. You may have to bring further amendments to other areas of the parent legislation if that is what you are trying to achieve. But the usefulness of what is here before us today is once you designate a website, and once you take the corrected, printed, certified laws—of course, certified by the Law Revision Commission, that is the body charged with the responsibility to say, “Right, this is the correct version of law”—and you upload that onto the designated website, using the amendments that will pass today, that then becomes the law.

I just wanted the opportunity to flag that to the Government, to take these concerns into account and make sure we do not end up into a situation where we are faced with unnecessary litigation in a litigious society, where someone then is challenging, “Well, look, I use the online version,” and the online version, according to the new section 5B, the electronic version takes precedent. And it is

clear on the face of it that that not the correct version of the law, because it has not gone through the certification process, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, as I said at the outset, the commitment was given from day one by the Leader of the Opposition. And we are reminded of it consistently that this PNM Opposition will support good law and progressive law, not in shallow or hollow words, as we used to hear all of the time, unfortunately, by the other side just as a catchphrase. I raise those concerns, and in particular the last part of the new section 5B, that the:

“...electronic version of the Laws shall prevail over the Laws published under section 5 to the extent of the inconsistency.”

Because I can certainly see, on an interpretation summons, that will present particular difficulty as to how does that work when you consider the wholeness of the parent legislation, the Law Revision Act.

So, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Opposition, those are our contributions to this Bill here today.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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. I think this may be our shortest debate.

Hon. Member: Yeah.

Hon. S. Hosein: But, Mr. Speaker, I took notice of some of the points my colleague from Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West would have made. Some of the submissions that he would have made would be helpful, and some may not be so helpful, so I intended to address each and every one of his submissions.

Mr. Speaker, the first point that my colleague raised is that we must go through the process as outlined in the Law Revision Act, and my friend would have taken us to section 4 of the Law Revision Act. Section 4, for the record, says that:

“The Commission shall prepare,”—so it is mandatory—“publish and maintain a revised edition of the written laws of Trinidad and Tobago (to be called the Laws of Trinidad and Tobago) in accordance with the provisions of this Act.”

And then, Mr. Speaker, the Act goes on to explain the form of publication, in terms of inclusion or removal of pages and so on. Then it goes to talk about the revision date and the special revision date, and I am stopping at those particular provisions because those are what I will use to respond to my friend.

If one looks at section 5 of the parent Act, it says this, that:

“The Laws shall be published in loose-leaf form or in such other form as the Commission may determine and shall comprise such pages as may be authorised to be included therein under section 6.”

And section 6 deals with, the “Inclusion or removal of pages to be authorised by Order”.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the reason I raised this point is that when you look at the language of section 5, it gives you two options, the Law Revision:

“...shall...”—publish—“...in loose-leaf form or in such other form as the Commission may determine...”

Now, we looked at this, very closely, and thought, well, this could, in fact, mean electronic versions also. But when one goes to section 15 of the Act, what section 15 says—this deals with laws of Trinidad and Tobago which are constituted in the Statute Book. Section 15 of the Act says that:

“Subject to sections 14 and 17, the pages duly authorised for inclusion in the

Laws shall, in all Courts and for all purposes, be the proper Statute Book of Trinidad and Tobago in respect of the written laws contained therein as in operation on the last revision date; and all such written laws shall be judicially noticed.”

With the use of that language there, Mr. Speaker, we believe that we had to come to this Parliament in order to be very clear in our intention to say that it will be electronic versions of the law.

What we are doing, Mr. Speaker, is that it is not a shortcutting of the entire process. If you realize, when you look at the language of the Bill, we are keeping all of the existing processes when it comes to the printed law and the official versions of the law will now be made in another format, which is the online version of the law. So I can tell my friend, on his first submission that we will go through all of the processes of the law. However, we now need to connect everybody, because we have to connect the CPC's department, we have to connect the Parliament, we have to connect the President's House, we have to connect the Government Printery, and also the Law Revision Commission when you are going to publish. I would imagine—and my friend will be familiar, when you download certain laws, for example, on the UK website, there will be a disclaimer to say that this is the law at this date.

So, my friend raised a concern that we can be open to litigation, but with the inclusion of those disclaimers, which will, in fact, come within the regulations, as my friend outlined, that the Minister has the power to make, those particular matters will be addressed then, in terms of the disclaimer, to prevent the State from any unnecessary litigation. And, Mr. Speaker that is something that we have looked at, this being a very responsible Government.

Mr. Speaker, my friend also raised an issue with respect to the creation of the

regulations as outlined in new section 5A(4), where:

“The Minister may make regulations prescribing any of the matters in subsection 3(c).”

And subsection 3(c) would have been dealing with the printout of the electronic versions of the law, and the authentication of it, and also the certification of it. And my friend said, you know, it would have been very helpful if the draft could have been provided to the Parliament and so on. What I can say is because of the technology and the evolving matters, in terms of testing and so on, those particular matters will, in fact, inform the final version of the regulations in terms of the publication and printout of the law.

I can tell my friend, it is not new, as he is well aware, as I outlined it when I was piloting the Bill. The Judiciary has a way of authenticating their documents, and we have looked at what the Judiciary has done, being the Law Revision Commission, and in terms of the testing and so on of a similar type of technology. And I have, in fact, received some complaints that maybe the Digital Legislative Library website may not be so user-friendly. We intend to make this new website, here very much user-friendly, because we understand that not only practitioners use it, or parliamentarians, or researchers, but general members of the public should be able to go on to the website and be guided very easily with respect to the laws.

I remember, Mr. Speaker, a proposal came whether or not we should include AI into the website, and I was very hesitant to say that we could incorporate it because that may open us up to litigation, because some member of the public might just prompt a response and say, “What is the law on an assault?” And it gives all sorts of answers—or what is the law, or what is the process for registering a deed of conveyance or a deed of gift or so on, and if the wrong answer is

generated by the official website, designated by the Minister, it opens up the State to an enormous amount of litigation. So, we are very hesitant to include an AI component to the new website that we are going to designate as the official website that will house the official versions of the law.

Another important point my friend raised, and he described it as a dangerous matter, is with respect to section 5B, which deals with the official versions of the law and which version shall prevail. Now, we indicated that the electronic version of the law would prevail over the printed version of the law. We believe that the electronic version will be a more up-to-date version, and let me explain. Because when you deal with the printed version of the law, first, you have to go by order, and have a new revision date, and then you have to have the supplements before you can have the printed official versions. And the last supplement that was printed, it would have been made in 2019, the last supplements to the revised laws of 2006. So, therefore, we will be in a situation where you will now have to continuously be making revised editions of the printed laws, which will increase the cost of printing and so on, and then, as I explained earlier, the manual replacing of the loose-leaf of the binders and so on.

So, we have—I have noted my friend's concerns but we are comfortable on this side, Mr. Speaker, because other jurisdictions would have done similar types of law in terms of having the online version, being the more up-to-date version, prevail over the written versions of the law.

The last point my friend made was with respect to section 10 of to Act. Section 10 of the Act says that:

“(1) The Commission shall cause a copy of every page authorised to appear in the Laws to be delivered as soon as practicable after publication to the Attorney General, to the Clerk of the House of Representatives, to the Clerk

of the Senate, to the Registrar of the Supreme Court and to the Government Archivist.”

So, of course, these versions of the law will appear online, they will be made available to all of these offices. That is the first point. Secondly, if we are doing the printed versions of the law to keep up-to-date with the official online versions of the law, we are mandated by section 10 to do this. But my friend made a very—he made an intelligent contribution on this particular point as compared to his counterpart in the Senate.

Now, Sen. Al-Rawi—

Hon. Member: [*Laughter*]—

Mr. Lee: We know why. We know why.

Hon. S. Hosein:—made a most incredible submission where he said that, Mr. Speaker, if we do not amend the section, that the State will be open to liability and they will file a judicial review action against you, and they will get a *mandamus* against the Law Revision Commission to ensure that we do this.

Mr. Speaker, I was appalled at that submission, and I am happy my friend from Port of Spain North/ St. Ann’s West, who is a much better attorney than the former Member of Parliament for San Fernando West is, to make a much more intelligent submission on this point—

Mr. Lee: “And I hear he take 45 minutes in the Senate.”

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, and he took 45 minutes to say absolutely nothing. When I heard the submission from my friend, I thought that he changed his mind in terms of supporting the legislation, but I am very comforted that—in fact, as I said before, that whatever are the existing obligations, as according to the written law as is, will remain, but now the electronic version will operate in concurrent manner with printed versions of the law. So, it is a very simple, simple matter that

we are dealing with here today.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Cabinet for approving this particular matter and for having this particular piece of law drafted in a very expeditious manner by the Office of the Attorney General, and brought here for the attention of this House, and passage. Mr. Speaker, 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.

3.15 p.m.

House in Committee

Mr. Chairman: I understand there are proposed amendments which have not been circulated. Are there substantial amendments, Minister?

Mr. Hosein: No.

Mr. Speaker: No. I am told there are no substantial amendments. What I propose to do is to suspend and return at 3:30, if that is convenient for everyone. Thank you.

3.17 p.m.: *Committee suspended.*

3.40 p.m.: *Committee resumed.*

Clauses 1 to 3.

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

Clause 4.

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

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, we have a simple amendment here, and it is to create a definition of what “electronic version of the

Laws” means. And for the record, the amendment is that:

“electronic version of the Laws means a written law that is published in accordance with ‘section 5A(2);’”

Mr. Young SC: Mr. Speaker, we had a very brief opportunity to take a look at the proposed amendments and to have some brief discussions with the Government side. And this particular proposed amendment actually ties up the point that was being made during the debate, where there is a specific definition of laws that would not have included “electronic version”.

Mr. Hosein: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: So I am happy to see this.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause4, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause5.

Question proposed: That clause5 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Mr. Hosein: Mr.Chair, we have two amendments to clause5. The first amendment being that clause5A(3)(b):

“...insert after the word “PDF” the words “or such other approved format; and”

That would also be consistent with the amendment being proposed in 5A(2), because the Minister can have the power by order to approve any other format other than PDF. So when we looked at 5A(3), we also included it to be any other format after the word “PDF”.

Mr. Young SC: Mr. Chair, again, if one were following the debate, this is something that we drew reference to, so I am quite pleased to see this by the addition of the words “or such other approved format”. What it does is, without

even the need for the Order, it gives the Minister the opportunity to cover the basis as technology becomes more available. So we are in agreement with that.

Mr. Hosein: And Mr. Chair, the second amendment is 5C.

“New proposed section 5C would provide that where a change or a correction is made to any written law already published on the designated website, the Commission shall publish a Notice of such change or correction.”

Clause 5C deals with the change or correction. What we have done is that we have removed the word “change” because of the editorial changes that can be made. It would mean that every single time they exercise a power for minor changes and so on, which they are allowed to do, it has to be published. So we are suggesting that it only be restricted to corrections of the actual law. And we have removed the words “written law” and included “electronic version of the Laws”, as this subsection deals specifically with electronic version of the laws.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: How does this address the issue of an error in the published version?

Mr. Hosein: In the published version—do you mean written or online?

Mr. Imbert: The electronically published version. The issue of you are saying that what is published shall prevail, and supposes an error in what is published electronically.

Mr. Hosein: Right. So what happens there, Member, is that every time a correction is made, there would be a Notice being published. And when I explained, when I wound up the debate, is that there will be stamps to say that the law is at this date, so therefore—

Mr. Imbert: Correct.

Mr. Hosein: That is the version that will prevail.

Mr. Imbert: So I got that part. So that takes you part of the way. But supposed what is published at this date electronically is inaccurate.

Mr. Hosein: Well, what happens is that the Commission—before they even reach at that stage, even if there is a correction, they will have to publish the Notice. So the Notice will be made public to show the change.

Mr. Young SC: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Imbert: No, I am on the—sorry. I am taking the opportunity in terms of amendments to deal with an issue in clause 5, where you say that what is published electronically will prevail. Okay? What happens—

Mr. Young SC: If I may—

Mr. Imbert: Sorry. You can go ahead.

Mr. Young SC: No, no. The Member for Diego Martin North/East is referring to clause 5B as proposed:“...the electronic version of the Laws...shall prevail...”—over the laws. That is what he is referring to.

Mr. Imbert: What I am saying is that if there is a mistake in that, how does this deal with that? Because this is post facto.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, even in the written versions, if you look at section 21 of the Parent Act, also, in the written version that can also happen.

Mr. Imbert: Correct.

Mr. Hosein: The printed version, not written. The printed version can have errors—

Member: Correct.

Mr. Hosein: And those Notices are done ex post facto also.

Mr. Imbert: Correct, correct, correct.

Mr. Hosein: So it is just a consistency here with respect to that. Because the

official version of Law currently, even with an error, is the printed version. And the corrections come ex post facto, which is the same thing that we are proposing here in terms of a consistency. So if there is an error in the publication of the online version, we now have a power here specific—

Mr. Imbert: To correct.

Mr. Hosein: Yes, to correct.

Mr. Imbert: I saw that. I go that, but before it is corrected, someone may avail himself of what is electronically published and use that in litigation.

Mr. Hosein: What we are doing here is no change in terms of the current law as it appears for printed versions of the law. It is just making it consistent with the online version of the law, and we support this amendment.

Mr. Imbert: But Minister, is there a way to deal with that? Because if somebody is dealing with a matter in court, and they quote or use an inaccurate version of the Law, what would happen?

Mr. Hosein: I think the amendment would capture it, Member.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. This appears to me to be after the fact, but that is okay.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 5, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 6.

Question proposed: That clause 6 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, I have a question.

Mr. Chairman: Yes?

Mr. Imbert: You say that this section shall not apply to electronic versions of the laws.

Mr. Young SC: That is a new one, so they have to amend—

Mr. Imbert: Yeah, yeah.

[Device goes off]

Mr. Chairman: May I ask who has their phone on to please turn it off?

Mr. Imbert: Not me. Not I.

Mr. Young SC: No, but then we can agree to clause—

Mr. Chairman: That is a new clause.

Mr. Imbert: Yes. I am dealing with this. In this amendment, you say this section shall not apply to an electronic version of the laws. Do you want to explain?

Mr. Hosein: That should be a new clause⁷. So we are confirming clause⁶, and then we will go to the second reading of the new clause⁷. That should be new clause⁷.

Mr. Young SC: So it should be new clause 7?

Mr. Hosein: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Because on the amendment, you said new clause 6.

Mr. Imbert: But it is amending 6, not so?

Mr. Hosein: It is amending the parent 6.

Mr. Imbert: Yeah, I am looking at the parent Act right now.

Mr. Hosein: Yes, but if you watch the Bill, the Bill only goes up to clause 6.

Mr. Imbert: No, I got that.

Mr. Hosein: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: So, I am dealing with the effect of this amendment.

Mr. Hosein: We did not reach there yet. I think the Speaker has to put the question.

Mr. Imbert: Alright, okay.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause⁶ ordered to stand part of the Bill.

3.40 p.m.

New clause 7.

New clause 7 *Insert after clause 5 the following clause:*

“Section 6 6. The Act is amended in section 6
 amended by inserting after subsection (3), the
 following subsection:

“(4) This section shall not
 apply to an electronic
 version of the Laws.”.

New clause 7 read the first time.

Question proposed: That new clause 7 be read a second time.

Mr. Hosein: Just for the record, Mr. Speaker, I will read the amendments into the record. The Act is amended in section 6 by inserting after subsection 3 the following subsection:

Subsection 4. This section shall not apply to an electronic vision of the laws.

What this amendment simply does, Mr. Speaker, is, because of the archaic existing parent Act, it actually talks about the inclusion and removal of physical pages from the laws. So, what we are doing here, Mr. Speaker, is that we make it explicitly clear that this section does not apply to the online versions, because it simply does not.

Mr. Imbert: Yeah, but I have a question on that.

Mr. Hosein: Sure.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, in 6(3), it speaks about overleaf. So, you know, clearly it is talking about a paper thing, but in one it is not clear. A PDF has electronic pages in it?

Mr. Hosein: Yes, but you remember Minister based on clause 5A, B, C—the new ones in the Bill—5A, B, C—the new laws will be published electronically on a website. The other powers of the Commission, in terms of what we just dealt with, in terms of corrections, in terms of any amendments as in the existing law, will appear electronically. This section talks about actually removing the physical pages from the binders to make it the official version of the law and that cannot apply to the electronic vision.

Mr. Imbert: I got that, but it is in PDF form and a PDF is comprised of pages. So, are you saying that this, which speaks to pages and does not in every subsection speak to physical pages, will not apply to the pages in the PDF?

Mr. Hosein: The 5C that we just passed will cover that issue that you are talking about.

Mr. Imbert: All right, okay, if you say so.

[Mr. Speaker confers with the Clerk]

Mr. Chairman: This is new clause 7, right? Minister, this has been labelled new clause 7.

Question put and agreed to.

Question proposed: That new clause 7 be added to the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

New clause 7 added to the Bill.

New clause 8.

New clause 8 Insert after clause 6 the following clause:

“Section 16 8. Section 16 of the Act is amended
amended in the chapeau by inserting after the
word “9” the words “or the preparation

of an electronic version of the Laws”.

New clause 8 be read the first time.

Question proposed: That new clause 8 be read a second time.

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Mr. Hosein: Mr. Chair, what we are doing here for the record is that section 16 is now being amended to say:

Section 16 of the Act is amended in the *chapeau* by inserting after the word “nine”, the words “or the preparation of an electronic version of the laws”.

At section 16 of the parent Act, this gives the Commission several statutory powers in relation to printed versions of the law. What we are doing is just giving the Commission, out of an abundance of caution, the exact same powers for electronic versions of the law. That is the simple amendment, Mr. Chair.

Question put and agreed to.

New clause 8 added to the Bill.

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

House resumed.

Mr. Speaker: Minister of Land and Legal Affairs.

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 wish to report that the Law Revision (Amdt.) 2026, was considered in the committee of the whole and approved with amendments. I now beg to move that the House agree with the committee’s report.

Bill reported, with amendment.

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

Hon. Member: Division.

Mr. Speaker: Division, having been called for, as I said, I have no discretion.

The House voted: Ayes 39

AYES

Padarath, Hon. B.

Persad-Bissessar SC, Hon. K.

Tancoo, Hon. D.

John, Hon. J.

Moonilal, Hon. Dr. R.

Lee, Hon. D.

Hosein, Hon. S.

Ameen, Hon. K.

Alexander, Hon. R.

Maharaj, Hon. D.

Mohit, Hon. V.

Sturge, Hon. W.

Bodoe, Hon. Dr. L.

Dowlath, Hon. Dr. M.

Ali, Dr. A.

Morris, Hon. W.

Watts, Hon. P.

Seecheran, Hon. Dr. R.

Kesar, Hon. E.

Elder, Hon. C.

Sam, Ms. C.

Narinesingh, Hon. Dr. H.

Roopnarine, Dr. N.

Gosine, Dr. C.

Thomas, Mr. D.

Sampson, Mr. J.

Gonzales, Mr. M.

Beckles, Ms. P.

Imbert, Mr. C.

Gadsby-Dolly, Dr. N.

Young SC, Mr. S.

Scotland SC, Mr. K.

Robinson-Regis, Mrs. C.

de Nobriga, Mr. S.

Manning, Mr. B.

Marcelle, Mr. K.

De Vignes, Mr. H.

Birchwood, Mr. C.

Romain, Mr. D.

Question agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

CIVIL DIVISION BILL, 2026

Order for second reading read.

Mr. Speaker: Minister of Justice.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Justice and Minister in the Ministry of the Attorney General:

(Hon. Devesh Maharaj): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to pilot the

Civil Division Bill, 2026 before this honourable House. Mr. Speaker, this Bill was debated and passed in the Senate with amendments on February 10th, 2026. It is indeed a good time for this House, for this country, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Prime Minister gave a review and a report on her travels to the United States of America, and has brought back hope and optimism for this country, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, the phones are ringing off the hook. The Prime Minister's phone is ringing off the hook. The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries' phone is ringing off the hook. Everybody wants to come to Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: Everybody wants to participate in this new initiative, and everybody wants to be here. It is indeed a glorious time for Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: No small measure, Mr. Speaker, due to the efforts of the hon. Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago and the decisions she has taken.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: We have help on all fronts. Help in the energy sector. Help in national security and generally help all over. It is indeed a beautiful, buoyant time and I hope the Opposition recognizes that and give praise where praise is due.

Mr. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, point of order 48(1). I think the Member might be on the wrong Bill.

Ms. Ameen: "Relax nah".

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Short answer. Member are you laying your foundation?

Hon. D. Maharaj: Yes please.

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

Hon. D. Maharaj:—Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: As Port of Spain South knows, he never delivers his knock-out blow. Context is everything. Civil Division Bill. You want me to explain it to you all?

Hon. Members: No, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Civil Division Bill is about setting up a Civil Court. Why do you set up a specific division? It is because there is a need to arise for a specific division.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

3.55p.m.

Hon. D. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, good news affects them. Good news troubles them. It is good news.

Ms. Ameen: They are not patriots, they “doh” like Trinidad.

Hon. D. Maharaj: Let us be patriotic for one time, Arouca/Lopinot. Mr. Speaker, on the heels of that, we have a very progressive piece of legislation brought by my colleague, the Minister of Land and Legal Affairs and Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, MP for Barataria/San Juan, and, today, another piece of progressive legislation is being brought, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move:

That a Bill to make jurisdiction for matters of a civil nature exercisable in a division of the Judiciary to be known as the “Civil Division” and to make jurisdiction for specified civil matters exercisable in a sub division of the Civil Division known as the “Civil Court”, to make jurisdiction for small-valued claims exercisable in a sub division of the “Civil Division” to

be known as the “Small Claims Courts”, to make jurisdiction for estates administration business exercisable in a sub division of the Civil Division known as the “Estates Administration Office” and for related matters, be now read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill has a little history, and I will just point it out for the benefit of all and the national public. In 2020, June, Cabinet approved the establishment of the Civil Division Administration Department, which had been operational alongside the Court of Appeal, the Civil High Court, the Probate Registry, and the Petty Civil Court, paving the way for this anticipated “Small Claims Court”. Mr. Speaker, on the 9th of November, 2021, a Cabinet Note was passed. On 11th of October, 2023, the Cabinet Minute was developed. On the 20th of the ninth, 2024, this Bill was passed in this House. It was lapsed in the Senate in 2025.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is a Bill that has some six years in making and we have it here today. The reason why I say it is a progressive piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, this was initiated by the Judiciary in its move to modernize its operations, and it follows on similar legislation, establishing divisions of the court, the Family and Children Division Act, 2016, the Criminal Division and District Criminal and Traffic Courts Act, 2018. Mr. Speaker, the Judiciary proposed that the Civil Division should be created formally by statute with a civil court, a Small Claims Court, and Estates Administration Office.

Mr. Speaker, this does not come lightly, it followed on a small-claims-court concept document in 2021, developed by the Judiciary. If we turn to the “Small Claims Court”, Mr. Speaker, we are operating under a bit of legislation known as the Petty Civil Court, which was established in 2011. That is how far back we go, Mr. Speaker, 2011, and operating in a system which is archaic, which is not suited

for purpose, and it is not delivering justice to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Petty Civil Court, Mr. Speaker, deals with matters such as debts, damages, breach of contract, negligence and recovery of land. Mr. Speaker, when the Judiciary did a review of this Petty Civil Court, what they found was that the average time for disposition of cases took upwards of two years, and you have matters under \$50,000; people with claims of \$10,000, \$20,000, \$25,000, and you are taking upwards of two years. A large part of the problem, Mr. Speaker, which the Judiciary found was that service of process, and issues experienced with performing this function contributed to a significant bottleneck.

Those of us who started practice many years ago—I know my friend from Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, Port of Spain South—well, I mean, these guys, they deal with big cases, so maybe they did not start in the small area I started at, Mr. Speaker. San Fernando, Petty Civil Court, you would go to the court and you have long lines, you have to wait on time. I know Port of Spain South, he deals with very, very heavy matters; very heavy matters, Mr. Speaker. You line up there with litigants, you wait hours, matters are generally adjourned, frustration, you cannot get service, police cannot serve, bailiffs cannot serve matters, and the court just adjourns matters routinely; not because they do not want to do it, it is just that the system is so bad.

So, Mr. Speaker, it was decided, after all this time, to create something called a “Small Claims Court”. There was also, Mr. Speaker, the lack of a dedicated and consistent administrative process to deal with this Petty Civil Court, and the work that the Judiciary relied on was a World Bank report, which talked about the importance of creating small claims courts. As distinct from the Petty Civil Court, which is attached to the Summary Court, which is attached to the Magistrates' Court, you have shared facilities in one building, so they are saying,

“Create a Small Claims Court”. You have large amounts of claims coming in and people are frustrated, the smaller parts of the population, where you can dedicate a judge, you can dedicate process servers, you can dedicate technology to make sure that fast-tracked procedures are put in place to make the Small Claims Court functional.

It is also designed to make it speedy, to make it less formal, and to introduce certain modern techniques in problem-solving in the Judiciary. I will give you some stats, Mr. Speaker, for example, during the law term, 2023 to 2024, a total of 901 new matters were filed in the Petty Civil Court; 830 matters were determined with a clearance rate of 92, but, 5,847 matters remained pending. Mr. Speaker, the Judiciary is of the view that this time has come to modernize the system with the swift enactment of this legislation. They took their job very seriously, they had stakeholder consultation, so that when we reached here with this bit of legislation, Mr. Speaker, it was not fly-by-night legislation.

During the period, December 2020 to February 2021, the Judiciary had their stakeholder engagement exercise, and it was conducted even during the COVID-19 pandemic. The following stakeholders, Mr. Speaker, were engaged, the Law Association of Trinidad and Tobago, the Attorney General and Legal Affairs, and the Legal Aid and Advisory Committee. In terms of academia, the Hugh Wooding Law School, the Faculty of Law, and other institutions who provide degrees, or facilities to get degrees outside of Hugh Wooding Law School. You had mediators, you had the National Mediation Board, the Conflict Resolution and Mediation Centre of Trinidad and Tobago, Dispute Resolution Centre, the Ministry of Sport, Mediate-It Limited, and other mediation agencies.

You had discussions with the Bankers Association, ATTIC, Credit Bureau, Agricultural Development Bank; other banks, ANSA Merchant Bank and others.

Large business entities were engaged, AMCHAM, TTMA, and many chambers of commerce throughout Trinidad and Tobago. State agencies from the Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Trade, Ministry of Finance, Division of Finance and Micro Enterprise, Tobago; NEDCO and others; small business owners, Trinidad and Tobago Contractors Association. So they all came together and they said, “Listen, how do we progress our small claims?” “How do we get it moving faster?” Based on those stakeholder engagements, this Bill came to fruition.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill contains certain modern approaches to dealing with litigation. For example, you have technological solutions, including virtual courts, e-filing, e-payments, and an online dispute resolution platform. Now, Mr. Speaker, why is this important? This is important, Mr. Speaker, when you have an online dispute resolution system, it means that the parties do not necessarily have to be there in person. They can talk to each other, and I think it is called, synchronous, where all the parties together are talking at the same time in a shared space, trying to resolve their matters, or it can be done asynchronous, where post the event, they can communicate with each other, and it is the hope that dispute over small claims may be dispensed with quickly, fairly and affordably. That is not present right now within the Petty Civil Court system.

The Petty Civil Court system, Mr. Speaker, is a very formal system. You have attorneys present on both sides, you have a judge, a Petty Civil Court judge, and the matter is very formal. This online system will allow a more innovative tribunal integrated into our justice system. That, Mr. Speaker, is a very forward-thinking part of this. Now, you could also participate by video link and other technological measures, which is not available right now, so that people in far-off parts of Trinidad and Tobago, who may not necessarily have the resources to get to the court, can participate in this.

Now, Mr. Speaker, one of the recommendations of that World Bank report was to ensure the availability of legal aid and the provision of fee waivers for small litigants. It was my honour and privilege this morning, Mr. Speaker, to participate in an exercise with the Legal Aid and Advisory Committee, where the Legal Aid and Advisory Committee, for the first time under this Government, under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice, created mobile units for the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

4.10p.m.

Hon. D. Maharaj: The purpose of these mobile units, Mr. Speaker, is that we are taking legal services to the far-flung corners of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: The Legal Aid, Mr. Speaker, has seen a significant increase in persons accessing legal advice in its offices throughout the country, with thousands of citizens seeking assistance annually through in-person visits, telephone consultations, email correspondence and web chat services. During the reporting period, September last year, hundreds of individuals accessed assistance digitally, including over 700 email enquiries and more than 2,000 web chat interactions, demonstrating the public's reliance on multiple channels to seek legal advice. So, not only, Mr. Speaker, are we modernizing the law revision, we are modernizing and we are creating a Small Claims Court, and we are ensuring access to justice, access to courts for all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: Because as the hon. Prime Minister has said, and we have said on the campaign trail, access to justice should not be limited by geography, financial constraints or lack of information. We are coming to you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, I want to tell the residents of a place called Cedros—

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Hon. D. Maharaj:—it will be the first place where this mobile unit will be moving into next week.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: I am not seeing Mayaro here. But I want to tell Mayaro, the next week, it will be Mayaro.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: I see my colleague, Mr. Sturge, smiling because he knows the gift is coming to him on the following week, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: We, who represent country areas, rural areas, underserved communities—

Mrs. Sam: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: Cumuto/Manzanilla will be getting it the following week.

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

Hon. D. Maharaj: We are saying to all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, we are coming to you. Any little problem that you have—you are afraid, you cannot afford a lawyer, you are frightened—we are coming to you. We are bringing the mobile unit. We are rolling it into town, staffed by lawyers, staffed by supplementary staff, auxiliary staff, and we will be helping you solve the problems.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: Brothers and sisters, what a great day for Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: I am offering my friends on the other side, if you are interested—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Ms. Ameen: Rural areas.

Hon. D. Maharaj:—please reach out to the Legal Aid. We are most happy to help all of you. I do not know why—Port of Spain South—it is available too for Port of Spain South. You do not have to look so serious.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: So, Mr. Speaker, I am saying, juxtaposing in the passing of this Small Claims Court, is this development with the legal aid, with our provision of all the laws for people to read in Trinidad and Tobago from the Ministry of Land and Legal Affairs.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this Small Claims Court, we are trying to make it as informal as possible because, you know, sometimes, Mr. Speaker, when people have the formality, they tend to get a little frightened. I will just like to read from the Judiciary document, Mr. Speaker, that:

We must rethink what constitutes a court and what modern-day delivery of justice demands are required. It is recognized that the courtroom itself and the hearing are no longer the focal points of a dispute and instead, dispute resolution should be prioritized at an early stage, and only the most complex and difficult cases should end up in trial.

We who are in the profession, or were in the profession, Mr. Speaker, we know about that. So, it is inbuilt into the Bill itself, clause 25, that the matters can and should be referred to mediation at a very early stage.

When you put matters into the mediation, the heat cools down. Parties are able to think rationally. Sometimes you might not get 100 per cent of what you

want but generally, parties come together, they put their heads together and matters are taken off the list. That is what we want to do. It clears the judicial system. It clears the smaller claims court.

When disputes are resolved, Mr. Speaker, people in the country are happier. They go about their business. They patch their differences. Neighbours get back together. People start talking again. You do not have this long-time friction developing between a community. So, this Government, Mr. Speaker, is geared to making people happy. We are making people happy, everybody. All our measures that we are taking, Mr. Speaker, are to benefit all of Trinidad and Tobago, everybody in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: Now, Mr. Speaker, not only are we creating a Small Claims Court, we are establishing the estates administration subdivision of the Civil Division. Mr. Speaker, between 2023 and 2024, a total of 4,614 new matters were filed and 2,501 matters were determined, with a clearance rate of 54 per cent. However, a total of 15,186 matters remained pending.

The hon. Chief Justice, Ivor Archie, in his speech on the 2025/2026 opening of the term, he reported that:

“The Estates Administration Office...formerly known as the Probate Registry...As a result of the backlog reduction project undertaken in the last quarter of 2024...dispatched 5,370 grants, more than double the 2,c12 issued in 2023, reflecting a 105.6% increase in clearance rates. During this period...completed over 13,000 searches...processed 11,000 filings...”—and supported—“...thousands of applicants more effectively.”

Mr. Speaker:

“...the Probate Registry E-services platform...allows applicants to track

filings and receive real-time updates, improving communication and reducing uncertainty throughout the process.”

The EAO, the Estates Administration Office, established administratively, is already making a significant impact in the administration of estates.

So, Mr. Speaker, whilst it is there administratively, we are now creating, by statute, the division of the Civil Court known as the EAO. Mr. Speaker, this will be staffed with specialized staff, so they are not all over the place—dedicated staff to this. It will make amendments to the Wills and Probate Act. The procedural and technological changes are already in place, and we are going to resource it more fully, together in partnership with the Judiciary, to close the gap.

You know, Mr. Speaker, many years ago, people were complaining about the probate taking long, three years, four years, five years, frustrated. Sometimes people die and they have not gotten their estates probated yet. We are trying to ensure, Mr. Speaker, that all of these things are closed.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there are certain consequential amendments which will happen to the Bailiffs Act, the Summary Courts Act, and the Criminal Division and District Criminal and Traffic Courts Act, 2018.

Now, if we can deal with certain clauses within the Bill, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated, Part I of the Bill addresses preliminary matters, mainly the interpretation section, to define certain terms used in the Bill, and references to any written law on civil matters, small claims matters and estate administration. If you look at the Bill, Mr. Speaker, you would note that it follows the pattern of most Bills, but just giving you the breakdown.

Part II of the Bill establishes a Civil Division of the court, comprising a Civil Court, a Small Claims Court, and the Estate Administration Office. So, the Civil Division will now encompass those three parts: Civil Division, Small Claims

Court, and estate. That is simplification, allocation of resources, all dedicated toward efficiency.

Mr. Speaker, Part III of the Bill proposes the establishment of the Civil Court to exercise authority and jurisdiction in civil matters that are exercisable by the High Court at present. The Civil Court will have the power to hear election petitions.

Mr. Speaker, you would remember the debacle in 2002/2003, with the cases of Gypsy and Chaitan, where there were no rules, and the election court was struggling to deal with those matters. We are now saying that the Civil Court will have the power to deal with these election petitions. The hon. Chief Justice will be empowered to provide for the times and manner of sittings of the Civil Court and the assignment of puisne judges and masters.

Clauses 10 and 11 of the Bill provide for the authority, jurisdiction, rights, privileges and immunities of Civil Court judges.

Part IV of the Bill seeks to establish the Small Claims Court to have jurisdiction in respect of small claims and small claims matters that do not exceed the pecuniary jurisdiction of the court. Mr. Speaker, clause 40 of the Bill provides for the pecuniary jurisdiction of the court to be prescribed at the Rules Committee of the Supreme Court.

Now, the reason why that is done, Mr. Speaker, is if you embed it within the Act itself, any time you have to make that change, you would have to come back to Parliament to make the amendments. The Rules Committee of the Supreme Court, Mr. Speaker, will have the jurisdiction to amend those rules, from time to time, easier, and to make more flexibility in dealing with these matters.

Now, Mr. Speaker, clause 14(4) empowers the Small Claims Court to grant equitable relief that was expressly prohibited under section 15 of the Petty Civil

Courts Act. Equitable relief, Mr. Speaker—you want to go for injunctions, you cannot go in the Petty Civil Court. So, the High Court is burdened by a lot of these actions. In certain instances now, you can access this court for equitable claims. It will not have jurisdiction for libel, slander or malicious prosecution.

4.25 p.m.

Part IV of the Bill provides for the honourable Chief Justice to assign magistrates as small claims court judges, giving added responsibility. The Chief Justice will be able to assign senior magistracy registrars and clerks of the courts as ex officio justices of the peace and commissioners of affidavits. The functions and duties of the senior magistracy registrar and clerk of the courts are set out in clause 22. Clause 23 provides for other members of staff of a small claims court.

Importantly, clause 25, as I already indicated, provides for the small claims court to refer matters to mediation, alternative dispute resolution. We are hoping that at least 50 to 75 matters filed in the small claims court can be determined with this mediation. Whilst I am on that, Mr. Speaker, within the High Court, the Supreme Court, this Government will be engaging and collaborating with the Judiciary to try to make mediation as a more mandatory part of the adjudicative process. There was a pilot project conducted in 2014/2015 which showed that mediation and ADR, if implemented in the High Court level, will produce greater results in the determination of matters. So we want to engage the Supreme Court, the Chief Justice with making that a mandatory provision.

Mr. Speaker, Part VI of the Bill provides for the Civil Division Administration Department, comprising a Central Coordinating unit, a Civil Court Administrative Office, the Estates Administrative Office. Part VII of the Bill provides for miscellaneous matters, including the oath of secrecy for members of staff, the power of the Rules Committee of the Supreme Court to make rules, to

give effect to the Act's transitional provisions and consequential amendments and the Petty Civil Court, as we know it, would be repealed. So you have certain transition provisions because there are matters filed in the Petty Civil Court as we progress with this, what happens to those matters?

We also contained certain consequential amendments to the Bailiffs Act Chap. 4:61. The consequential amendments to the Bailiffs Act Chap. 4:61, seeks to re-enact sections 46, 47, 48 and 49 of the Petty Civil Courts Act which will be repealed as new sections 9A, 9B, 9C and 9D respectively. The consequential amendments seek to modernize and redirect bailiff-related procedures so that they operate within the small claims court framework, specifically, interpleading a matter, for example, at present could only be heard in the High Court, could now be held and heard in this small claims court. It is updating offences relating to assaults, obstruction, rescue of goods from a bailiff to reflect enforcement under the small claims court. To provide mechanisms for dealing with misconduct by bailiffs under the supervision of a small claims court judge. Regulate actions against the bailiff.

The Summary Courts Act Chap. 4:20, there will be consequential amendments seeking to insert to statutory definition of the small claims matter by reference to the Civil Divisions Act 2026 and the Criminal Division and District Criminal and Traffic Courts Act, 2018, will expand the Chief Justice's administrative powers.

Mr. Speaker, the Civil Division Bill, 2026, is a critical step in the justice sector reform and improvement of service delivery in the administration of justice in Trinidad and Tobago. This modernization process and push by this Government, Mr. Speaker, does not end there. I will give you a bit of disturbing news. When we assumed office, I had conversations with the Director of the

Forensic Science Centre, Mr. Speaker, and when we assumed office, I was horrified to learn, horrified to learn, 3,000 autopsies reports were not completed.

Hon. Members: Wow.

Hon. D. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, you had a stellar career in the Criminal Justice department as my learned friend, Port of Spain South. When you do not have these autopsy reports, what happens to the criminal justice system, it grinds to a halt. Judges might be prepared, defence counsel might be prepared, “you doh have yuh report”, the case cannot go on, it gets adjourned indefinitely. One aspect, one cog in the wheel of the criminal justice system. You have bailiffs, you have police, you have prisons, you have a forensic science centre, availability of judges, availability of defence counsel but that important function, 3,000 reports. Immediately, Mr. Speaker, immediately, we recruited four house officers to work with the forensic pathologists at the Forensic Science Centre. Within a few months, we were able to remove 300 reports from that list, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: I am pleased to report that the list for 2025 and 2026, all reports for those years, have been completed.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: We are now working to clear that backlog over the years. We want the criminal justice system to work. We want to deliver justice. People must not be frustrated, people must not only have access to justice, they must see it working for them. We have also included in the biology department, we have recruited six persons with DNA experience to work in the labs to help us upgrade our DNA where there is a huge backlog as well, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, on all fronts, whether it is forensic, reform of laws, reform of our small claims court, mobile units in the legal aid, Mr. Speaker, everything is

being refreshed, everything is being modernized, everything is being brought up to date. What a great time for Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, we must continue to be optimistic because we know that Trinidad and Tobago is going to get better. Mr. Speaker, with those few words, I beg to move.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we are just three minutes beyond the tea break, but the hon. Member had three more minutes of his time. But what I propose to do is read the question for debate and then we take the tea break.

Question proposed.

Mr. Speaker: So, I propose to take the tea break, and I think Members will agree with me, we have a long night ahead of us, I propose to come back at 5.30 p.m., 5.30 p.m. instead of 5.15 p.m. I propose to come back 5.30 p.m. unless there is—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: 5.30 p.m., yes. Because I foresee we have some distance to go. So House is now suspended and we come back at 5.30 p.m. Thank you.

4.34 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.30 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Speaker: Port of Spain South.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Keith Scotland SC: Mr. Speaker, this is a febrile debate because how could we not support what is our brainchild?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: But it is with some seriousness that I want to address some issues raised by the hon. Member, the former speaker, because as the Government

thumps their desks and beats their chests in their echo chamber, I want to put the PNM's position on the record. This may be a great and happy time for you all, but it is not so great and happy time for the CEPEP workers who were fired, you know, it is not a great and happy time for the bar owners who had to close their bars under the weight of increased alcohol prices, it is not a happy time for URP workers, forestry workers, nurses who have received no per cent. So go ahead beat your chest, thump your desks, but this is not a happy time for Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: That being said, we are here to discuss the Civil Division Bill of 2026 and yet the duty of candour requires that you acknowledge the simple and undeniable facts, which is that this legislation is the very same legislation introduced by the PNM Government in June 2024, by the then Attorney General, hon. Reginald Armour SC and this Bill is in exact terms to the Bill introduced under the PNM. It is a PNM Bill.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: History and the records will reflect that this very Bill was debated in Parliament in September 2024 and it lapsed because the Parliament's life came to an end in March 2025. How come the hon. Member did not tell that to the population?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Why is he rising? Let me take my seat.

Mr. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, the records will reveal that I did say that.

Ms. Mohit: Correct.

Mr. Maharaj: I said it was brought to the House and the Senate.

Hon. Member: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Mr. Speaker, there is just no authenticity about them.

Mr. Speaker: That is not true.

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Everything is a farce.

Mr. Speaker: Port of Spain South, the Member did say it. The Member did acknowledge that the Bill was debated in the Parliament and the Bill lapsed, he did say that.

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Mr. Speaker, that is not my point. My point is that it is a PNM Bill.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Come on. Not once in this contribution did he tell the country with all his buoyancy and all this great enthusiasm that this is nothing novel by no means and that this was introduced by a PNM Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: To drive home my point of lack of authenticity if you turn, Mr. Speaker, respectfully to the provisions that were made in the *Draft Estimate of Development Programme* of 2025 at page 67, you will see that we even allocated \$770,000 for this civil division. “Dat is givin’ dem performance”.

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

5.35 p.m.

Mr. K. Scotland SC: On this side, Mr. Speaker, we are not high at any place, you know. We are doing, whether in government or as the Opposition, the work for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: So, Mr. Speaker, this Bill deals with the administration of justice and it is not simply another policy area within the remit of the Government. It is one of the central pillars upon which our constitutional democracy rests. And,

the rule of law, we say, depends not merely upon the existence of the courts, but upon how the courts function. It must function effectively, efficiently and with accessibility to all citizens who wish to access the courts. That is why under a People's National Movement Government this Bill was introduced and debated in this Parliament.

We say, when justice is delayed, when procedural bottlenecks are allowed to frustrate litigants, when ordinary citizens find themselves caught in a system which moves at a pace that is incompatible with the results that they want, that as a government then and as an Opposition we will support legislation that drives and tries to eradicate that problem. So the short of the long is that we will be supporting the legislation that we introduced to this Parliament.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Mr. Speaker, stated plainly, all the intellectual capacity and all the intellectual architecture of this piece of legislation is PNM, you know.

Mr. Young SC: PNM DNA.

Mr. K. Scotland SC: It is the PNM's DNA that is in this Bill. I want to commend to the public and to Trinidad and Tobago, that the concept of the creation of the Civil Division within the Judiciary, the establishment of the Civil Court, the Small Claims Court and Estate Administration Offices were all conceived and developed by the People's National Movement.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: There was a lot of beating of the chest—let me hear the AG.

Mr. Jeremie SC: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I never like to see my friend go astray, so I have in the past risen to assist him from not going astray.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Mr. Speaker, there has to be a point. Come on, this is a

debate.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: AG—

Mr. Jeremie SC: One second. The Bill came from the Judiciary. Not from the PNM.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Is he serious? The Judiciary introduces a Bill in Parliament? Who does it? Who does that?

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Mr. Speaker, let me continue. Let me—No. Yung Bredda is from Port of Spain South. Gentlemen, he is from Port of Spain.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Mr. Speaker, what I want really to say is this. There was a lot of thumping of desks and beating of chests about some mobile legal aid clinic that is there. You know, as they try to rewrite history what they did not say? In 1976 under an Eric Williams Government, the Legal Aid Bill was passed in this Parliament on the 1st of July by a PNM Government. All its incarnations, Mr. Speaker, came and, all its improvements came under a PNM Government. Mr. Speaker, I remember the days when we would sit in court and work for \$1,500 in Legal Aid for months doing criminal cases because there is where you got your feet wet. There is where you got your experience to cross-examine and to interrogate witnesses and to do forensic analysis. Emmanuel Walker; I remember him distinctly as a forensic analysis. The point I am trying to make, Mr. Speaker, is that you cannot rewrite history.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: I ask the hon. Members, for once be authentic, “nah?”

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, this Bill establishes the Small Claims Court for disputes valued under \$50,000. For many citizens \$50,000 is a lot of money, and some and such matters, we recognize, became bogged down within a court system designed primarily for complex litigation. Small claims jurisdiction has become an integral part of the modern justice where somebody gives you money to buy a car, or fix your vehicle and they have it. And, you want to retrieve your moneys, but you are spending years retrieving it, when sometimes the loss and the time spent recovering the loss outweighs the effort made in trying to do so. That is why a PNM Government introduced this Bill to this Parliament in September 2024.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: It was indicated earlier in the debate that more than 130 jurisdictions worldwide utilize Small Claims Courts and it is precisely for that reason. By creating such a forum, the justice system becomes more accessible to ordinary citizens, while simultaneously allowing the higher courts to devote their time and resources to more complex matters. To the poor man, \$50,000 is a lot of money, and each case is as serious and important, be it big or small, to the litigants that come before the court, be it the claimant or the defendant.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, the legislation provides for a civil court capable of conducting hearings, not only in person, but also through modernized technology platforms such as telephone and video link. Mr. Speaker, you recall the case of *Missick*, which deals with the forum and the ability of a court to deal with a matter remotely, and whether a non-traditional courtroom represents a court. The experience in recent years with COVID-19 demonstrated quite clearly that the courts must be able to operate in a digital environment, and, I want to thank former Attorney General Reginald Armour and the PNM Government for the forward-thinking approach they took to the administration of justice by introducing this Bill

to Parliament. The integration of technology in civil proceedings is therefore not a mere convenience, and it is an essential feature of the modern justice system.

Fourthly, Mr. Speaker, this Bill establishes the Estate Administration Office to address one of the most persistent and frustrating issues faced by citizens; delays associated with probate and estate administration. Mr. Speaker, you will know that the learning is that a will is ambulatory, and when someone dies, one would expect that the probate, if they died leaving a will, or the letters of administration if they die intestate, will be done in a timely fashion. History has taught us that this is not so, and delays have long plagued that system and have caused extra hardships on persons trying to deal with the business of their deceased loved ones. This Bill tries to provide some mechanism of relief.

At the time the original Bill was introduced, it was acknowledged that the Probate Registry was completing only approximately 35 per cent of large estate matters, and those were the matters filed per year. The consequence was that families would have to wait until, or have an inordinate wait, in order to have the assets of the deceased persons settled. These delays would have occurred, Mr. Speaker, when families were already dealing with the grief of having lost their loved ones and the uncertainty of having the financial and other matters of the deceased settled in a timely way. The inability to access property, financial assets or other legal entitlements for an extended period of time would have only led to financial and emotional hardships on these families. That is why we introduced, Mr. Speaker, the Estate Administration Office in order to reform the system of estates in Trinidad and Tobago.

However, Mr. Speaker, I want to add one point, and maybe the hon. Attorney General may take credit for this. When this Bill was introduced in 2024, the then Leader of the Opposition did not support it, you know. The hon. Member

for Siparia said that this Bill was loose and required clarity. Questions were asked about section 36B, clause 31, and clause 32. With all the so-called bright lawyers that were advising her then, how come the change? Well, the only change was the hon. Attorney General. Maybe he now—you see, the effects of a good PNM education?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Good advice. Because the hon. Attorney General—well, it seems that the Minister of Justice has brought the Bill. But you have seen the light, Sir. You were on your way to Tarsus. You started off as Saul, but you ended up as Paul. But thank the PNM for bringing this Bill to the Parliament. That is what “ah” want you to do. Yes. He would not know about Saul of Tarsus.

So, Mr. Speaker, as I close in this contribution today, we will support good legislation. This is legislation brought by the People’s National Movement and it is good legislation, and as said by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, we just do not talk, you know. We walk the walk. So we are supporting this legislation and we lend our wholehearted intellectual capacity to this Bill, a PNM Bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Minister of Defence.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Justice and Minister in the Ministry of the Attorney General (Hon. Devesh Maharaj): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House put credit where credit is due. My learned friend is seeking to take credit when it is not due to him and not due to them.

Hon. Member: That is a normal thing.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: Let me explain, Mr. Speaker, and I really did not want to have to go back through all of this history, but let me do it.

Mr. Speaker, there was a stakeholder exercise conducted not by the PNM, not by my learned friend, not by Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, he is leaving. It was conducted by the Judiciary. The Judiciary conducted this exercise, a stakeholder exercise. I took pains to go through. They went through academia, the Law Association, and interest groups. They complied together, Mr. Speaker, all the recommendations. The Judiciary drafted the Bill. They drafted it. The Judiciary sent it onwards to the Attorney General, wholesale in detail, and retail, they put it before the House.

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

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: It was piloted by the Chief Justice.

Hon. D. Maharaj: Drafted by the Judiciary, and they are begging for a little credit.

Mr. Alexander: Yeah. Give them it.

Hon. D. Maharaj: Take it.

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

Hon. D. Maharaj: This is a time of happiness, joy, goodness, and optimism. "Yuh want something? Give it ah bligh".

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: I mean, I did not want to go back into it. But let me read the notes that came.

Mr. Alexander: Read it.

Hon. D. Maharaj: Note for Cabinet.

Mr. Alexander: Read it.

Hon. D. Maharaj: The Attorney General, et cetera submits conveying the

recommendations of the hon. Chief Justice.

Mr. Alexander: What?

Hon. D. Maharaj: 149 Cabinet Note 1757. They drafted it. They brought it. You want credit. My good friend, I know things tough. We give you “ah lil” credit. Give them a little credit, AG?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

5.50p.m.

Hon. D. Maharaj: The intellectual Attorney General that we have, competent, he stood up to try to correct my learned friend. “You shoot him down. Why you shoot down the AG for?”

Mr. Rogers: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: “And then want to claim the AG for he self too.”

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

Ms. Mohit: “He doh know what credit to really take.”

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: You are claiming the Bill, and, Mr. Speaker, you know, if you really wanted—

Ms. Mohit: The AG rejected that claim.

Hon. D. Maharaj:—to claim credit for this, right, the policy started in 2020, a Cabinet Note in 2021—

Mr. Scotland SC: PNM.

Hon. D. Maharaj:—you come back again in 2023.

Mr. Scotland SC: PNM.

Ms. Mohit: Promise what?

Hon. D. Maharaj: Going into 2024 in the House, lapsed in 2025, and you are claiming credit for that?

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

Hon. D. Maharaj: If it was anything, it was a slow walk. Slow meandering walk. There was no urgency in trying to reform the system. If the Chief Justice brought something to you in 2021, you went until 2025 for it to lapse and want to claim credit for that? Shame on you!

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: Shame on you! When you have something important like this, Mr. Speaker, which deals with access to justice, which deals with the common man, which deals with a Small Claims Court, show urgency and significance to it, and then take credit for it. Do not come and take credit, ex post facto. With those few words, Mr. Speaker, 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 43 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule ordered to stand part of the Bill.

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

House resumed.

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

RELATED MOTIONS

STATE OF PUBLIC EMERGENCY (BASIS FOR DECLARATION)

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Attorney General.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Attorney General (Sen. The Hon. John Jeremie SC): Mr. Speaker, I ask that by agreement of the—Mr. Speaker, I beg to move Motion No. 1 standing in my name. In moving this Motion, I seek the leave of the House in accordance with Standing Order 50(1) to debate, along with this Motion, Motion No. 2 on the Order Paper, both of which are interrelated.

Mr. Speaker: Is this the wish of the House? *Assent indicated.*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, leave has been granted for Motions 1 and 2 on the Order Paper to be debated interrelatedly. Hon. Attorney General.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: Mr. Speaker, on the evening of Monday, 02 March, 2026, at a meeting of the National Security Council convened by the hon. Prime Minister, the Commissioner of Police, and the head of the SSA delivered a security briefing which informed the Council—

Mr. Padarath: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: Sorry. Mr. Speaker, I am told that I should read the Motions first. They are slightly different in the sense that one asks that we note the statement of the President. The other asks that we extend the period of emergency.

[*AG confers with Secretariat*]

Okay. So, I am following the advice, the advice of the experts.

Mr. Speaker: I as well, Attorney General. I am following. I see we have wed ourselves to anachronistic procedure, but it is what it is, so let us follow it.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC:

“*Whereas* it is enacted by section 8(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago that the President may from time to time make a Proclamation...”—

State of Public Emergency
(Basis for Declaration
Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC (cont'd)

Hon. Member: [*Interruption*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if I might be allowed to make my contribution in silence?

Mr. Speaker: I am sure Members will respect that.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: I am always extremely well behaved, as all Members would know.

Whereas it is enacted by section 8(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago that the President may from time to time make a Proclamation declaring that a state of public emergency exists:

And whereas the President has by Proclamation made on the 2nd day of March, 2026, declared that a state of public emergency exists in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago with effect from Tuesday 3rd March, 2026:

And whereas it is enacted by section 9(1) of the Constitution that within three days of the making of the Proclamation, the President shall deliver to the Speaker for presentation to the House of Representatives a statement setting out the specific grounds on which the decision to declare the existence of a state of public emergency was based, and a date shall be fixed for a debate on this statement as soon as practicable but in any event not later than fifteen days from the date of the Proclamation:

6.05p.m.

And whereas on the 4th day of March, 2026, the President delivered to the Speaker for presentation to the House of Representatives a statement setting out the specific grounds on which the decision to declare the existence of a state of public emergency was based:

Now, therefore, be it resolved that the House take note of the Statement by the President under section 9(1) of the Constitution setting out the specific grounds on which the decision to declare the existence of a state of public emergency was based.

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned a while ago, on the evening of Monday, 02 March, 2026, at a meeting of the National Security Council, chaired and convened by the hon. Prime Minister, Commissioner of Police and head of SSA, delivered a security briefing which informed the Council that over several days prior to the meeting, a number of violent criminal activities had taken place, most of which were carried out by members of organized criminal gangs.

The NSC was further advised that criminal gangs had increased acts of violence on a scale so extensive that they had resulted in multiple deaths, in mass shootings, and that that would continue to endanger public safety. The Commissioner of Police and head of the SSA informed the NSC that intelligence gathered indicated credible threats as well to attack police officers and other members of the protective services. These are, of course, usual targets of the criminal gangs.

The hon. Prime Minister canvassed the views of the members of the National Security Council and then the National Security Council took steps to advise Her Excellency the President that a state of public emergency existed in Trinidad and Tobago. Her Excellency the President, being satisfied that a public emergency had arisen as a result of the occurrence of action that had been taken or was immediately threatened by any person of such a nature and on so extensive a scale as to be likely to endanger the public safety, by Proclamation made on the very evening of the 02 March, 2026, declared that a state of public emergency

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existed in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago with effect from Tuesday, 03 March, 2026.

Upon the declaration of the State of Emergency by Her Excellency the President, the TTPS and the defence force commenced strategic operations. Those operations will continue in an intelligence-led targeted and deliberate matter until these threats to public safety are curtailed. The House is asked to note Her Excellency's statement that a state of public emergency existed, dated 02 March, 2026, with effect from 03 March, 2026.

I turn immediately to the second matter for which leave has been granted, that is, the question of the extension of the initial period of emergency. Mr. Speaker, a year and three months ago, the then Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley, came to this House on the very last day permitted by Constitution for an extension of the State of Emergency declared on the 30th of December, 2024. If it was not the very last day, it was the day before the very last day.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: It was the 15th.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: I am corrected, and I am told that it was the 15th day. The country will recall that his government had declared on Old Year's Night—I am sorry, the night before Old Year's Night, the 30th, that a state of emergency existed in Trinidad and Tobago. Now, at that time, and at the hour that the State of Emergency was to come into force, photographs later emerged of him, of course, in Tobago, at a party, with a glass in his hand. I am not condemning anyone—

Hon. Members: Facts.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: I am just stating what the facts are.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: Now, it is not easy to listen to some of the words uttered by Dr. Rowley, as he now is, but I fear that this evening, I have to carry you to precisely those words. Now, his words are recorded for all time, and they are not just recorded, they are recorded in the *Hansard* of this House for all time. And this is some of what he said when he surfaced from Tobago to extend the State of Emergency, which is what we are about this evening. So, in his normal style, he is perhaps thinking aloud, there is some sort of stream of consciousness. He says:

“I think that was 2011, where 350-odd persons were killed and it has continued and continued to the point where in 2023, over 600 persons were murdered in this society.”

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Under his watch.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: Under his watch.

“We thought”—that is him speaking—“that was a record-breaking arrangement, which to contemplate a repeat was too much given the amount of effort, resources, dollars, policemen, security services, information gatherers, promotions around and of course the concerns of the citizens for safety and security.”

I want to be fair to him, that is his quote, end of quote for now. I pause to say something. I wanted you to note the focus on “resources”. It is all about money:

“...dollars, policemen, security services, information gatherers...”

The last thing he mentioned is:

“...citizens...safety and security.”

—there in that Bill.

I go on and I quote:

“We thought that all the effort that...”

—now this is poor him:

“We thought that all the effort that we would have put out would have seen some reduction. Madam Speaker,”—well, it was Madam Speaker at the time—“come 2024 and it is as if the violent criminal element decided that if you want, we will show you what we can do.”

I pause there again, end of quote. So, at that time, the criminals seemed to be dictating what is going on, not the other way around.

I quote again. It goes on:

“Madam Speaker, it is not uncommon in this society to wake up and be informed of a new kind of crime, a new way of hurt, a new way of killing people and you ask what were these people thinking?”

My comment on that is, sense of hopelessness. “I and all feeling sorry for him” at this stage.

Then he goes on:

“What respect do they have for human life whether it is a pensioner whose home was invaded to be killed by some person who is able-bodied and who one would expect in a normal society would go out and look for a job and feed himself or a child or a person going to work?”

Now, this is what stunned me, Mr. Speaker. I mean, it is on record, in the *Hansard* for all of us to see. I want my colleagues to listen to this, because I think it is important. This is what Dr. Rowley then says:

“It has turned out Madam Speaker, where initially”—this word is important—“we thought that this was a Laventille thing because the crimes were committed in Laventille and therefore if we isolate Laventille—in

State of Public Emergency
 (Basis for Declaration
 Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC (cont'd)

fact...”

Now, you can make what you want of this, but this is him talking, not me:

“...one Member of this House...”

—he does not say who. If it was a Member on this side, I guarantee you what I am about to say, he would have mentioned that person. He said:

“...in fact one Member of this House”—he does not say who—“had reported to his Leader”—I am leaving it as that—“that the way to solve the crime in this country was to castrate the males in Laventille.”

Hon. Members: What!

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: What! Who said that? Who said that?

Ms. John: That is in the *Hansard*?

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: It is in the *Hansard*, it is in the *Hansard*.

Ms. John: Show them where to find it.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: Mr. Speaker, it is in the *Hansard*, 13 January, 2024.

Mr. Tancoo: Oh my.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: I saw and I almost had a heart attack. I had to be revived.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Shame.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: Now, as I say, if that was a Member on this side, the population would have known, he would have said it. I asked a sensible population to draw the inference where that comment came from. That is all. I go on. That is not the end of what he says. That is the highlight, it is not the end.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: That was his plan.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: So I am just lucky I am not living in Laventille for

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the time being. So when at the end of the year—this is him moaning again. We see a continuation of a situation where persons who take the decision to commit crime are now so comfortable with their power where they believe that, essentially—he goes on, and I am not quoting here—they can do anything. He says:

“Even as they get convicted and get into the prison, the prison has become part of the problem...”

Now, this is in 2024. He is demonstrating that he knows the prison is a part of the problem in 2024. And he says:

“...the prison has become part of the problem rather than part of the solution, and all we can do, Madam Speaker, is to continue to engage them, direct resources”—the same resources he was squeezing about earlier on—
 “and ensure that we have a commitment that law-abiding citizens must be protected from this element of criminality.”

And then he goes on to say that after all is said and done, he has no choice but to take note of certain things. One:

“...gang warfare...”—is—“...imminent.”

Two:

“Gang warfare action had been taken.”

Three:

“Retaliation was...expected...”

Four:

“...more deaths and more mayhem were to be expected...”

And in all those circumstances, he said:

“...governmental authority had to intervene...”

He used a strange word. He said:

“...if not to bring sobriety,”—I mean, he have to read that in the context of where he was perhaps on Old Year’s Night—“but to bring some element of increased and improved law enforcement to the lawless.”

6.20p.m.

Now, Mr. Speaker, when Dr.Rowley was speaking, and I ask you to cast your mind back to January of 2024. Just to our north in Haiti, there was a serious problem with just those things that he was speaking about. In fact, the United Nations put out a paper, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, they do this every quarter. The last quarterly report was done six weeks ago, in January and this is what that report says:

“Haiti is facing multiple, overlapping, humanitarian, political, economic and security crises, with dire consequences for the local population. 16,000 people have been killed since January 2022, 1.5 million have been displaced, more than half do not have food to eat.

Powerful gangs now control vast swathes of territory and infrastructure in the country. Abetted by a steady flow of trafficked arms, they are inflicting horrific violence on civilians, including homicides, kidnapping and sexual violence.”

This bit is important. The United Nations is speaking, not me.

“Over the past decade, the criminal landscape has transformed in Haiti. Gangs once operated as fragmented, neighborhood vigilantes who committed sporadic violent acts, much like gangs in other countries.”

Now, he is speaking in that context, with a country a few miles away, which provides an example of the force that gangs can have. He is operating within a context where gangs are merging together. He has all of this intelligence at his

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disposal and what does he do, apart from playing golf and drinking on Old Year's night? He declares a State of Emergency, he throws up his hands and he walks away.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we on this side are of the view that when we came into office just under a year ago, we met a country whose foundation was so profoundly corroded, so systemically undermined by the criminal underworld that Haiti seemed to be imminent for us. The looming danger of societal collapse, seemed to have been obscured from a population that had become desensitized by the daily litany of gruesome murders, kidnappings, rape, home invasions, and multiple homicides. Why do I say that? Because their complexity, rather Dr. Rowley's complicity, is recorded in the *Hansard* and it is recorded there for all time. He did nothing.

By his own admission on that day, he said in the *Hansard* of this House, that they had spent billions, allegedly, on securing ourselves and yes, we agree, they spent billions on themselves, billions spent and yet the murder rate surged upwards. Serious crimes suffocated communities, the illicit drug trade boomed uninhabited. Mr. Speaker, the illicit drug trade boomed uninhabited. I am not going to explain what that means, I am sorry. We reject what he said on that day.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: We reject in the strongest terms, that castrating black men in Laventille is an option.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: We reject that gang violence is just a threat of violence which might be met by a state of emergency, which then incidentally with their attitudes, they declared a state of emergency on the 30th of December. Do

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you know what happened on the 31st of December? The day after they declared the State of Emergency? A state prosecutor involved in the trial of one of those people that my Prime Minister put in Tetrone, who was boasting about the murder of that state prosecutor. A state prosecutor was murdered in front of his family and children that was the answer of the gangs, to their declaration of a state of emergency on the 30th of December. We are not prepared to tolerate that.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: So, the threat of violence will be met with all of the resources, the serious resources of the armed forces in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: The threat of reprisal killings will be met with every single intelligence resource, every single resource that we have at our disposal.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: And we are not going to moan and cry about the money that we spend on national security. Our first duty is to secure the people of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: The Prime Minister has made that clear before, she made it clear this afternoon when she discussed, what is in fact, a revolutionary approach to dealing with crime in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: That is, the forging of alliances with those who have more resources, intelligence resources, more military assets and more know-how on these things.

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Mr. Speaker, this afternoon, our Prime Minister has called us to the House, this is not the 15th day, this is not the last stop.

Hon. Members: Correct.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: She has called us to meet an exigent threat, we are here to ask for an extension of the State of Emergency, and with those words, I beg to move.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, you are reminded that leave has been granted for Motions one and two to be debated together. Member for Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Marvin Gonzales (Arouca/Lopinot): Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, having listened to the hon. Attorney General, in his presentation, it felt as though the hon. Attorney General read from his last presentation, when this Government came to Parliament and asked for an extension of the State of Emergency.

The statement and the proclamation by the President reads almost similar to the last proclamation that caused us to be here at an Extraordinary Sitting of the Parliament to debate the President's proclamation and an extension of the State of Emergency. And having listened to the Attorney General, Mr. Speaker, I am not surprised. As a matter of fact, it feels like an encore, a state of emergency encore. But Mr. Speaker, there was absolutely no performance on this regard, none whatsoever.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, let me remind the people of Trinidad and

Tobago, that when the Attorney General and the Government came last year with a state of emergency, it is the PNM party as an Opposition, we supported that State of Emergency because the allegations contained, the intelligence that reached the National Security Council, as was stated in the President's proclamation, Mr. Speaker, very serious allegations, where certain actors within the prison, according to the President's proclamation, and the intelligence reaching the National Security Council, that certain actors within the prison, posed a serious and immediate threat against certain Senior Officials of the State, the DPP's Office, the Judiciary and senior law enforcement officers. And it is this Opposition standing with the Government, said that we will stand on the side of law enforcement and support the declaration and the extension of the State of Emergency because what was contained in the President's proclamation was a very serious matter that could have undermined, the stability of Trinidad and Tobago.

So, when the Attorney General could come here today, Mr. Speaker, and give the impression that this Opposition was never in support of the Government or never in support of law enforcement, it must be rejected, out of hand.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: It must be rejected, Mr. Speaker. Because we said time, and time again, that we will always stand on the side of law enforcement, Mr. Speaker, that this is not no place for politics because when you are declaring a state of public emergency, it is a very serious matter. It is a very serious matter, Mr. Speaker. Because when a state of public emergency is declared in any country, and in this particular, Trinidad and Tobago, you are talking about that the suspension of our constitutional rights, Mr. Speaker, and our freedoms. The right to bail, the right to habeas corpus, the right not to appear before a judge, to apply

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for bail. Your constitutional rights, Mr. Speaker, is taken away in order to deal and treat with the emergency.

6.35p.m.

And, Mr. Speaker, the Attorney General talked about—and he read, as a matter of fact—the Attorney General spent most of his time talking about the former Prime Minister, Dr. Rowley.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: Dr. Rowley can defend himself. He does not need me to defend him, Mr. Speaker, but I was not surprised. I was not surprised that the Attorney General spent most of his time talking about Dr. Rowley because he had nothing else to say this evening. He has absolutely nothing else to say.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: And I must say, Mr. Speaker, that we are in the season of Lent, and I am a devout Roman Catholic, let me say so, and I am observing the season of Lent. I want to tell the Attorney General that the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago is not a place for his personal grouses.

Hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. M. Gonzales: I want to tell the Attorney General here once and for all because we have had enough of him. We have had enough of him.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago is not for your personal grouses, and if you have a bee in your bonnet for Dr. Rowley, go and seek forgiveness.

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

Mr. M. Gonzales: We are in the season of Lent. We are in the season of Lent,

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and perhaps when you leave this Parliament, go and find a church, do the Stations of the Cross, go down on your knees, and repent, but the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago is not for your personal grouses. It is to debate the affairs of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: So do not come and read from excerpts—and the hon. Attorney General knew, Mr. Speaker, that he was playing smart with foolishness.

Hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. M. Gonzales: He knew when, quoting from Dr. Rowley, and what he was talking about, castration, he knew—

Mr. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 48(6), please. I refer you to Standing Order 48(6).

Mr. Speaker: I do not think it is an imputation of an improper motive—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker:—but I think that it is borderline. [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: Thank you for your protection, Mr. Speaker. But the Attorney General knew that Dr. Rowley was referring to a matter where a Member of Parliament made reference to the castration of male Africans in response to the crime situation in Trinidad and Tobago. And, he knew, Mr. Speaker, where it came from.

Hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. M. Gonzales: And it was not in the People's National Movement. He knew that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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Mr. M. Gonzales: He knew it. And, I will not stand here and waste my time to respond to the Attorney General because I want to tell him that we are in the season of Lent, and here is no place for your personal grouses.

Mr. Speaker: You have made that point five times already.

Mr. M. Gonzales: Here is not for it. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: We are also in Ramadan, so let us move on.

Mr. M. Gonzales: Well, the Muslims will speak on behalf of that. But, I am a devout Roman Catholic, and I feel more comfortable to tell the Attorney General that this personal issue that he has—

Mr. Speaker: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: Come on, Mr. Speaker, you tell me about Ramadan, I have to tell you about that I am a Catholic and what I feel comfortable to speak about, Mr. Speaker. Let me tell you this.

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

Mr. M. Gonzales: Oh yes, of course. Do not disturb me.

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

Mr. M. Gonzales: Do not disturb me, with the greatest of respect.

We are here debating another State of Emergency. Mr. Speaker and colleagues on both sides, when this Attorney General came back to Parliament to extend the State of Emergency, I stood here and I asked the Attorney General, the circumstances that led us to the calling of an Extraordinary Sitting of the Parliament, tell us what is the status of this particular matter? Because there were very serious allegations. Because we supported the Declaration of the State of Emergency, we supported the extension of the State of Emergency because the allegations were serious, Mr. Speaker. And, when the Attorney General came back

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here asking for an extension, we said, what is the status of these matters? And, up to now, Mr. Speaker, this country cannot be respected and cannot be regaled as to what is the status of these matters, and I dare say, because there was no status, that is the reason why we are here today debating another state of emergency.

Every time the Attorney General came to Parliament asking for an extension of the State of Emergency, the Attorney General said that the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, the Commissioner of Police, reported that the threat or the threats have been abated. The threats have been neutralized. But we asked, “What is the status of these matters? Where is the investigation? Who is being placed before the courts? Have the files been submitted to the DPP’s office?” Because, you are talking about threats to serious state officials, Mr. Speaker? And up to now, with hundreds of people being detained under detention orders, and most of them leaving detention centres and state prisons, Mr. Speaker, up to now, we have not heard what is the status of these matters.

The Attorney General, Mr. Speaker, on numerous occasions, came before this Parliament, and we supported it. The records are clear. We supported it. And, Mr. Speaker, when leaders cannot speak with a semblance of credibility, then it undermines our democracy. Because the people of Trinidad and Tobago have had enough of leaders saying one thing today when it is convenient to them, something else tomorrow when it is convenient to them, and something else again, Mr. Speaker, when it is convenient to them. And this is exactly what is taking place with this Government. They say and they speak what is convenient at the point in time. It is governance by “voops, vaps and vaille que vaille».

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: Make it up as you go along and hope for the best. Make it up

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as you go along and hope for the best, and when the best cannot continue, blow in a plastic bag.

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

Mr. M. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, when they were at the wit's end, asking for justification for the State of Emergency, because the reason why I am raising these issues, is because we are not here by chance. We are not here by chance. The Commissioner of Police, via an *Express* report dated August 12th, when he was asked about this threat that forced the Government to call a state of emergency in Trinidad and Tobago, the Commissioner said, and I quote:

“THE “imminent threat” which prompted Commissioner of Police Allister Guevarro to approach the National Security Council for a state of emergency...to be declared in this country on July 18 has been “neutralised”...

According to Guevarro, the police response has moved from disruption to the systematic dismantling of an organised criminal gang.”

So if the threat was neutralized, and there has been systematic dismantling of an organized criminal gang in Trinidad and Tobago, then for God's sake, what are we doing here today?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: Because the President's declaration that we are debating here today, Mr. Speaker, is talking about gangs. It was neutralized by this august report.

“...disruption to the systematic dismantling of an organized criminal gang.”

But on this Presidential proclamation or statement, the President is saying that

“...I was informed by Cabinet, that within the last days a number of violent

criminal activities had taken place with mass shootings and multiple victims, most of which have been carried forward by members of organized criminal gangs which have endangered public safety.

Cabinet further informed that there have also been credible threats to attack police officers, prison officers, and other members of the protective services. Additionally, Cabinet advised that Trinidad and Tobago's Police Service Intelligence informed the Minister of Homeland Security, who in turn informed the National Security Council that criminal gangs in the islands of Trinidad and Tobago have increased acts of violence on a scale so extensive that it threatens persons and will endanger public safety.

According to the National Security Council, it was of the view that it was necessary to take immediate action.”

Mr. Speaker, if the threat was neutralized, the gangs were dismantled and there were no more threats, Mr. Speaker, then what are we doing here today? What are we doing here today? Mr. Speaker, I can go on.

The Prime Minister, speaking at a Caricom conference giving remarks, she made a very interesting statement. She said, and I quote:

In 2025, with a change of policy to treat with drug cartels and gangs as violent terrorist organisations, the military action by the American military in the Caribbean caused Trinidad and Tobago's murder rate to decrease by 42 per cent or 257 murders.

So, what is it? Was it as a result of the last State of Emergency where you said that the threat was neutralized? Or, was it as a result of so-called military action by a foreign military power? What is it, Mr. Speaker? Because you were boasting not too long ago that the crime situation was falling precipitously, as though we had no

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more problems in Trinidad and Tobago, and less than one week after you were boasting to regional governments, you came back in Trinidad to declare a state of emergency. Mr. Speaker, they are speaking from all sides of their mouths.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: All sides of their mouths, Mr. Speaker. Because how could it be so good when you were boasting to regional leaders, and one week after you return to Trinidad and Tobago, the thing is so bad that you have to call for another state of emergency? Mr. Speaker, it is leadership that is lacking in credibility.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: Leadership that is lacking in credibility, but it gets more interesting. It gets more interesting because you see they speak from all sides of their mouths, Mr. Speaker.

I want to read a very interesting article. Where is it? By the Police Commissioner. And he was asked—it is a *Newsday* article dated Saturday 3rd January, 2026.

“Commissioner on decline in murders, serious crime...’ Thanks to cops, not SOE”.

Mr. Speaker, if you take them on, they would give you political whiplash, you know.

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

Mr. M. Gonzales: Political whiplash. Because one minute the Attorney General is saying something, the next minute the same Attorney General is saying something else. The other minute the Prime Minister going up the region saying one thing. The next minute, the next one blowing in a bag.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: “Take care yuh lash meh”

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Mr. M. Gonzales: “Nah. I wouldnt lash yuh at all. You doh worry.” The next minute, Mr. Speaker, the Commissioner is saying that the criminal gangs have been dismantled, they have been neutralized, and the next minute the same Commissioner is saying that the fall in murders have nothing to do with the State of Emergency, nothing to do. Mr. Speaker, they will not give me whiplash and they will not give this Opposition whiplash because it is “voops, vaps, and vaille que vaille”, Mr Speaker, and make it up as you go along.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: No plan, and as a matter of fact, I see the Prime Minister, and I am happy she is there because before she leaves the Chamber, I want to remind the Prime Minister that in—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Nice photo.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: “Nah I see better photos than that, come on.” This is the Prime Minister, then Opposition Leader 2024.

“This government has no real plan to tackle crime. This State of Emergency is a shameless political gimmick, a band-aid solution that does nothing to address the root causes of crime. A United National Congress (UNC) government has a comprehensive, actionable plan to combat crime.”

Mr. Speaker, political hypocrisy of the highest order.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: And according to my friend as according to my friend from Couva South, he puts it even better, sanctimonious hypocrisy, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

6.50p.m.

Mr. M. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, let me not be distracted by the Prime Minister because the country is very much aware of what she said. I want to read what the Commissioner said from that *Newspaper* article:

“COMMISSIONER of Police Allister Guevarro is praising the men and women of the TTPS, as he said improved intelligence-gathering coupled with honest, hard police work – and not the state of emergency (SoE)...” — would have—“...led to the drastic decline in murders and serious crime.”

So, the Commissioner of Police is telling the people of Trinidad and Tobago that it is hard work by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. It is intelligence-led policing that led, and it is not the State of Emergency. The Prime Minister, up the islands, is saying something completely different. The Attorney General, with personal grouses, is saying something completely different, and we are all over the shop, Mr. Speaker.

It is a hapless government with no vision because they campaign, Mr. Speaker, on misinformation, and now that they have fooled the country and are in government, they do not know what to do. They are turning left. They are turning right, Mr. Speaker, and they have no plans whatsoever to manage the affairs of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and that is why we are here today to declare and to debate another state of emergency, Mr. Speaker. This is what the Deputy Commissioner of Police said in support of the Commissioner of Police:

“Echoing sentiments shared by Guevarro, Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Junior Benjamin noted the successes of 2025 were not merely the result of increased patrols, but a fundamental shift in how the TTPS manages its greatest asset – its officers.”

That is where we are. And we hear from the Attorney General saying, according to him, the Commissioner of Police and the SSA, now reporting that the situation is so bad with respect to gangs and their operations in Trinidad and Tobago that they want another state of emergency. What about improved intelligence gathering? What about all of the lovely things and the management of the human resources of the police service? What about all these things?

One month ago, Mr. Speaker, it was not the SOE. We could manage. We were able to reduce murders. We were able to reduce and to disrupt gang activities because of intelligence-led policing, Mr. Speaker. Today, the Attorney General will want to have us believe that we are here today to call another state of emergency, or rather, to extend another state of emergency, because traditional policing cannot help. Traditional policing cannot help.

Mr. Speaker, let me remind this country that on January the 31st, when the previous State of Emergency came to an end and there was a spectacular collapse of the ZOSO Bill, and serious allegations being made against Senators by none other than the Prime Minister, this is what the Prime Minister said on her X platform, and also carried on the Facebook page, and she is talking to criminals according to her:

“Behave yourselves, or another State of Emergency (SOE) will be called.”
Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar warned criminals that they must behave or another state of emergency can be imposed, stating:

“Behave yourselves, or another State of Emergency will be called.”
She further warned:

The Government will use every lawful means to confront criminals. Mr. Speaker, who tells criminals to behave themselves?

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Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: You are telling criminals to behave? And if you do not behave, you will call another state of emergency. Mr. Speaker, let me remind the Prime Minister that the declaration of a state of emergency is for an emergency, Mr. Speaker, and it is not a crime-fighting tool, and I will refer the hon. Prime Minister SC, and the Attorney General, to a Jamaican court decision in 2025, which said that a state of emergency is not a constitutional tool to fight crime in any democratic country, Mr. Speaker.

Let me remind the Prime Minister that it is section 8 of the Constitution that speaks about the declaration of a State of Emergency:

“Subject to this section...”

—and allow me, Mr. Speaker, for the listening and viewing audience, I am not talking to the Prime Minister. I am talking to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Speaker. I am talking to them—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales:

“...for the purposes of this Chapter, the President may from time to time make a Proclamation declaring that a state of public emergency exists.

A Proclamation made by the President...”—which we are debating here today—“...under subsection (1) shall not be effective unless it contains a declaration that the President is satisfied—

- (a) that a public emergency has arisen as a result of the imminence of a state of war between Trinidad and Tobago and a foreign State;
- (b) that a public emergency has arisen as a result of any occurrence,

any earthquake, hurricane, flood, fire, outbreak of pestilence or of infectious disease, or other calamity, whether similar to the foregoing or not; or

- (c) that action has been taken, or is immediately threatened, by any person, of such a nature and on so extensive a scale, as to be likely to endanger the public safety or deprive the community of any substantial portion of the community of supplies or services essential to life.”

Mr. Speaker, when you read section 9 of the Constitution, Mr. Speaker, with respect to a threat, it must be immediate, but when you take into consideration, Mr. Speaker, the collective words of the Attorney General, the hon. Prime Minister, the Commissioner of Police, and the Deputy Commissioner of Police, and the Prime Minister, saying that “if you do not behave yourself, I will call another state of emergency”, Mr. Speaker, it is unconstitutional, and it is wrong, and it is an undermining and an infringement of the rights of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales:—to call a premeditated state of emergency because things are simply not working your way. That is the reason why we are here. There is no immediate threat in Trinidad and Tobago. There is absolutely no—and the Attorney General has said absolutely nothing, Mr. Speaker, that demonstrates that there is an immediate threat in Trinidad and Tobago that warrants the calling of a state of public emergency in Trinidad and Tobago, absolutely nothing, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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Mr. M. Gonzales: Because it is the Prime Minister that said, just a month ago, that, “if you do not behave yourself, I will call another state of emergency”. Murders taking place; triple murders, quadruple murders, gun violence taking place all over Trinidad and Tobago, and that is the reason why we have asked the Attorney General to tell us what is the status of the investigation that brought us here via an Extraordinary Sitting. What is prosecution? What is the state of these matters? Because if these matters cannot be addressed, Mr. Speaker, we will continually find ourselves here again debating state of emergency, state of emergency, because we are not dealing with the root cause of the problem that exists in Trinidad and Tobago—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales:—and that is not what a state of emergency is called for. It is wrong, and it is unconstitutional, Mr. Speaker. May I ask you how much time I have again?

Mr. Speaker: You have three minutes more.

Mr. M. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will take my extension as well, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, let me ask the Attorney General, or let me tell the country, I am not speaking to the Attorney General anymore. I am talking to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, there was a Jamaican case in 2025. Similar circumstances that we are debating here today in Trinidad and Tobago, because in Jamaica, there was a habit by the Government to declare states of emergency to

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address their gang and other criminal activities, Mr. Speaker. The General Secretary of the Opposition party brought a constitutional Motion asking the court to look into the constitutionality of the Government declaring a state of emergency to address the criminal situation in Jamaica.

Mr. Speaker, the Commissioner of Police, the Deputy Commissioner of Police, and other senior state officials went on affidavits, and in their affidavits, Mr. Speaker, they spoke about the criminal situation that exists in Jamaica at this point in time, and that having regard to the information that the only way in which the police can treat with the issue of gangs and criminal activities is via the declaration of a state of emergency. Allow me to read excerpts of the judgment. At page 44, the Jamaican court ruled and cited that:

“Without citing details from DCP Blake’s evidence of the crime statistics for the various police divisions and parishes, or the existence of gangs and gang activities in the various parishes, it seems clear enough that what is being described is an ongoing state of affairs that the police have had difficulty managing over an extended period.”

An ongoing state of affairs, very critical, Mr. Speaker, not the immediacy of a situation, not an emergency, as we are being asked to accept here today. It continues:

“There is logic and good sense in the assertion that a state of affairs which persist over a period of years cannot properly be described as an emergency.”

I repeat:

“There is logic and good sense in the assertion that a state of affairs which persist over a period of years cannot properly be described as an

emergency.”

Mr. Speaker, this is at the heart of what we are doing here today, because gangs and gang activities have been our state of affairs in Trinidad and Tobago for a very long time, and the court is saying that if you are using that to declare a state of emergency, then it is contrary to the Constitution, and it is wrong, it is unconstitutional, and it is illegal, Mr. Speaker.

It continues:

“Having determined that the SOPE were not imposed for a proper purpose, within the meaning of section 20 of the”—Jamaican—“Constitution, we consider that in any event, the state has not shown that the imposition of SOPE with its consequent infringements of constitutional rights is a response that is proportionate to the circumstances. We consider that the specific provisions of the Emergency Powers Regulations 2023 addressed by King’s Counsel may well be reasonable limitations on constitutional rights during a period of public emergency.”

And:

“The separation of powers doctrine extends to the relationship between the executive and the legislature. The present constitutional arrangements require the participation of the executive as well as the legislature in order to properly secure an extension of a SOPE. Therefore, the declaration of a new SOPE within days of the expiration of one SOPE in circumstances where it could not be said that a new emergency arose, is a method of circumventing the constitutional provisions and process.”

7.05 p.m.

The court is saying that what the Government of Jamaica was doing was

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finding ways to circumvent the constitutional process, and that the state of affairs with respect to crime is one that existed for a very long period of time, and therefore, a state of public emergency was not the way to treat with those matters, Mr. Speaker. And I dare say, Mr. Speaker, that where we are today is very much similar, and therefore, this State of Emergency, and the extension of the State of Emergency are unconstitutional and it is one that should be challenged in our constitutional courts, Mr. Speaker, because it is a misuse of state of emergency—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales:—especially, Mr. Speaker, when one takes into consideration the utterances of the Prime Minister, the Attorney General, the Commissioner of Police and the Deputy Commissioner of Police saying that, “We can achieve law and order in Trinidad and Tobago, that we can disrupt the criminal gangs by intelligence-led policing and not a state of emergency.” And that is what we stand for. And we say that our principle here on this side is that if there is a genuine emergency, we will support the police and we will support the Government. “But this is not no genuine emergency.” It is premeditated because it was the Prime Minister herself who said on January 31st that, “If you do not behave yourself, I will call another state of emergency.” It is wrong, Mr. Speaker, and it is unconstitutional.

Mr. Speaker, the Attorney General spoke for a very long period of time, not on the President’s proclamation, not on justifying the State of Emergency, but on dealing with all kinds of things that I do not want to—

Hon. Member: Repeat.

Mr. M. Gonzales:—repeat. Correct. I do not want to repeat it. But I want, and I hoped that the Attorney General would have told us—and perhaps in the

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discussion or in this debate maybe we might be surprised if the Minister of Homeland Security would finally speak in an SOE debate. But I want to ask the Attorney General and the Government, and perhaps the Prime Minister, what is wrong with the Anti-Gang Act? What is wrong with the Anti-Terrorism Act? What is wrong with the Proceeds of Crime Act? What is wrong with the Sexual Offences Act? What is wrong with the Kidnapping Act? What is wrong with the Dangerous Drugs Act? What is wrong, Mr. Speaker, with the Trafficking in Persons Act? What is wrong with the Bail (Amdt.) Act? All of these pieces of legislation were passed by this Parliament, by elected representatives, to give the police and law enforcement, Mr. Speaker, the power and the tools to tackle crime at its root causes.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: And as the Leader of the Opposition would have said on numerous occasions from the moment she took her oath of office and being appointed as Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the Opposition, Member of Parliament for Arima, told the Prime Minister that we are willing to work with you, we are willing to support you, we are willing to collaborate with you on any piece of legislation or policy that will address the crime situation in Trinidad and Tobago. Tell us what is wrong with these pieces of legislation and let us work together to address them so that we can attack crime at its root causes.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: But a state of emergency, Mr. Speaker, according to the Prime Minister and according to some Members of the Government is just putting a plaster on a sore and not dealing with the problem. They said it when they were in Opposition and they are running away from it because they are in government,

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because they cannot and they have not advanced one policy to treat with the issue of crime and criminality. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, the plans and programmes that we in the PNM put in place to address crime at its root causes, they have dismantled all of it, Mr. Speaker; all of it—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales:—depriving the hopes and the dreams of so many people to give them a fighting chance, Mr. Speaker, away from crime and criminality so that we do not have to come here and debate state of emergency, state of emergency. That is not hope, and that cannot be our portion and cup as a country. We can do better. We must do better. We have the capacity to do better, Mr. Speaker, and we here in the Opposition are saying, you come to us, tell us what is wrong with these pieces of legislation, and we are prepared to work with you. But it requires hard work. It requires hard work. And there is no silver bullet to addressing crime in Trinidad and Tobago, but it requires leadership with credibility, which is lacking in Trinidad and Tobago here today. It is lacking in Trinidad and Tobago here today.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: Tell us what is wrong with these pieces of legislation, Mr. Speaker, and we are prepared to support you. We are prepared to support the Government. We are prepared to support the police, Mr. Speaker, but tell us what is wrong. But you cannot come here, threaten a state of emergency when things do not go your way, say one thing one day, say something else another day, and expect that you will call legislators here today and say that things in this country are so bad, when you were boasting not too long ago that, “We have it under control, it is going down,” but it is so bad today that you have to declare a state of emergency. Mr. Speaker, it is wrong, it is an egregious trampling on the rights of

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the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and it ought not to be tolerated.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: It ought not to be tolerated. And therefore, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that we in the PNM are not supporting this State of Emergency because it is a fake state of emergency.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: It means that nothing would have changed from the last time you brought us here. Nothing would have changed. You locked up over 200 men and women, put them in detention centres. Many of them, Mr. Speaker, have not been interviewed for one crime. You allowed them to go, then you threatened them and you called them criminals, “Behave yourself because I will call another state of emergency.” Mr. Speaker, that is not the way you lead a country. It is regrettable and it is very unfortunate, because if it is not addressed at its root causes, I am telling you, Mr. Speaker, we are going to come back here again with another extension, and we are going to come back here again with another extension. Where are we going? Deal with it from its root causes because you cannot be snuffing out the opportunities available for so many of our young people by trampling and removing state programmes to give them a fighting chance, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: And then, today, coming to declare a state of emergency. It is sanctimonious hypocrisy and incompetence by a hapless government, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Gonzales: This State of Emergency must be rejected out of hand, and the Government must be encouraged to sit down and do its work. And if you have a

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Minister of Homeland Security who cannot do the work, and if you have a Minister of Defence who cannot do his work, then replace them, fire them and put someone that is competent to do the work, Mr. Speaker. We are fed up with incompetence and we are fed up with a government that is wallowing, lost at sea, giving no hope to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. This State of Emergency must be rejected out of hand, Mr. Speaker, because it is an intrusion and an unnecessary provocation of the rights of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Toco/Sangre Grande.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Defence and Minister in the Ministry of Homeland Security

(Hon. Wayne Sturge): Mr. Speaker, I literally do not know where to start.

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

Hon. W. Sturge: And, Mr. Speaker, you, as a practising lawyer, would know that the most difficult thing to do is to come after one who engages in pettifoggery.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. W. Sturge: Because that was the work of a pettifogger.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: Let me—before I go to their crime plan, let me deal with something the last speaker just made reference to ad nauseam. And he made reference to it ad nauseam, and by doing so, it became evident that he had no clue how to fight crime.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: So I will suggest to him that he should continue making videos

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on Facebook about how to make macaroni.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. W. Sturge: Because, Mr. Speaker, I am surprised as a lawyer because I heard you say that he is a lawyer. But let me deal with what he spoke about ad nauseam, the root cause of crime, and he said that they dealt with the root causes of crime. Anyone who understands crime fighting would know that if you want to make an impact in the short to medium term, then what you deal with is not the root causes of crime, but the proximal causes of crime. When you are dealing with the root causes of crime, you have to start 10 years in advance. So whatever you do in dealing with the root causes, you will see the results 10 years down the road. Any social scientist will tell you that.

So let me tell you about what they did 10 years ago and why we are feeling the results of what they did 10 years ago. Ten years ago, they claimed to have the answer to crime. They came with a 10-point crime plan, and I have it here. Permit me to read it out. Here is their 10-point crime plan to deal with root causes from 10 years ago. Here is their 10-point crime plan:

1. Appoint a police commissioner.

We all know how that went. Basically, they manipulated the merit list to get the choice they wanted and then when they did not—

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 48(6), please. No one here manipulated any merit list.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Hon. W. Sturge: Manipulated the merit list, and when they could not control the Commissioner they got, then they fired him and intercepted the merit list. So that is point one. We did not do that. We worked with the system. We worked with

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who the independent JSC got, and we are working with him, and it turns out that he is the best choice.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: Point two of their 10-point crime plan.

2. Police Manpower Audit.
3. Establish municipal police units.
4. Give greater powers to the PCA, including the power to prosecute.

Yeah, that is a crime plan, eh.

5. Parliamentary oversight of crime suppression plan.
6. Create an offence of witnessing tampering.
7. Create an offence of unlawful eviction.

That is a crime plan, eh. Because they were running out of ideas, quite clearly.

8. Urban renewal plan.

For God's sake, what does that have to do with crime? They are clearly running out of ideas.

9. To bring more effective anti-gang legislation.
10. Make the CCJ the final appellate court.

So let me tell you, well, they claimed—apart from the last one, they claimed that they did everything else. So you achieved nine out of 10, and 10 years later, let me tell you what the result is. The result is that they have the gold medal in murders, the most murders ever, 625. They have the silver medal in murders, 605. So 2025, 625; 2024, 605. That is the result of 10 years after their crime plan. So the crime plan, which was the answer—they said that they had the answer to crime? Ten years later, the crime worsened, it doubled. Murders doubled. They also happen to have the bronze medal with respect to crime, 577. If you are

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running in lane four, lane four, they also claimed lane four at 550; lane five at 539 in 2019; lane six, 518 in 2018; lane seven, 2009, they had 509; and lane eight, 497 in 2017. You know what else, Mr. Speaker? They also stole the award for—drum roll—the most murderous months. They got more awards: First to cross 300 murders a year, first to cross 400 murders a year, first to cross 500 murders a year, and first to cross 600 murders a year, and first to beat that 600 murders a year consecutively. So that is their crime plan.

So when they stand up here today—and I noticed that the man who likes to make videos about macaroni had no ideas, since he said—

Mr. Alexander: The one who is leaving here?

Hon. W. Sturge: The one who is leaving, who is running away—

Hon. Members: *[Laughter]*

Hon. W. Sturge:—who is running away. He had nothing by way of suggestion; not one thing. All he could do is talk, and talk, and talk. And do you want me to tell you why—

Mr. Alexander: *[Inaudible]*

Hon. W. Sturge: He has to run away. You know why? He was there for a “cobo sweat”.

Hon. Members: *[Laughter]*

7.20 p.m.

Also, the “cobo sweat—his cobo sweat was only shorter than the other cobo sweat, which was Port of Spain South. So two lawyers, two cobo sweat, followed by the Rastafarian who had the longest cobo sweat. And all the lawyers, four lawyers in a row in national security, and crime just got wors and wors and wors.” So they have nothing. They cannot be heard on what is a crime plan. But they are

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coming here to say that a state of emergency is not a crime plan. It is not. We are not suggesting that it is. And he is coming here to say that—what did he say? I want to quote him. Coming here to wonder what happened with all of the information we had. Well, if he was a real lawyer, he would have known.

If the police were picking up chatter that things were being planned, then the Government has one out of two choices; “leave dem, let dem plan, wait until they carry out their plan, wait until they kill who they have to kill”, and then try to get evidence to arrest them. Or, or—

Hon. Member: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. W. Sturge: What is that?

Hon. Member: Ahhh.

Hon. W. Sturge: Poor thing. That is why you are over there.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: So, the alternative of a responsible Government who cares about life, and the right to life of citizens who are law-abiding, and even those who are not law-abiding, but who should be presumed innocent, any responsible Government would choose to preserve life. And if calling a state of emergency preserves life, then so be it. So be it.

And you see the thing is, that is why he had to run away, and I am being told he is outside watching on the TV because he cannot take the heat inside of here. If he had an ounce of common sense, he would know. Any lawyer would tell you that the minute you institute a PDO, which is what you get during the State of Emergency, a Preventative Detention Order, in that term, the very first word is preventative. It is to prevent something from happening. So if you get a PDO, in keeping with the powers of the SOE, how do you expect, for God’s sake, to collect

evidence thereafter? You get the PDO, and in the context of the last SOE, and this one, the purpose of the PDO is to keep you inside, and not just keep you inside “the people jail” where you can continue to communicate over Minecraft, Call of Duty, Roblox, and all that. The purpose of the PDO is, since you are so dangerous, to take you out of the system and put you down Teteron and Staubles where you cannot communicate. And because they were not able to communicate, they could not carry out their plans.

So it is not inconsistent when the Commissioner of Police said that the threat was neutralized. It was neutralized because you could not communicate any longer. You could not carry it out. That is common sense. That seemed to fly over the head of Arouca/Lopinot. In fact, it was chasing him, and he ran faster, until he ran out of here. So he seems to always be running away from common sense.

And the thing is, with that PDO, that PDO, in essence, achieved something. It prevented bloodshed. But the takeaway from that is, and you have to make a choice, when you preserve life through the PDO, you obviously cannot listen anymore. There is nothing for the SSA to listen to. So what do you prefer? “You prefer leave dem, so you could listen to dem, leh them kill who dey have to kill, just like they killed Mr. Hector, the prosecutor.”

And you know, the thing is, Dana Seetahal also knew she was going to get killed. She knew. Yes, she did. She chose not to have security around her and she went on. And there was—well, if you had the case, you would hear about the intercepts. There are intercepts. So the police is there listening, knowing that a high-profile prosecutor is going to be killed. And instead of doing what we did, you know what they did? They listened, and they listened and they listened and

now she is not here. That is what they do. You know what they do? Nothing. What they do and nothing is the same thing. That is the PNM fame. So they cannot come here, and he did not try. You cannot come here and tell us what to do, what new crime plan.

And you know, the thing is, an SoE is not a crime plan, and we never said it was. But if it is necessary to preserve life, we will do it again and again and again.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: “Who vex, dey vex. Tell de boss he loss. And I doh know who is de boss on that side.”

Ms. Ameen: “Dem and all doh know who is de boss.”

Hon. W. Sturge: Yeah. It is not a crime plan, but we do have a crime plan, which we were implementing in stages. And a critical part of that crime plan, a critical part of that jigsaw puzzle was ZoSO. And you see, the thing is, and there are conflicting reports as to how ZoSO died in the PNM and the hypocrisy that goes with what happened with ZoSO here.

Imagine you have a ZoSO Act in Jamaica that worked and continues to work. They copied the identical thing, tried to bring it in the Parliament. If we are to believe Faris Al-Rawi, the rejected man who was rejected by San Fernando West, he said it died because he wrote a letter to the then Opposition and they did not respond. So his crime-fighting plan is based on whether the Opposition chooses to respond to a letter.

You know what the Member for Laventille West told us on the last occasion? That that is not why ZoSO died. It died in the Cabinet of the PNM because the leader and others in that Cabinet felt that ZoSO would have targeted PNM supporters. So who was speaking the truth? Yeah, who was speaking the truth? And now you

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have ZoSO, which works in Jamaica. They were going to use it, did not use it. Now that we are using it and they know fully well it would work, you know what they do? They say we cannot support that because they know that the number one concern of law-abiding citizens in this country is crime. They know that once crime is cut substantially, like it was last year, down by 42 per cent for murders—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge:—they know once crime goes down, “dey coo coo cook.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: “Yeah, dey coo coo cook.” They know that once we succeed on crime, they will be there for 10/15 years.

Ms. Mohit: Obstructionist.

Hon. W. Sturge: So you know what they do? They obstruct. And when it went to the Senate, master obstructionist, here is a man who could speak for 45 minutes and say nothing. That is why San Fernando West rejected him.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: That is an amazing talent, and on that alone he deserves Silk. Because I do not know any other lawyer who could speak for 45 minutes and say nothing. Well, I see Marvin tried just now.

And the thing is—no, because the interesting thing is Arouca/Lopinot was accusing the Attorney General and saying the bulk of his speech was reading what Dr. Rowley said, Keith Rowley. But you know, I was just going through his. His speech is no different to the last one, and he bites aspects of the speech from Port of Spain South. And then the rest of his speech is basically reading from what other people say and reading from a court judgment. He, in essence, said nothing.

But, you know, the thing is, let me go back to San Fernando West, former

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San Fernando West, the rejected prophet. So in the Senate, he came with a whole set of amendments. Dishonesty at its highest, the epitome of dishonesty. And when you listen to all of the Senators, sorry, presidential Senators, the new “Eight Gang” because we have Sixx and Seven. When we listen to the utterings of the Eight, I would not count Mr. McNish in that. When you listen to the utterings, Sen. McNish, sorry.

Mr. Speaker: Rephrase that. Those are Members of the Senate. Rephrase that.

Hon. W. Sturge: So, when you listen to the utterings of what was said, it became obvious, they did not read the Bill. Because almost everything they asked for is in the Bill. So, you know what disturbs me, and we have not made this point clear? If you have a Bill named ZOSO, which is part of our crime-fighting plan, and it is working in Jamaica, it continues to work, so much so they wanted to use it and could not get to use it, and we bring it practically word for word, and Jamaica is almost, in terms of constitutional arrangements and laws and so on, similar to ours, strikingly similar, then how do you come up with amendments to something that actually works? Imagine they are coming to amend something that actually works in Jamaica. And when you read the amendments, probably three or four might be laudable. It makes no sense.

Mr. Young SC: Mr. Speaker, 48(8). Most of the last five minutes have been referring to Members of the Senate and their conduct, which is not permitted, 48(8).

Mr. Speaker: No, I did ask him to rephrase it. I think he has moved along. So I do not think it applies.

Hon. W. Sturge: I move on. The sorry part of all of this is that my friend is so slow. He should have objected so long ago. Yeah, so long ago. Anyway.

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Mr. Young SC: —*[Inaudible]* Superman now.

Hon. W. Sturge: Now, I want to deal with—Superman? You want to wear my Superman draws, Mr. Young? I will buy a pair for you. I will buy a pair for you. Now, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Come on, stop shouting across the corridor. And Toco/Sangre Grande, address me, please.

Hon. W. Sturge: Sorry.

Mr. Speaker: No, no, no. You are way too experienced for that.

Hon. W. Sturge: “Sorry, ah would not do it again. Ah would not do it again.” Now, Mr.—“oh, God, look at him, poor fella complaining again. Yes, he want to cry.”

So, Mr. Speaker, let me deal with what is affecting “all ah dem”, and it would continue to affect “all ah dem” for a long time.

Hon. Member: Talk about the SoE, please.

Hon. W. Sturge: Yes, we are dealing with the SOE. And I want to deal with the contribution of Keith Rowley, or Dr. Keith Rowley, as he is, now is. You see, the thing is, they try to deflect from the reality. The reality is, he said what he said in that debate. He said what he said, and it is symptomatic of a problem he has, which I will get to just now. But what he said is no different to a number of things he said in the same vein. Imagine when there were children, school children, fighting in a secondary school in Chaguanas, who called them African hyenas? Did we? Or did he? “He behaving like—right.” And who called them “duncey head” first formers?

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, please. Standing Order 48(1), please. The population would like to know why an SoE is being called now. We have heard

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nothing of that from this Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: I hear you on that. But if you reflect on the contribution of Arouca/Lopinot, you will see who let slip the dogs of war. All of it—

Mr. Manning: The Member for Lopinot—

Mr. Speaker: Have a seat. Have a seat, have a seat. Have a seat.

Mr. Manning: He is not the one calling the SoE.

Mr. Speaker: That is not relevant. The Member for Arouca/Lopinot—and I have all of it written down, because it is context. And it is fairness and proportionality. The Member is entitled to respond to those allegations. Thank you. Continue, Member.

Hon. W. Sturge: Yes, and let me not—thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me try to come off of that quick. “It just have two more.” Because those two things always disturb me about that particular gentleman: cotton picking and then the rest of us have to wait by the table for crumbs to fall off it, and his job is to get the rich richer and then “we the poor go wait for some crumbs.”

7:35p.m.

That is indicative of his mindset. That is indicative of his self-hatred for who he is.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: So, the Attorney General here, and I “doh” need to defend the Attorney General, but the Attorney General was right. It is self-hatred, and that is what is affecting all of them on that side. And, until they get over their self-hatred, just like him—you know what, if Keith Rowley was alive 300 years ago, he would have been in the house talking about them on the field. That is who Keith Rowley is.

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

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: That is enough now Toco. That is enough.

Hon. W. Sturge: “Ah still geh to say it”.

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

Hon. W. Sturge: Yes.

So, Mr. Speaker, let me move on to something else that deals with crime, because you know, the Member for Arouca/Lopinot, he does not understand things in context, and as Herbert Volney used to say, “A text taken out of context is a pretext for confusion”. Hence his confused contribution—Arouca/Lopinot. And you see to thing is, Mr. Speaker, he quite clearly does not understand how we are, where we are. Let me put something in context, and I had to raise this—I do not know if it was the third or the fourth breakout session at SOUTHCOM, but I had to raise the issue of the types of weapons we are seeing here. “I had to indicate that we doh make AR-15s and we doh make AK-47s”. But, Mr. Speaker, you must have seen three videos circulating via WhatsApp this year. One, I cannot remember the area, I think it is Picton or something like that.

Mr. Manning: The one with Guerra.

Hon. W. Sturge: The one with Guerra?

Hon. W. Sturge: Okay.

Hon. Member: “Wooh!”

Hon. W. Sturge: I did not know you knew.

Mr. Manning: “Yuh free now”.

Hon. W. Sturge: I have always been free.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

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Hon. W. Sturge: He is also free now. Free as a bird.

Hon. Member: Mr. Speaker, 53(1).

Hon. W. Sturge: Yes. So, Mr. Speaker—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. W. Sturge: Mr. Speaker—

Hon. Member: Mr. Speaker, 53(1).

Mr. Speaker: Continue Member, I know you can defend yourself.

Hon. W. Sturge: Sorry. I do not know if you recall, Mr. Speaker, a shooting in Laventille, and you are seeing on the video the men basically walking away from the crime scene with an AR-15 in their hands. An AR-15 again, used in Diego Martin. An AR15 again, used by Grand Bazaar, and you are seeing the murderer standing up over— I think his name is Curtis Pierre or something like that, “Bird”—and “bussing ah AR-15 on the man.” That is the weapon of choice. Those weapons are for mass murder. What we have heard through the intercepts, and all of this, through what was said at the National Security Council, and what we know now to be true, and what we have seen circulating on WhatsApp, about someone whose relative died on J’ouvert morning, and that to avenge his death, if he had 64 psalms, he is going to kill 64 people. Should a responsible government wait for 64 people to die as a result?

Mr. Speaker, 64 people, and you know what was made plain? He is not going to concentrate on 64 gang members. Mr. Speaker, 64 people from that area, he is going to kill. If you are in the wrong place at the wrong time—as one man in Bagatelle found out—“yuh dead”. What does a responsible government do when you are hearing things, and when you are faced with intercepts suggesting that they are going to kill police officers? You see, you have to take all of that in context.

This year how many police officers were shot at? This year—I do not know if you recall, Mr. Speaker, about an incident—I cannot remember if it is Santa Cruz—when the police went in search of someone who shot at them, they torched up the vehicle.

So, you have information telling you that that similar type of behavior, which has happened this year is going to continue. What do you do? You asked for ZOSO, you already made sure that we are not getting ZOSO. That is what you all did. So, if you do not want ZOSO, “yuh go get SOE”. And, guess what, ZOSO coming back. “And, when it come back, ah want to see whey yuh go do. No amendment, doh bother with that, Mr. Romain.”

Mr. Alexander: [*Laughter*]

Hon. W. Sturge: “Doh buddah with that”. I want to see what they will do.

Ms. Ameen: “Them doh care yuh no”.

Hon. W. Sturge: “I know dey doh care”. You see the thing is, Mr. Speaker, I raised the issue of the AR-15s, because that was something that was raised at SOUTHCOM. They are talking about—and I watch their narratives regularly—that it is wrong to kill these men on the boats who are carrying drugs, because these men deserve a trial, these men deserve a presumption of innocence, right. How do you know they are carrying drugs? But you know when the boat blew up off St. Vincent, you know it was “white gold” all over the place. Kilos of cocaine were floating all over the place till local fishermen were grabbing it up, and now they are getting arrested for what is not theirs. So that narrative is dead.

But, the point I want to make about that is this, they want to tell you, because all of their narrative, even upstairs, is about defending the rights of the criminals. They come here, and always talking about the rights of the criminals. ZOSO did

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not target law abiding people. This SOE does not target law-abiding people. The last SOE did not target law abiding people, but they are coming here to complain, because you know what, the SOE gives the same powers as ZOSO. Arrests without warrants; we can detain you, we can search your place—or as my friend would say, “suu-ch. We could suu-ch your place.”

Mr. Speaker: You have 15 minutes.

Hon. W. Sturge: I would like my 15 minutes.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. W. Sturge: Not all of it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: Yes. So that we can “suu-ch” your place without a warrant, and, in essence, we are getting to use ZOSO. But, you know, the thing about it is, whilst they are arguing for the criminal class innocent people are dying. A man went by a mechanic who had nothing to do with what happened J’ouvert morning on the Avenue, and, he is now dead, because they “doh” want ZOSO, all right. Well now you will get the alternative to ZOSO. And, we will not have to call a next SOE, because ZOSO is going to pass, whether you like it or not, next time.

Mr. Manning: You want to call another SOE?

Mr. W. Sturge: Sorry?

Mr. Manning: You want to call another SOE?

Hon. W. Sturge: Listen. You put that in your pipe and smoke it, and roll down San Fernando Hill.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: Yes. So, they wanted to make that point about the presumption of innocence. There was talk that Curtis “Bird” Pierre may have been involved,

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but a man stood over him with an AR-15, and killed him. What about his presumption of innocence, if he was in fact involved? What about the children he has left behind? All of this is because of you. Let me tell you further how it is because of you. Because, we do not produce AR-15s here. We do not produce cocaine here. We do not produce fentanyl here. We do not produce AK-47s here. Right?

So hear what, we do not produce any of that here, but those are the weapons of choice. We are not consumers of cocaine, but cocaine is transshipped from here. The cartels are using us to move their goods, and when transactions do not go smoothly, then people die. People sometimes die here, and they know that. People sometimes die—sorry?

Hon. Member: *[Interruption]*

Hon. W. Sturge: Oh, sorry.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Public Utilities and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Barry Padarath): Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 15(5), I beg to move that the House continue to sit until the completion of the business before it.

Question put an agreed to.

STATE OF PUBLIC EMERGENCY (BASIS FOR DECLARATION)

Mr. Speaker: Member continue.

Hon. W. Sturge: Yes, please. Thank you.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. W. Sturge: Yes. So, because we are a transshipment point, and because as a

result of when these transactions do not go as smoothly as they should, people die. Some of the people who happen to die have nothing to do with the transaction. Sometimes they kill your family who have nothing to do with it. So you have innocent people dying, and all of a sudden you know what their narrative is, Mr. Speaker? For the last 10 months how we are basically courting a war with Venezuela, they “doh” want radar here, they “doh” want the Americans here, they “doh” want no help from the Americans, and they “doh” want the Americans at Grafton in Tobago. They just seem to have a problem with the Americans. Ah doh know why de Americans ain take dey visas from all ah dem”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: “Dem fellas need to get a visa for Caracas.” Go there. Let me tell you why I have to say, “go there”. Because, when you look at their behaviour—well not this set. Down here they are innocent.

Hon. Member: No.

Hon. W. Sturge: [*Laughter*] “Nah. Dem is only robber talk. Leh meh tell yuh how is dem to blame for what is going on now. Because from 2017 coming up—leh meh roll back.” In 2015 we got vessels from Damen. Government changed in 2015. They did not like the fact that we cancelled the OPV from the company they chose. “Ah doh no wah went on. Dey was vex, who ain't get what they was supposed to get. They get Damen. Right.

So, Damen come now, and Damen tell them you have to put on shore Electrical-shore supply so that these vessels could work properly, and you will get longevity out of them.” You know what they did? They did not install any electrical shore supply. The very thing that the Dutch manufacturers told them not to do is what they did. They told them, “Do not run it without installing and using the electrical shore supply. Do not use the generators on board only.” You know what they did?

They did exactly that, used generators only, so that they could say that, the Damen vessels that the UNC procured were no good. “Look how quick it mash up. That is the game they does play. They play that game, so that they could go and get thing from Austal.”

Mr. Alexander: “Eh heh. Who dat?”

Hon. W. Sturge: “So they could like deh self. And then, they taking care of the Austal vessels, but they are not taking care of the Damen, because they want to go and tell the country, The Damen not good.” Right. You know we had to come in 10 years later, and in only in the last few months under the—who Marvin saying not good the Minister of Defence? Well, he was there—

Mr. Des Vignes: Mr. Speaker, 48(5). The Member is referring to another Member of this House by his name and not by his constituency. 48(5)

Hon. W. Sturge: I am sorry.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, please.

Hon. W. Sturge: Member for Arouca/Lopinot. So sad. “Ah feeling tuh cry. You know, both him, and someone who does stir ah coal pot, and ride ah bike, everybody had a chance to install the electrical shore supply, and for 10 years they did not.” We had to come and do it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: The end result of what they did meant that when we came in, only three vessels out of our 16 vessels were working. Only three vessels. I had to go down— I personally went to every single coastguard base, army base, whatever, and spoke with the people on the ground. ”You know what they say? They never see Hinds, they never see this one, they never dah one, they never see the other one. No former, former, former. Them too big to go down on the

ground.”

So I went down on the ground, and you know what I found out when I went down on the ground in Cedros? I went down on ground, and found out that the boat the coastguard was using in Cedros was an actual court exhibit waiting to be tendered as evidence in a court drug case, and that is what the coastguard was using.

Hon. Members: “Ohrrr.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

7.50 p.m.

They—well, let me not say “they”. Some very expensive communication handsets were acquired, but I think they needed something called a receptor or something like that to make it work—some walkie-talkies, “nah”. And you know what? “They eh bother to geh that.” So they left the Coast Guard in Cedros literally in the dark. They had no vehicles—“all ah dat I find out because I went down and fixing, eh.” They had no vehicles, no light, and no communication devices.

And you know what? When the radar centre had to contact the Coast Guard in Cedros to say, “Look, something heading Carli Bay way”, you know how they had to call? By cell phone, and hope that whoever they were calling answered. And by the time he answered, and it was time to respond, “de boat done reach ashore, empty dey load, coming back, and going dey way”. And that started in 2015 onward.

In fact, it got “rel” bad in 2017. And then in 2019, when they had the migrant crisis, they basically left the borders open. So while I sympathize with the Venezuelan nationals who had been coming, you know who came among them?

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The Tren de Aragua. Whose fault is that? That is “we” fault? That is your fault.
 You all—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: So whilst they were busy dancing conga line—and you know the Americans asked a question. They referenced 2017, and I was embarrassed because I could not answer it. You know what the Americans asked? “Why did they shut down the refinery in 2017?”

Hon. Member: In 2018.

Hon. W. Sturge: In 2018, sorry. “Why did they shut down the refinery?” I think it was Stephen Miller who asked or one of them. I had no answer. He said, “You must have an answer”. I said, “They do not even have an answer”. They said one day, Wilfred Espinet came and said, “We not closing Petrotrin”, and then the next day it closed.

Hon. Member: “De” fridge door closed too hard—

Hon. Member: The next Prime Minister said that.

Hon. W. Sturge: Right. I think Rowley said that too; it was not going to close, and then the next day he closed it.

Hon. Member: And then Espinet said, “all, all, all”.

Hon. W. Sturge: And then Espinet said, “all, all, all”. Thank you for reminding me, “meh bredda”. But whilst they busy dancing conga line to and fro, flight to and from—all during COVID Delcy coming, Delcy going, and conga line dancing, Tren coming and dancing conga line too. Tren coming to secure their cocaine. Tren coming with their AR 15. Tren leaving their AR 15 here. Tren actually integrating with local gangs. Tren actually now looking to take over local gangs. Tren up in Grande black out, black out, black out, and Tren killing who they

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“hadda” kill. God rest whoever died up there.

Hon. Member: Whoever, eh.

Hon. W. Sturge: Yes. “Is not police kill nobody.” So we are seeing the effects of Tren de Aragua as a result of policies or lack of policies on that side.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: So what does a government do? “And dey talking bout radar. Dey doh want radar, dey doh want Yankee here, and dey doh want them in de waters.” But as far as I understand it, “Yankee here” since 1945 in varying numbers. And almost every year is Tradewinds. They have interest here. And if we are pursuing partnerships and we have a belligerent neighbour—“well, he gone he way now”. “They take him and they gone with him.” If we are pursuing partnerships and we have people next door who are going next door in Guyana and committing terrorist acts, and Caricom cannot even condemn it, then, who must we turn to? Who must we turn to?

Imagine a terrorist act in Guyana. A child dies at a gas station bombing carried out by Venezuelans, and Caricom “eh” condemn that yet. But when there is a bombing in Belgium, they could say “I am Belgium”. When they have bombings in France, “I am *Charlie Hebdo*.” “I does watch their profiles, yuh know.” They are everybody else. So Caricom, who was backing Venezuela who is not a member of Caricom. And when they are threatening Trinidad and Guyana, you know what they said? “Dem on de side of Venezuela.” So what are we to do then? And they are gaslighting the population and telling the population, we are irresponsible. A routine drill to test the responsiveness of the defence force, they turn it into a circus and say, “War coming”, and gridlock all over “de country”. “Is them yuh know, not me.” And when I tell the country they had nothing to worry

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about and “everything Irie”, they say, “Nah, he is Superman”. “He eh know what he talking bout.” And how war is coming. “Any war come?”

Hon. Member: None.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Sturge: Prophets of doom and gloom. That is the modus operandi of that side: Scare tactics and robber talk. And then they want to talk about sovereignty. I think it was—I cannot remember if it was Elbridge Colby or if it was the Assistant Secretary of War who said it; sovereignty—not “soverinity” as one man on that side likes to say, “it doh have ah ‘I’ in between”—is the ability to control who comes into your borders. If that is the textbook definition of sovereignty, we have not been sovereign since 2019.

Hon. Member: We have been suffering.

Hon. W. Sturge: We are not sovereign, we are suffering. We are suffering. So if Tren de Aragua and other cartels can walk in and walk out, do business, kill who they have to kill, threaten who they have to threaten, and use their local proxies to do the exact same thing, and threaten and kill innocent people, then what must a responsible government do? Say, “well, de Opposition go geh vex”? No, what we do is we have partnered with—we are on the right side of history partnering with big brother, so big brother is going to stop that. “Them days done.” And you see who is on that list? “Ah frighten for allyuh.” So, Mr. Speaker, as I wrap up, let me just say that it is a necessary extension, and I ask those on the opposite side, for once, to have some common sense and patriotism, and support the extension. I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Port of Spain North/St Ann’s West.

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Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Stuart Young SC (*Port of Spain North/St. Anns West*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we are here today at this hour of the night to deal with the constitutional rights of citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. And it is not only a sad and disturbing day for me as the elected Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, having listened to the two previous speakers on the other side, but having listened, in particular, to the previous speaker who, after chastising the Member for Arouca/Lopinot, is making his way out and is now turning back to come back, I am now frightened for the state of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: Mr. Speaker, to be back here in this House to be debating once again, in the short time period of less than a year of the UNC being in Government, a second state of emergency, with the first one being extended to the limit and stopped because it would have required a special majority and a debate in the Senate. Within a matter of weeks, we are back here again for another state of emergency, does not auger well for us as citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. And what we have just heard from the previous speaker amongst all of the grandeur, all of the gusto that he seems to have found in the last couple of hours, something that in his last few contributions has been missing, but all of a sudden, he seems a man with a lighter spirit.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: What we have heard there is the clearest admission by the UNC that their sole plan for crime is to call state of emergency after state of emergency. And in fact, the Member has now put on the *Hansard* that, "Yuh eh want ZOSO, yuh will get states of emergency".

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Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: We have heard absolutely no constitutional justification. And that is where we have to go back to, Mr. Speaker. Because maybe skilfully, as they tend to do with their public relations, they have completely attempted to distract from what the reality of the situation is. Because why we are here this evening, Mr. Speaker—according to the Constitution which is the supreme law of Trinidad and Tobago, is that we are here to hear the justification for the suspension of important, entrenched, fundamental constitutional rights.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: Not just constitutional rights but our section 4 and section 5 entrenched, fundamental constitutional rights. And the Constitution sets out in section 8 what must exist for the State of Emergency. And it is not just because you have a majority that you could compel the President to call a state of emergency. The country has been waiting for today to hear the reasons why we are back, yet again, in a state of emergency. And as I will show when I get to the Regulations, why important, fundamental constitutional rights are suspended once again, and what we have picked up in looking at the Regulations. Because it is the Regulations that indicate in the clearest possible manner what a government intends to use a state of emergency for. So to go to section 8, the only way you can constitutionally justify the current State of Emergency is that it has to fall within section 8(2)(c) of the Constitution:

“That action has been taken, or is immediately threatened, by any person, of such a nature and on so extensive a scale, as to be likely to endanger the public safety...”

Not a single reason has been proffered here this afternoon by the previous

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speakers, not one.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: We had a whole discussion focused on the former Prime Minister, Dr. Rowley, and an obsession with him having a glass in his hand in Tobago. And then what we had from the previous speaker was standing up with call cards in his hand, referring to the PNM's crime plans. They are in charge, and they are suspending once again, in the less than a year that they are in power, our constitutional rights and the constitutional rights of citizens. And let me immediately debunk this falsehood that they are putting forward that we have come here to protect any criminals and any criminal rights.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: Because the allegations of the last general election and the financing of the last general election in Toco/Sangre Grande—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: And who financed it, and who was behind it, is not our burden to carry. And there is no Member here in the 13 PNM Opposition Members who has once uttered anything in favour of crime or criminality.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: The further irony of the previous speaker and the hypocrisy because he made a living of what he just attacked with his utterances, and attacking people who are—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: I think you could make another point except that one. The Member was one of the most eminent defence counsels.

Mr. S. Young SC: And I have said—[*Inaudible*—]—otherwise to that.

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Mr. Speaker: Yes, but you said he made a living defending the same people. Come on. Stop that. You know well that you have offended.

Mr. S. Young SC: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: No, you know you have offended that rule.

Mr. S. Young SC: Mr. Speaker, I move on.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. S. Young SC: So to bring the population back to the reason we are here, and to try to make sense of why, once again, our constitutional rights are being suspended in a manner where we are hearing, “Well, if yuh doh want de ZOSO yuh will get states of emergency”. You cannot threaten a population with states of emergencies.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: You cannot threaten a population, “Well, I will just bring state of emergency after state of emergency”. And as the Prime Minister who has now left the Chamber put in writing to the population, “If yuh doh behave yuhself, not only ah coming for de criminals” or who they suspect as criminals, you know, but as the Leader of the Opposition was pointing out to me recently, “Ah coming for yuh family and ah coming for yuh friends too”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

8.05 p.m.

Mr. S. Young SC: Trinidad and Tobago, on the last two occasions, we cautioned—and today, the caution will run cold—do not allow yourselves to become numb by state of emergency after state of emergency. Do not accept your constitutional rights being brushed aside in the crass manner that we have heard here this evening. We cannot normalize states of emergency. States of emergency

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are a measure of last resort, Mr. Speaker, and the courts have ruled that it is a measure of last resort.

So the President tells us—and I want to put the nation on notice. The President's role in this is subject to the Constitution as well, that once the Cabinet advises Her Excellency to call a state of emergency, she has no discretion. This is what we are told that the Cabinet advised, but we have heard absolutely nothing to support it here this evening. Nothing, not one single instance. Most importantly and frighteningly, we have heard the Minister of Defence, who I assume is a Member of the National Security Council, talk about, we intercepted and we intercepted and we heard. I am telling the population, according to the Interception of Communications Act, that is an illegal and criminal act.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: Mr. Speaker, the only people allowed to order an intercept of anyone in Trinidad and Tobago are the Director of the SSA, the Commissioner of Police and the Chief of Defence Staff.

I sat as a Minister of National Security, you get reports, and not a single one of those intercept reports has a name. They are all in code and that is because Ministers are not supposed to listen to intercepts. So I am very concerned to hear repeatedly by the Minister of Defence saying here that he heard this intercept, and he heard this intercept.

I also want to correct the record, because he referred to an awful crime that was committed against a private prosecutor in this country, Ms. Dana Seetahal, who many of us in here knew very well. The Member for Toco/Sangre Grande said that it was picked up on intercept the fate that would befall her. He said it

with much confidence. I want to remind the public that happened under a UNC Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: That happened in 2014. And the suggestion that was made by the speaker, that if you had intervened—because he said it. He said, “If the PNM had intervened.” They had no intervention. He said that, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: The police had intervened. I think you should check the record. I do not think he actually said that. He said the police.

Mr. S. Young SC: He did not. He said, “If you intervene.” We can check the *Hansard* after, Mr. Speaker. I will move on. But the point is that Ministers do not get involved in intercept, and when we get to the Regulations that have been passed, that empower and that are being used to implement the powers of this State of Emergency, there is even more cause for concern here this evening.

It is clear today to the whole of Trinidad and Tobago that the only plan that the UNC has for fighting crime and criminality is states of emergency. I will remind the population—I thought I had to come here to remind the population what the Member for Siparia said in January 2024, but her Minister of Defence said it in even clearer terms here today. He said—the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande—“because we did not get de ZOSO, yuh go get state of emergency after state of emergency.” That is not how people are supposed to govern a democratic country of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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Mr. S. Young SC: I am telling the population of Trinidad and Tobago here tonight, at 8.10 p.m., you could count on the People's National Movement to stand in defence of your rights.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: Not in defence of the crime or the criminality, you know.

They came here a few months ago and begged for stand-your-ground Legislation to pass to stop home invasions, again, selling a panacea. It has failed miserably, unfortunately, for the country. But we are not going to stand here now and accept that people cannot go and protest. People cannot gather, as we are being asked if they can. Those who are jobless; those who are suffering; those who have lost their jobs in CEPEP, reforestation, URP, cannot feed their families, they are being told, "Be careful, because we are currently under a state of emergency and you can be arrested without warrants."

When I get to the Regulations—because you see, these Regulations really came from 1990, and they were then utilized in 2011. We then utilized it in December 2024, minor amendments being made over time. But what we now have, Mr. Speaker, is no longer moot conversations. We have now been through a UNC state of emergency in 2025, where we have seen how they will utilize the Regulations; where we have seen how a Minister of Defence will issue PDOs, preventative detention orders, where your rights are suspended. No due process. You cannot go for *habeas corpus*. Once the magistrate does not grant you bail, that is the end of that. It is how these are applied. Because we accept if they are being utilized for crime and for criminals to keep gang leaders off of the street, to break up sophisticated criminal networks, go ahead.

Another thing I would like to correct—because it is not only a dog whistle, it is a bullhorn we heard from the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande, saying that, “Those on the PNM side,” and “They”—we take offence to “they”. In previous Parliaments, you could not say “he”, “she” or “they”. You have to call by the person’s portfolio, or which constituency they represent. To say that we have something against the Americans, we do not—complete hogwash.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: The record will reflect that we worked, as every government previously did, very closely with our US counterparts.

I sat there with the then Prime Minister in meetings with the then President Biden, and we had private meetings as well with the Vice President, Kamala Harris. There is a new administration, and that is who you interact with. We had meetings continuously with the DEA, the FBI, encouraging our law enforcement, our intelligence agencies to work with them. I am reminded that under a PNM Government, the former Prime Minister Manning, President Obama came to Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: I was remarking earlier as well, the same former Prime Minister, Patrick Manning—not in the last 50 years—met with President George Bush. **Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: Coming out of that meeting is where the documentation, and the intelligence, and the files came for the Piarco corruption.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: So, Mr. Speaker, we reject that outright as well.

But let us get back, because there is an attempt to distract this evening. We will get back to the State of Emergency because that is why we are here. In January 2024, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, the Member for Siparia, who was then the Leader of Opposition, told the population what their crime plan was going to be. It is a *Newsday* article by Sean Douglas, 16 January, 2024:

“Kamla calls for SoE...”

So, as the Leader of the Opposition—we heard the Member for Arouca/Lopinot read out a quote by the then Leader of the Opposition, when a state of emergency was declared and criticizing it. But it has always been the Member for Siparia’s crime plan to call states of emergency. That is not how—yes, a state of emergency will temporarily suppress crime. It is supposed to. But it is not a crime plan, because all of our constitutional rights are trampled. Out of the hundreds of persons who were detained in the last State of Emergency—hundreds—how many were charged? Because that is the test. So, if the police use it to break up and to disrupt, fine, but where are the investigations? Where are the criminal charges? Where is the anti-gang legislation? The then Leader of the Opposition:

“She endorsed an earlier call by political scientist Dr. Indira Rampersad for state of emergency...”

Persad-Bissessar said, ‘I want to categorically agree with you, to state that what is needed now, amongst all the other suggestions, is a state of emergency in...’”—Trinidad and Tobago.

I thought we would have to come here this afternoon and remind the population that was the crime plan. But it was done for us by the previous speaker who over and over, and repeatedly, for an attorney—and he likes to criticize and he was

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attacking the Member for Arouca/Lopinot, “Oh, he is supposed to be a lawyer,” but all of that is on the *Hansard* now. So, if a constitutional challenge comes, that now is first-hand evidence of the lack of justification—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC:—under section 8 of the Constitution. Right? Because he is so full of gusto this evening; a gusto that we have not seen in months.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I wonder why?

Mr. S. Young SC: This is the concern now, when we start to look at the Regulations—the Emergency Powers Regulations, 2026, Mr. Speaker. Because you see to say that, “Oh, well, certain Regulations existed in the 2024 and the 2025 Regulations are not sufficient,” what you have to look at is how it is utilized.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to point out to the population here—because you see, this State of Emergency is called in a very different geopolitical time. Having not heard a single domestic justification for this State of Emergency today, I am pointing out to the population, because it has not been picked up before, a very worrisome addition to the current Regulations. What is going on now, and what we were seeing in the Middle East, I hope to God that it has no effects here in Trinidad and Tobago. But let us look at the definition in these Regulations, Mr. Speaker.

The 2026 Regulations, Emergency Powers Regulations, for the first time in any state of emergency regulations in Trinidad and Tobago, there is a new definition of “weapon”.

“‘weapon’ has the meaning assigned to it in section 2 of the Anti-Terrorism Act.”

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Why is the Anti-Terrorism Act now being used to define “weapon”? So, let us go to the Anti-Terrorism Act:

““weapon”” includes a firearm...”

Fine, there have always been firearms in state of emergency regulations.

“...explosive...”

That too has always been contained. But now, for the first time:

“...chemical, biological or nuclear weapon.”

So, in the state of emergency regulations, for the first time in Trinidad and Tobago, we are now including “chemical, biological or nuclear weapon.”

8.20p.m.

Take that in the context of what is going on globally. Take that in the context of the application of the Regulations that allow now police officers and defence force officers to stop any citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, or anyone in Trinidad and Tobago on mere suspicion. You see, one of the areas of the Regulations that came into play the other day, and we drew it to the population’s attention, is Regulation 11.

I heard it uttered from the other side that, “Oh, well that existed in previous regulations, and, in fact, you had to amend the 2004 Regulations”—I will get to that—“to take out ‘public order’ and just leave in ‘public safety’.” But, you see, Mr. Speaker, as I said, these Regulations find their genesis in the 1990 post-coup State of Emergency Regulations, and what happened in every occasion, they were just reproduced. What you have to look at is, how were they applied in the last state of emergency, because that is the best indication of what a government intends to do and how they intend to use it.

This particular one, Regulation 11:

“No person shall—

- (a) endeavour, whether orally or otherwise, to influence public opinion in a manner likely to be prejudicial to public safety...”

Seems innocuous enough, seems that it is possible to have an interpretation, but what we saw in the last state of emergency is it actually being utilized in a manner we all feared, but never thought would happen. What you do, is you marry that Regulation 11 to Regulation 12, which governs searches. Regulation 12 says:

“Notwithstanding any rule of law to the contrary, a police officer may, without a warrant and with or without assistance and with the use of force, if necessary—

- (a) enter and search any premises...”

—“any premises”, your home, your place of business, “any premises”:

- “(b) stop and search any vessel, vehicle or individual, whether in a public place or not,...”

—and this is the part:

“...if he suspects that any evidence of the commission of an offence against regulation 8 or 12 is likely to be found on such premises, vessel, vehicle or individual and may seize any evidence so found.”

That was not utilized, that Regulation 11, which was under 2024 Regulations, Regulation 12, was not utilized, because when you look at it—and we actually took out, when drafting the 2024 Regulations, took out the criminality aspect of it, because in having discussion with Senior Counsel when we were settling it, we took a decision, “You know what, that could have wide-reaching powers, you know”, because when you read it:

“No person shall—

(a) endeavour, whether orally or otherwise, to influence public opinion in a manner likely to be prejudicial to public safety...”

This is the provision that has people nervous, that if you go and stand up outside in Woodford Square and you criticize the Government, can it be used, or worse yet, if you are on your cell phone, or you are on a device, because this is covered here. As lawyers we figured, “Okay, well that could be a broad interpretation, but, you know what, that is not what the state of emergency is about.”

The last time we were called here, in the 2025 calling of a state of emergency, we were hearing about RPGs into buildings, we were hearing about problems in the prison, and threats to the Judiciary, and threats to the police. So, okay, being responsible, we agreed, you should have the powers of the State of Emergency. We looked at the Regulation, we said, “Well, that will only be applied against hardened criminals”, but you know what is the reality, Mr. Speaker, and Trinidad and Tobago, this is how it was applied. A woman by the name of Olive Green-Jack, a social media blogger, looking at the social media post one can immediately discern, it is very unlikely that the individual would have the ability to carry out any threat of the magnitude that would disturb public safety, but a preventative detention order was utilized against her under the same Regulation 11.

Fine, you bring her in, because you cannot go threatening a Prime Minister, but what happens next, no charge; leave Olive Green-Jack in preventative detention order until the expiry. The irony is that we have someone else who committed the identical behaviour was brought before the court, was charged, was fined, granted bail, or whatever, and then after being convicted, paid the fine and goes about life.

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

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A state of emergency and its Regulations suspend constitutional rights, and what we saw with the Government's utilization of the SOE Regulations against a 55-year-old woman, social media blogger, has only one connotation, to intimidate, to put fear into the citizens, and to abuse our constitutional rights.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: So, you see, Madam Deputy Speaker—welcome to the Chair—we are not speaking here of possibilities, we are not speaking here as though it is a moot, we are not speaking here of imagination, it is the reality what we saw with the last one. Today, we expected to come here as citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and to be told, out of the hundreds of persons who were detained under PDOs on the last occasion, X number were charged under the Anti-Gang legislation; not a single statistic.

We cannot sit down here and normalize the use of states of emergency, the courts have ruled. We also had the Commissioner of Police, at the end of the last state of emergency, on the 31st of January, telling the population that:

“...the six-month-long State of Emergency (SoE), which expires at midnight, was ‘100% effective.’

Asked yesterday if the SoE had achieved the desired results, Guevarro said, ‘I would say that we have achieved a great percentage of the results that we hoped. For me, 100 per cent prosecution would have been the ultimate result. In terms of safety and security of the public, that is something that I must say that I am pleased with the outcome.’”

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member, your original speaking time has ended, would you like your additional 15 minutes?

Mr. S. Young SC: Yes, please.

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Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: A government has to take a conscious decision to use this measure of last resort. You take the advice, you take the intelligence of the intelligence services, of the defence force, of the Commissioner of Police, and maybe other people, but, ultimately, you take the decision.

To listen to the ridiculous submissions of the previous speaker on another issue, accusing the previous PNM Cabinet of not bringing the ZOSO legislation—just to digress, but I must correct the record—because the Cabinet was concerned that it would affect our supporters, complete hogwash.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: It is—because a PNM Government was responsible for the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago, and it is the PNM founder, Dr. Eric Williams, who is responsible for the Constitution, and we respect the constitutional rights of Trinidad and Tobago citizens. So when we look at that legislation, we did not think it could be justified, because it is not right, and you cannot say that, “ZOSO legislation would only affect criminals”, because it does not work that way. When you declare a zone, not everybody in the zone is a criminal.

When you come into Belmont, you come into east Port of Spain, you go anywhere, Siparia, Oropouche, Caroni Central, and you say, “This area, they are law-abiding citizens in there whose rights are going to be infringed and affected”, all this intercept, all this intelligence target the criminals. What we are seeing here today is an admission—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC:—of failure, once again, by the UNC Government, because they cannot target the criminals. You had a six-month state of emergency on the back-

end of a previous one. It is the same police service that is there. It is the same SSA that is there. It is not that criminal gang heads are springing up after every state of emergency. So tell us what you have done, but you cannot just come and suspend constitutional rights as the Regulations do. They allow searches without warrants, no bail, no habeas corpus. They could stop motor vehicles. Defence force officers have the same powers as police, that is not how the law works, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Damen vessels—and, again, the hypocrisy, but I know it is out of a position of ignorance and not knowing, and just having a sudden likeness to talk here this evening.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: There was no kickback with the OPVs. A decision was taken by a UNC Government to stop the OPVs that affected our borders. It was on the eve, as they were about to be voted out of office, they ordered the Damen vessels. Do not try to fool the population that you tried to get the vessels before.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: It was literally a few months before the elections with no financing in place. We took possession of those Damen vessels.

The first thing we were told is, “They are not fit for purpose.” The first thing we were told is, “Those vessels and their keels are not made for the rough waters on the east coast”, and, you know, the irony of him raising it, the previous speaker. That Damen transaction that was done by the UNC Government is under criminal investigation—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC:—not in Trinidad, by the Dutch authorities and Interpol, and,

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you know for what, for bribery and kickbacks. That is what those Damen vessels represent.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: For the record, the Austal vessels that were procured by the PNM Government were procured through the Government of Australia directly—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC:—through the Australian EximBank that disbursed the funds directly to Austal, under an Australian Government programme for naval assets. But they will not tell you that, because they try to judge everyone by their own corrupt grubby ways.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: So, Madam Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Lee: Madam Deputy Speaker, 48(6).

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Manning: Madam Deputy Speaker, the gentleman should declare his interest in the statement just made before he speaks, please.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, I suggest that you continue, you have very little time remaining. Please move on.

Mr. S. Young SC: Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: Madam Deputy Speaker, I will wrap up where I began, states of emergency are measures of last resort. States of emergency are all about suspending important constitutional rights, fundamental rights, the right of freedom of movement, the right of freedom of speech, the right to due process. It is the same judgement that my friend from Arouca/Lopinot referred to out of Jamaica.

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This was said by the Jamaican court:

“...states of public emergency, by their very nature, involve infringement of citizens’ rights.”

What that case went on to hold, Madam Deputy Speaker, is as follows:

“While we accept that democratic rights may be limited or restricted in order to ensure public safety, and...”—to—“...maintain public order, the restrictions should be temporary so that affected rights are impaired as least as is reasonably possible. It is unquestionable that the constitutional rights of members of certain marginalized communities will be disproportionately affected as there is increased policing of such communities. There is likely to be an erosion of public trust in government.”

That is happening right here in Trinidad and Tobago:

“There will be negative implications for social and economic stability.”

That is the caution that is applicable here as it was in Jamaica.

8.35p.m.

The last thing, I will end by saying, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that they come here on every single occasion and attack PNM constituents and constituencies. We reject that outright.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: Madam Deputy Speaker, all 13 of us are proud of every constituent who is a law-abiding constituent that we represent.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: We will continue to represent not only our constituencies but all of the law-abiding citizens of Trinidad and Tobago whose rights are being trampled on by the UNC Government. You can take that to the bank, and you can

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bank it like gold. With those few words, Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for Oropouche East.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal):

Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on this very important debate before us on a Friday evening. Madam Deputy Speaker, this is not a debate that anyone would wish or find great pleasure in hosting and contributing to. This is not a debate that one would necessarily want to plan in advance, to speak to Motions regarding the President's proclamation and an extension of a state of emergency. It is a very serious matter. It is a heavy matter.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I begin by indicating that I have had the opportunity, for the last 15 years, of serving either on, or sometimes simultaneously, the National Security Council of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago or a joint select committee of Parliament on national security. In those 15 years, Madam Deputy Speaker, I have accepted and understood some of the issues before us, and the gravity, the weight of these issues.

Madam Deputy Speaker, when I first participated in the matter of a state of emergency many years ago—and not in this current administration—I remember giving my support, but I also remember feeling heavier, feeling, you know, a seriousness, almost a sadness, that it was something that was necessary but had to be done in the circumstances. So this is the point at which we are.

The Member who spoke before me served this country, as did the Member for Arouca/Lopinot, I believe, briefly—well, I would not to use the word “serve”. He had the office of Minister of National Security between 2018, thereabout,

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August or so, and 2021/2022, around there, and would have been in that office—a critical office—and understood somewhat, or should have understood, some of the issues before us. But, you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, it pains me to take note that today, at this time, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, the only unelected Prime Minister this country has ever seen, is lecturing us today on democracy.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Lecturing us on constitutionality, democracy, and rights is the only unelected Prime Minister this country has ever confronted, and gratefully, for a short period of time.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Member, as I said, was in the office of National Security, an unelected Prime Minister, and today, tells us that he is frightened by the state that Trinidad and Tobago has reached. He was not frightened when Fitzgerald Hinds served as the Minister of National Security, and presided over the highest murder rate in this country's history. That was not frightening enough. But he is frightened when, in the year before us, the murder rate went down in a bewildering manner, by 42 per cent. I have the figures before me.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Deputy Speaker, even as a Member of Government, when I look at the figure, you know, I am almost surprised. I am taken aback. When I saw the murder rate for 2025—and I mean, I knew it before. It was just I did not memorize it; I saw 369. I asked my colleague from Caroni Central, I said, “You sure that was not for part of the year? This figure that we have here, that was what, the first two-quarters or three-quarters?” He said, “No, no, no, no, that is the entire year.” You know what is amazing? No Member

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opposite recognized or acknowledged that 42 per cent decline in murders in 2025, and their constituencies—I will come to that—may have had persons whose lives were saved in 2025 because of a UNC Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: That is the important point. It is lives that matter. The Member came and attempted, again, to give us some lecture on the Constitution, and all the rights in the Constitution and, so on, and so forth. But I find that they conveniently, you know, leave out a particular right. They speak so much about this right, you know—the infringement of rights that are expressly implied in a state of emergency, and so on. But, what about the right of the individual to life, to liberty, to security of the person, and to enjoyment of property? What about those rights of innocent law-abiding citizens who work hard, pay their taxes, raise their children to obey the law, have their homes and then are invaded by brutal criminal elements? What about their rights? What about the bystanders who go about their business and are shot and killed? What about their rights? What about the victims and the families of victims in these circumstances?

When you look at this murder rate: 2022, 605; 2023, 577; shockingly, 2024—again—625, to drop by 42 per cent. This happened under the watch of the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: This was not in her first year of office. It was in the first part—it was a part of the year, in the first part of her term of office, not the first year, as 2026 will be her first calendar year, of course. That was it.

You hear Members opposite speak about, you know, infringing all the rights,

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and so on, but they never speak about this right to life, to liberty, and to enjoyment of property that innocent citizens, law-abiding citizens face. People leave this country. They run. Sometimes, when you meet folks, and you ask, you know, why did you leave? How is life, and thing? They say, “I could not stay because of the crime. I could not stay because of the crime.” You have to protect your family. That is a basic, you know, tenet, to protect your property and protect your family, your loved ones.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is a country where, if a mango drops on the galvanize, you jump up. You jump up. You are scared. Even if you live in an area that is not a big crime spot, or the records show that it is not a big area that the police concentrate on because they do not have a concentration of crime there. But, even if you live there, and a car passes in front, and you look at your monitor, you jump up. You jump up in the night because of the state of insecurity. The Members opposite convey this impression that this is done, according to Arouca/Lopinot, by “vaps”, by “voops”; that this is something that is not thought out, and so on.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to congratulate the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande on the brilliant contribution he made here today.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: I saw no difference in his character, personality and contribution. He is always charismatic. He is always thunderous.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: I saw no difference. He was a practising attorney-at-law—

Ms. John: Successful.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:—and successful. The Member cast aspersions on what he

was doing before. He was a defence attorney. That is his job. He is not the first Minister of a government or Attorney General to be a defence attorney. A former Minister, from Couva South, Attorney General Mr. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj, as well, was a defence attorney, and represented clients. The Member who spoke before, the hon. Minister was a defence attorney, represented clients. That is their job. That is their duty. So, you cannot focus on them and make that type of attack. It is very sad. It is very sad. The Member himself is an attorney; we do not say anything that his client was Calder Hart.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: We do not make anything out of that. I mean, he chose his client, whether it is Calder Hart or Malcolm Jones. That is his duty. That is his job, I guess. I do not say anything about that. But he wants to attack the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande about who his client is, who is not his client and so on. It is very sad. Madam Deputy Speaker, those of us on this side, we have a duty to raise issues pertaining to the Government of 2016 to 2025 April.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: We are here today because of their failed policies/programmes. We are today because of that. Governance is a continuum. You know, you continue doing something, or you change something as you go along. Many times, you know, if there was good work before, you build on that. But what good work in crime fighting? What good work? From whom? Fitzgerald Hinds? He came here. I do not know what this had before. It does not have it now. Some drug or something was here that put you to sleep all the time. The first thing we did here was to check to see if it has—what it is called—Ativan or whatever on this side, or whatever they called it, that if you sit here, you

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generally sleep. But there is nothing of the sort here. The Member came, Madam Deputy Speaker, week after week and, you know, one week he was half asleep, the next week he was half awake—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:—and conducted the business of no lesser office than National Security.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: National Security. I want to reiterate and really drill down on a point. Anybody remembers a helicopter being towed away in the night under tarpaulin? The UNC Government—partnership Government—invested heavily in military assets and security assets for law enforcement. When there was a commissioning of a crime, and so on, I remembered, you know, the police had aerial support, choppers in the air. When they did their normal surveillance, and so on, in San Fernando, Madam Deputy Speaker, you would see national security choppers in the air. Those things served an important mission. Apart from the technology that they possess to monitor, and so on, they are also preventative. They tell the criminal element, “Hello, the police can move quickly here now.” Whether it is patrols on the road or aerial support, they can move.

As soon as they came in 2016, they destroyed all those plans, programmes and policies. “They parked up the chopper in Cumuto then say it had nobody to fly de chopper”. They made a deal, which we will speak about, and we will expose in the coming days, to pay the United States TT \$48 million to return a chopper. We paid for it. We bought it. They made a sweetheart deal of some kind—I do not know what kind of sweetheart that was—to pay money like that, to return an asset. Then one day, there was an escape. Anybody remember that prisoners escaped

somewhere? They had to hustle on Curepe Junction like they were touting a PH car. They had to go and get a civilian chopper. It crashed searching for escapees. A chopper that was not equipped, and a crew that was not equipped with law enforcement training and the equipment necessary for that type of activity. They crashed somewhere in Arouca, I believe.

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A chopper that is not equipped and a crew that is not equipped with law enforcement training and the equipment necessary for that type of activity. They crashed somewhere in Arouca, I believe, Madam Deputy Speaker. The aerial support police had the vessels, the former Prime Minister and we must say that, Keith Rowley, he came to Parliament and his big thing in a debate once was how much food the army was eating. That was the centrepiece of his presentation, was that they eating too much food and the money was too much so we should cut back and that seemed to be the next preoccupation. The Member for Arouca/Lopinot gave us an entire speech one day about what food you could eat and not eat and so on. That was the concern, it was not the build-up of military assets.

Mr. Gonzales: You did not listen.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: You know, I will tell you about my appetite another time.

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

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Deputy Speaker. Madam Deputy Speaker.

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

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: You see, Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to tell you, our menus would be different.

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

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Our menus would be different, I assure you. Madam

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Deputy Speaker, let me move on quickly before—they know they would not distract me, I am sure of that.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Lee: Not macaroni pie.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Yeah. Madam Deputy Speaker, state of emergency and I will close because I am reflecting on Port of Spain North/ St. Ann's West, you know, this concern with democracy. When they called a state of emergency in that midnight hour somewhere between I think a third and fourth drink, midnight on December 30th, I believe it was. Yeah, you sent the glass to the bar for a refill and then you called a state of emergency and then it came back full and you continued what you were doing. They called that. That went into a general election campaign. Where was the cry about democracy and freedom of expression and assembly and getting—when it was a political season, where the democracy of the country was at stake, where the Government was at stake, did not raise any issues of democracy there, when we went into February, March, April with a state of emergency. But today, telling us about the loss of rights and so on. Madam Deputy Speaker, this is hypocrisy of the highest order.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Of the highest order. And they should be concerned, Madam Deputy Speaker, they should be concerned with the state of crime and the intent of these measures before us. I heard the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West—well, this one, Madam Deputy Speaker, thank God we have some good, strong chairs here, otherwise I would fall off completely.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

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Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: No, thank God. I mean, I want to thank the Parliament for these very sturdy chairs.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West speaking, reflecting on Toco/Sangre Grande about his intervention, referring to interceptions and so on, and the Member was very clear, he said that knowledge came from him from proceedings, it came from proceedings. He was certainly not in the Cabinet at that time, he was not a Member of the Government at that time. He said that came from his participation in court proceedings and related matters. The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West was a regular speaker and everywhere he went he talked about Members of the then UNC Opposition. Member for St. Augustine, Member for Couva North and he had intelligence and he had information of meetings with gang leaders and what, buying drinks in Hyatt and walking—

Mr. Jeremie SC: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes. Through fake profiles, yeah. And communicating what information and intelligence, went to a joint select committee—

Ms. John: And say those things.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:—and said those things.

Ms. John: And I was not in the House to answer, you know.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: No, and those Members were not in the Parliament. Then make statements about who met gang members and which restaurants and which place meeting and talking and implicating even the then Commissioner of Police in that. Where did you get that information from? Where did you get that from, by the cashier at Massy? Where did you get that from?

Ms. John: No, he felt we did not matter, that is the problem.

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Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Yeah.

Ms. John: He was looking down on us, that is his problem.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Yeah, where you go that information?

Ms. John: No, he felt we did not matter.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Where you get that from? In the Tunapuna Market?

Ms. John: He felt we did not matter.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: But they went to the country and they put on record, that is something we will have to review as well, Madam Deputy Speaker, and today to tell us about the Member and interception, we know the law. In fact, the Interception of Communications Act was done by a People's Partnership UNC Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Anybody remember that one? When the former administration in 2010 had been recording, spying on the political leadership of the country including their own Members, including the Chief Justice. It was the Partnership Government that dealt with that matter through legislation, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the President was very clear in her statement, which I have in my hand, which is the subject of our business today and the statement reads, I will just quote a piece, on March 02, 2026:

I was informed by Cabinet that within the last several days, a number of violent criminal activities had taken place with mass shootings and multiple victims—I recognize that—mass shootings, multiple victims, most of which has been carried forward by members of organised criminal gangs which have endangered the public safety.

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She further stated that there have also been credible threats to attack police officers, prison officers and other members of the protective services. What again do you want to hear? You want to hear what, the eulogy when you go to church at their funeral? It is either you listen to this or you go to the church and deliver the eulogy. The goodly gentleman from Diego Martin Central may have good words on those matters.

Hon. Members: *[Laughter]*

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: But we cannot wait for that. This is to protect life. This is to protect life.

Hon. Member: The eulogizer.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: The eulogizer. Madam Deputy Speaker, so the National Security Council based on this report, intelligence which I will not go further in, because we cannot go further in these matters, took a decision. Madam Deputy Speaker, and here we are and the Member opposite, you know, conveniently will forget, Madam Deputy Speaker, that this business, I could not help again when I heard the Member talk about a bullhorn and somebody blowing a bullhorn. Madam Deputy Speaker, his claim to fame was standing up by oval with a bullhorn, shouting to Venezuelans, that is what he was up to.

Hon. Member: In English.

Dr. R. Moonilal: He spoke in English, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Member: *[Laughter]*

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: He spoke in English to Venezuelans. Then he negotiated in Spanish agreements, which he signed to, and then does not speak Spanish. All those agreements with Venezuela in Spanish, there is no English translation. The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries at that time could not speak Spanish or

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write Spanish. What are you signing?

Ms. John: Spanish.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Yeah. Madam Deputy Speaker, let me just remind our viewers and the public, Madam Deputy Speaker, that we have had, we declared a state of emergency to treat with this threat, Madam Speaker, and among those matters in the last period here we must reflect about a couple being gunned down in broad daylight in front of their baby and other children in a community playground, two men from Bagatelle murdered in drive by shooting. Did the Member for Diego Martin, who represent these areas, make any comment on that?

“Three men shot dead in two separate incidents in Valsayn and El Dorado”—

in under four hours.

“The murder toll increased by three...”—after separate—“...shootings in Petit Valley and Tunapuna and Bon Air.”

I could read in depth all of the associated report, but it is not necessary.

“Teen killed by bullet meant for father”

“...two shot...”—one murdered—“...during J’Ouvert”—

“Triple murder in Laventille”

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is what we confront today. When we brought the legislation, Zones of Special Operations, now called ZOSO, Madam Speaker, I like to say Zones of Special Operations, to adopt that legislation in Trinidad to meet and treat with it, Madam Deputy Speaker, they did not support. They did not support the stand your ground legislation either, did they?

Hon. Members: No.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Right. Did not support stand your ground legislation, did

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not support ZOSO, did not support anything like that, will not support state of emergency and when I read here it is your constituents, your constituents, and then the Member raised this matter coming down to the end that we have something against their constituents. Your constituents are dying, when will you wake up?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: When will you wake up?

Mr. Jeremie SC: It is their friends and financiers and they turned their backs on the constituents.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: They have turned their backs on their constituents who need them at this hour to stand up in the Parliament and say, listen we will do what it takes to reduce crime, stop the murders, but why do you not do that? I do not know, Madam Deputy Speaker, is it friends, is it financiers, I do not know. I am not saying it is.

Mr. Jeremie SC: Big business.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Is it big business? Everyone knows in Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean at large, in all the conflict to move guns, weapons, drugs, you need deep pockets. You need deep pockets and who really has deep pockets it is business generally, Madam Deputy Speaker. Deep pockets you need for that business and there will always be that interest of those business elements, not all and certainly not a majority, there will always be in Trinidad and Tobago and possibly the wider region, big business interest in criminal activity. What is the danger now, is when big business infiltrates political parties and parties do their bidding by objecting to legislation like this, by objecting to stand your ground, by objecting to ZOSO, by objecting to this type of state of emergency. That is the danger, it has happened in other parts of the world when the business force ties

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with the political system and this is why we must congratulate our Prime Minister, the Member for Siparia.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: For standing strong when others would have buckled under the pressure and the Member for Siparia did not start her courage on April 28, 2025, you know, she did not. She led a struggle, a courageous struggle, while as Opposition Leader, anybody remember the statement “What Trump could do we”? If we had taken them on, you watch snow on TV, eh.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: You will watch snow on TV, you never see it in real, if you take them on. They came to Parliament, “What Trump could do we”? They were hiding behind Maduro. They are lucky on January 3rd, some of them did not see a helicopter over their homes, you know.

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

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: “They lucky.” “They lucky!” They could have been picked up. Just as one in Caracas was picked up in two hours, he moved from President to prisoner.

Mr. Padarath: One still—[*Inaudible*].

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Yeah, one still has a fear. Yeah, of that. Madam Deputy Speaker, they told this population that the Member for Siparia was on risky, dangerous ground by her principled position against the tyranny of Maduro. They said we live—they said it. They say we are so close by, we have energy installations in the Gulf, seven miles away and we can be a target of something. The Member for Siparia, as Opposition Leader, said absolutely not, we stand firm on democracy, on principle, on equality, on fair and free elections. They were

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carrying that. Today, Maduro is somewhere, I do not know where, in New York State, somewhere I do not know.

Mr. Jeremie SC: Rikers.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Rikers? He is somewhere. Now they come with the Middle East now. They say now we have to be worried because the Middle East, now they “cyah” hide behind Maduro, they are going behind the new supreme leader now. Yeah, now telling you about the Middle East.

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

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Yeah, the new supreme leader now. I do not understand this Opposition. I simply do not. They tried to frighten the population about Maduro, he will attack. Madam Deputy Speaker, when I spoke to the energy companies that operate in our offshore, in our maritime space, I called a meeting of eight or 10 of them, I said tell me something, what is the situation with security? They said, Minister, listen, we are accustomed to this, you know, it is you not accustomed to this. They operate in dangerous conflict-ridden parts of the world they have very comprehensive, sophisticated security policies, equipment, contacts and their head of security worked 20, 30 years with the United States in their specialised law enforcement agencies and so on. They said, Minister, it is you not accustomed to this, we are accustomed.

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But the former administration wants to frighten you. Today, they come to tell us about what? Chemical, biological attacks, nuclear weapons and so on, the Middle East. Yeah. That is what they come with today now, you know, having failed with Maduro. Then this is the shambles that they have found themselves in, Madam Deputy Speaker, that their approach to dealing with questions of policy

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and law to deal with crime is to frighten the people.

Ms. John: That is right.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: It is just to frighten the people, to go and jump out from behind the curtain and say, “Boo!” That is their policy.

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

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: That is their policy, to say, “Boo!” and frighten people. Madam Deputy Speaker, we are not about frightening the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. We are about protecting the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. That is what we are about.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: And this has worked. The Members opposite—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member, would you like your additional 15 minutes?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. John: You are speeding. Slow down. Slow down.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker. Madam Deputy Speaker, I would have been tempted to say, “This is Trump speed as well.” Madam Deputy Speaker, yes. So they have no strategy. They have no policy. They will not support the Government with our measures. They do not recognize the decline in murders last year, and serious crime. They by themselves failed miserably at that, so one has to be careful accepting policy programme recommendations.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I remember all of this because I was there too. We put in place the Community Comfort Patrols, a programme where law enforcement worked with private security, and we said that the areas that were not really, you know, under great threat from criminals, we will use private security, in partnership with the police, and do the patrols, so that the people will have that

comfort and they will have the security they need, but not the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, and they will liaise with the police.

I remember in Diego Martin—because I also remember the various Ministers over the years with that programme. The community became so close to the security personnel in their private security that I remember if they had problems that were, strictly speaking, not just major threats to their lives or anything like that—someone was actually giving birth in Diego Martin sometime—before they called a doctor, they called the Community Comfort Patrol. They said, if you could help and assist and so on. They worked on Sundays. The private security officers would say that when they passed around the neighbourhood to check and so on, people might invite them for lunch. Such was the closeness, the network you got, it was as though it was like village policing. They dismantled that completely. Gone.

Do not talk about CCTV cameras. They stood here, the sleepy one, and said that out of 18,000 cameras, 900 are working, 50 per cent are not working at all. You asked him, “How many boats are working?” He said, “Ah cyah tell you dat. That is national security.” And they fixed precious little.

We are now looking at even those contracts with CCTV cameras. There was a contract in September 2016, or thereabouts, went through a process, tender accepted and so on. You know what? “Dey break it up. Dey mash it up.” They cancelled the tender because who they wanted to get it, did not get it. They went out again in some secret, suspicious tendering process, or some process, I guess, by January 2017, to get another provider and then came up with some consortium of providers. The long and short is that the CCTV camera system between 2016 to 2025 April, that system was in disarray.

And when there was that horrible incident involving Andrea Bharatt—that is the name of the girl?—

Ms. John: Yes. Yes. Yes.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:—in the east, I think. When there was that horrible incident involving the kidnapping of Andrea Bharatt, I would not forget ever that when we met the security and we asked, “What is happening?” They said, “We would have liked to have done more, but the CCTV cameras in that area were not working.” So they could not act quickly. I had a personal experience in San Fernando in a hit and run. Not a major accident, but a small accident. But when it happened, I looked around and saw the cameras and I said, “Good. At least we can find that driver and get him to account and go through the process and so on with insurance”. The police said, “Doctor, we would love to help you. None of those cameras are working.” That is what they presided over. And today, they are lecturing us about democracy and rights and so on, when you presided over the highest murder rate in the land ever, Madam Deputy Speaker/

Madam Deputy Speaker, a point the Member made—every year, for the last five years or seven years, we are hearing about an investigation involving the Damen boats. The Damen investigation never finished. We do not know, but they know because they were office, so they claim to know ongoing investigations with the Dutch authority, Interpol and so on. You know, nobody knows that except them? And every year, they come with this thing. That investigation never finished about seven years now and they always come to drop this like some big controversy, and scandal, and corruption, and so on. We do not know when it started. We do not know when it finished. We do not even know if it exists. Those of us who have had some exposure to national security do not know. But

what we know is that we presented this country with the assets that are needed.

Assets in the modern fight against crime involve technology. There is a technology—which is now commercial, so you can say it—of tracing bullets to a point of origin. There is technology if bandits/killers are on the loose. I mean, forget the killer. You could see an ant on the ground. You can go up in the sky and look down on the ground and see an ant moving. You have technology like that now. We sought to obtain that technology. Yes, it is expensive. It must be expensive. It is not a Kodak camera. It must be expensive. So you have to purchase and invest, because you want to save lives. When we gave them that, they disrupted everything as if, you know, it was deliberate, Madam Deputy Speaker; as if it was a deliberate ploy that they embarked upon.

So today, Madam Deputy Speaker, as we are at this critical juncture, we ask the population to reflect, and the population has been speaking. Madam Deputy Speaker, when this State of Emergency—again, nobody on the opposite side raised the issue, you know. The business community—I was a bit taken aback because I know the business community sometimes, you know, they talk a lot and they are very concerned with the police action and so on. The business community welcome the State of Emergency. The Chamber of Industry and Commerce, they welcome that. They said, they welcome that because that can reduce the fear in the society, the criminal activity. They said, of course, it is needed much more, as we know. You need much more, so we agree with that. But the business community supported it.

Citizens on the ground, ordinary citizens, those of us on this side and your side—because we have seen the press and social media and so on—welcome a state of emergency. I could not believe the amount of people, when interviewed in

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social media, newspaper and so on, who said they welcome this. They said, “It worked before. It can work again.” They know of the issue of rights. People are not stupid. They know that they have to give up some of their constitutional rights. But it has not been abused.

The Member came with one alleged abuse of somebody ill-speaking the Prime Minister, or something like that, and wanted to shoot the Prime Minister. Law enforcement acted and that was a big abuse. That was a big abuse. When somebody went, I think, on social media for the former Member for Diego Martin West and they were nabbed on the same day. There was a Canadian blogger, I think, who went to meet alleged elements—

Ms. John: They picked him up.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:—in Laventille and so on. They picked him up for treason. What is his name? “Chris Must List”?

Ms. John: “Chris Must List”.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Yeah. “Chris Must List”. They picked him up for treason, you know. Because what he was doing there, they felt—

Ms. John: It is what they should have been doing.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Yeah. What he was doing is what they should have been doing, picking intelligence and understanding what is happening there, so you can act on it. So, we have no reference.

The population knew that in the states of emergency declared by the UNC Government, there was absolutely no allegation of abuse of power, of police brutality. I mean, is there any newspaper clipping that anybody could find where somebody alleged that under emergency powers, they kicked down their door and grabbed them in the middle of the night, throw them in detention and so on? The

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policy has had, and they continue to have, a targeted approach to this matter. Madam Deputy Speaker, the police had a targeted approach to the matter because of the seriousness of gang violence. Madam Deputy Speaker, may I ask how many more minutes I may have?

Madam Deputy Speaker: You have six more minutes.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Great. Thank you. Madam Deputy Speaker, in those few minutes, I just want to put the population on notice that this matter involving gang violence is a serious matter. I will not repeat the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande, who spoke about the infiltration of foreign gang members into the domestic gang network. We spoke about that, and the Venezuelans, in particular, situation. I do not want to repeat that.

But I will add to that, Madam Deputy Speaker, that in a report at the United Nations Security Council recently, January 2026, which I have in my hand, they dealt with the issue of gang violence in Haiti and gave a report. Madam Deputy Speaker, we cannot read at length the entire report, certainly not. But what we can say is this matter is before the United Nations Security Council, reflecting on gang violence, spoke about the escalation of criminal networks, gang activity in a much more structured form, not just territorial control, but integration into transnational illicit markets, armed gangs that consolidate into federated coalitions that exercise control and influence over significant parts of a national territory. If we do not watch it and if we do not take action like this, you could end up where parts of a country are outside the control of the State. That happens in other countries. I do not know if they know that, you know.

There are countries in this world where they have a government in the capital but the government cannot send the army in another province in the same

country, you know. They cannot. Recently, we saw some images emerging from Mexico, when that fighting took place over, I think, the killing of an alleged drug leader—if he is alleged or real. But, Madam Deputy Speaker, you did not know who was the police and who was the gang. You could not tell. Because unlike the movies, they did not have different colours, so you could watch and know who is who. You just saw the movement of gangs.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in reflecting on Haiti, they spoke of that, that you can lose national territory when gangs take root this way and they are involved in arms, drug trafficking, fuel smuggling, migration, exploitation, extortion, unlawful activities. They deploy—you know, for people like this in gangs, they have enormous strategy, Madam Deputy Speaker. Over the last 10 years, may I remind you in this country, when so many of the guns came in, it also mirrored the time when we did not have border control, border patrol. The vessels were not working. They had no fuel. They had no crew. Maintenance contracts—this is important, you know. We purchased vessels, paid for them, all the administration had to do was continue a maintenance contract. They did not do it. So you had these boats parked up, border unprotected, guns coming in at the port.

Ms. John: They had no scanner.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: The scanner, you remember? At the Ministry of Finance, we were told in a joint select committee, that every time they reached the point of buying a scanner, they changed the rule. They said, no, no, no. We have to bring more—different calibration and different this and different that. When they reached again to purchase, it changed again. Four, five years went without a scanner. That was where we were. That was where we were. So you had no scanner working. One scanner in the Port of Port of Spain. We went on a tour, I

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remember, it broke down. They sent a forklift, it reversed and bounced it, so the scanner was not working. No patrols out in the coast. Scanner was not working, and we are surprised that all these guns came in, illegal guns, Madam Deputy Speaker? That is what we face today. That is the result.

Madam Deputy Speaker, regional trafficking and financial networks are now linked to gangs in Haiti and the wider Caribbean. Gangs are consolidating, criminal networks are sophisticating themselves to expand rapidly. This is the reality, according the United Nations Security Council report on Haiti. If we do not watch it and we do not take action like this, Madam Deputy Speaker, Haiti could be our future. We will not have that. We will not have it at all. We will not have a country that is ungovernable, uncontrollable. We will not concede space to the criminal elements. The Member for Siparia has said this with her tough stance and her courageous leadership, not only in Trinidad and Tobago now, but in the Caribbean—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:—in the Caribbean. When she stood firm, few—I mean, I do not want to get into foreign affairs. That is the business for the Member for Tabaquite, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will not get into that. But when the Prime Minister stood firm and courageous on those matters, very few regional leaders jumped to support, to stand with her publicly. They may have done so privately—I do not know—but not publicly. Today, when we see what is happening where the Prime Minister has brought pride, dignity and strength to Trinidad and Tobago once more in the region when she stood—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:—at the summit, the Shield of the Americas Summit. And

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the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West was talking about a former US President came when the PNM was in power. My good friend, the Attorney General, has a memory of that time; a good memory. But Mr. Obama came became the country hosted a Summit of the Americas. He did not come to visit Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Jeremie SC: Exactly.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: We were the host.

Ms. John: "Dey did not invite nobody here."

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Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Yeah. Then somebody in the airport grabbed him and almost choked him, I think. What is her name? Gopee-Scoon? "Gopee-Spoon or Scoon."

Mr. Jeremie SC: She assaulted him.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Yeah.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: I think the US authorities were looking for her six months later. Madam Deputy Speaker, Mr. Obama came here because we hosted the Summit of the Americas. He did not come per se on a State visit to Trinidad and Tobago. It was a United States Vice-President who was here. It was a United States Vice-President, Mr. Biden, who came here before, and of course, Secretary of State Warren Christopher came under the UNC before, and other American leaders, Janet Reno was here at that time, and recently other leaders have been here. But to say that the President of the United States came because a PNM Government was in place. We hosted a Summit of the Americas, and he had to attend, and I think it was his first foreign visit, actually, to attend the Summit of the

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Americas.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, the tenet of my argument today is that we have reached this historic juncture. We either make a decision today. We let go of the wheel and say, “Look, whatever happens, happens.” Haiti is there. Other countries across the world have lost it to the criminal elements. We have that. That is a choice that they would make. Madam Deputy Speaker, on this side, we will hold on to that wheel. We will get all crew members on board. We will steer the state of Trinidad and Tobago—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:—to safety, to order, to security. That is the commitment we make tonight, and we ask Members to support us. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for Port of Spain South.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Keith Scotland SC (*Port of Spain South*): Madam Deputy Speaker, what has been made pellucidly clear by all the contributions from the hon. Members from the other side, is that the only way they can hold onto the wheel is by declaring state of emergency, after state of emergency, after state of emergency.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: I want to drive home to the public of Trinidad and the people of Trinidad and Tobago, the plan. The hon. Member for Oropouche East has said that this Government intends to protect the constitutional rights of citizens to life. Do you know how he intends to do that? By taking away all their other constitutional rights.

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

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Mr. K. Scotland SC: That is the irony of ironies. But more importantly, Madam Deputy Speaker, I have sat here today in this Parliament, and I have learnt what not to do. The contribution from the hon. Member for Toco/Sangre Grande was at once shameful and shameless.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: And for that to be commended by the hon. Member for Oropouche East who has so much experience in this Parliament is a worrisome state for Trinidad and Tobago and its governance. The blame game must stop. You are in charge now. Fix it without infringing our constitutional rights. That is what we have to say.

More importantly, Madam Deputy Speaker, to show the lack and the abject ignorance coming from the other side, and particularly the contribution from Toco/Sangre Grande, who said and displayed his ignorance by his inability to appreciate that urban renewal projects and plans are used worldwide as a crime-fighting tool. How could he then come to mock plan number eight of the PNM's for fighting crime, to say that urban renewal is not a crime-fighting measure? That is ignorance at its highest.

More importantly, to say, and I do not want it to be tediously repetitious, but it is something that is close to me, that Dana Seetahal—to imply that she was killed under the PNM watch—

Hon Member: [*Inaudible*] they.

Mr. K. Scotland SC: They. Madam Deputy Speaker, that is the unkindest cut of all. It is as egregious as it gets, because Dana Seetahal, the day is as clear in my mind as it was then, on the 4th of May, a Friday evening, under a UNC Government. So if there was a chatter going on in any place, it was not the PNM

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who had it. It is they who had it.

Mr. Young SC: Correct.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: It means if we take the word of the hon. Member for Toco/Sangre Grande, the blood of Dana Seetahal is on your hands.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: If you had that chatter and then acted upon it, and now coming to blame the People's National Movement? Come on, we were in Opposition then. Also, to say that we do not use cocaine here. He has not walked—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Oh, he has not walked Toco/Sangre Grande. That is not true. He may very well say that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Things may change tomorrow. I am not sure. But I assure you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that for someone to say that we do not use cocaine here is someone who is totally, totally removed from the reality of this Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for Port of Spain South. The Member for Toco/Sangre Grande did not say that we do not use it here. We say we do not make it here.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Madam Deputy Speaker, I do not want to enter into a crosstalk with you, but I wrote it down when he said it, please check the record. If

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I am wrong, I will correct it. But I recall, and I wrote it down, and that is why I am responding.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, as I go ahead, this is a serious debate and not one for gesturing. When a state of emergency is declared, and we come to debate it, it is one of the more serious debates that we can enter into our parliamentary life. Parliament is not merely considering a routine decision and a routine policy. We are being asked to approve the continuation of extraordinary constitutional powers which permit the State to restrict certain freedoms ordinarily enjoyed by the citizens, and to significantly expand the authority of the law enforcement agencies.

I want to address one point, and that is the point of the declaration, the statement of Her Excellency on the grounds for the declaration of a state of emergency. At the penultimate paragraph, the recital is as follows:

“Additionally, the Cabinet advised that the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, (TTPS) Intelligence, informed the Minister of Homeland Security, who in turn informed the National Security Council that criminal gangs in the islands of Trinidad and Tobago have increased acts of violence on a scale so extensive that it threatens persons and will endanger public safety. Accordingly, the National Security Council was of the view that it was necessary to take immediate action.”

My contribution on that is as follows: During the time that the UNC has been in Government, what actions has this Government taken to prevent us from reaching this state? That is the first question that I asked. Where were the actions of this Government when this threat was building? The last issue I raised, and I raised it very neutrally. Will we hear from hon. Minister of Homeland Security as

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to the information that he had within his bosom that came from the intelligence agency in the debate? I ask it neutrally, and I move on.

I want to move, Madam Deputy Speaker, to put on record that the regulations utilized by the People's National Movement in 2024 are almost identical to the regulations that we utilize now. But here is the difference. The difference between a PNM instituted state of emergency and what we are facing now is clarity, it is honesty, and it is a sense of integrity—

Mr. Young SC: And no abuse.

Mr. K. Scotland SC:—and no abuse of the State of Emergency.

The first distinction that I make is that when the State of Emergency was declared in December 2024, it was never asked to be extended in this Parliament. In this Government, when the State of Emergency was introduced, I think it was on the 18th of July 2025, they came for an extension, and that extension, I think we support it. That extension we supported the initial declaration, but they could not justify their extension, and that is the difference. We on this side never governed by states of emergency. I want to explain further, Madam Deputy Speaker, why we say that clarity was presented at all material times, so that the population can put its pulse, his hands on the pulse on what was going on.

The Member for Oropouche East outlined certain murders that occurred but is your plan as soon as a murder occurs, you call a state of emergency? That is not right. Let me explain what happened in December 2024. An incident occurred on the 29th December, 2024. It was at Prizgar Lands, Laventille and that night, five men were brutally murdered in what investigations and investigators described as a reprisal attack linked to gang conflict, and that was relative to a Besson Street Police Station incident that went before. The victims were Ryan Lessey, Derron

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Calliste, Cleon Lubin, Kambon Omowale, and Gareth Smart. Those men were gathered outside an establishment. The tragic events occurred only hours after an incident at the Besson Street Police Station, where Trevor Williams had been shot and killed. Intelligence suggested, based on that confluence of activity that there would be reprisals, particularly the brazenness of the shooting outside of the station in the heart of the city, and the five men who were killed in one incident.

Acting upon that information and against that backdrop of credible intelligence, the Government at the time declared a state of emergency based on advice, based on advice. Members of the Government Benches now may disagree with that decision. But we presented the population with data, with statistics, and with a trajectory which showed an escalation. What has been presented here seems to be murders occurring, and the Government has no answer, and they say, "Well, ZOSO did not succeed, let us go to a state of emergency."

Mr. Young SC: Correct.

Mr. K. Scotland SC: That is exactly what was said by the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande.

What he has done, Madam Deputy Speaker, is he has under *Pepper v Hart* 1990, I think one All England Law Reports at page 290. What he has done is to give fodder to anyone who wishes to challenge these repeated states of emergency to say it is not for a proper motive, and *Hansard* cannot be erased. I am sure the hon. Attorney General cringed, cringed, when he heard that submission from Member for Toco/Sangre Grande. That was out of order. What you are telling the population, you did not support ZOSO, so take state of emergency? That is a serious submission in this country, and that is to be applauded.

Madam Deputy Speaker, what statistics have been presented to this country

to justify the imposition and continuation of this State of Emergency? Where is that evidence as we stand in this debate today? It is not sufficient to say, “X was gunned down in Diego Martin, Y was stabbed, and somebody’s father posted something.” That is not sufficient because murders are—it is a phenomenon that, as a Government, you are responsible to deal with in a proportionate manner. That is what you are elected to do. Not suspend the Constitution and say, well, “they have murders.”

9.35p.m.

Remember I started by giving you the comparison, Madam Deputy Speaker, as to the escalation that occurred in December 2024. So that is the second point I want to make. The first was the continuous rolling over. The second was the clarity, and the transparency that were presented by the People’s National Movement in December 2024. And, the third is what I call—and I want to use neutral language, because hearing the contributions made, I understand what I must never do in this Parliament; so I want to use neutral language—the hypocrisy that is now emanating.

What did the Government say then when the People’s National Movement presented its State of Emergency in this Parliament? The Members who occupy the Government Benches were among the most vocal critics, particularly the Member for Oropouche East, of the State of Emergency. They argued that the emergency power should not be used as a crime-fighting strategy. They argued that the declaration of such powers demonstrated a failure of leadership and an absence of a coherent national security strategy. What is the coherent national security strategy that has been presented now? They told the nation that the solution to crime was competent governance, intelligence-led policing, and proper

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management of the security services and not the suspension of constitutional rights. What are they doing now other than suspending constitutional rights? Either by ZOSOs, which failed, or by states of emergency being rolled over and over and over.

Mr. Young SC: Correct.

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Those statements were not made quietly or privately. They were repeated in Parliament on the *Hansard* across political platforms, repeated in interviews, and repeated during the national election campaign. The electorate was assured that the UNC possessed a comprehensive—and I quote:

A comprehensive plan to address crime and that the country would see a new approach to national security once they assumed office.

Where is that comprehensive plan to address crime? They have assumed office. Where is that plan?

The present situation today, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that we are confronted by a Government which has no plan to effectively deal with criminal activity and crime in Trinidad and Tobago. The very political entity that condemned the one state of emergency that was implemented in December 2024 now asks this Parliament to extend those same powers, not for the first—well, extend for the second. But let me use the first as the first one. Not once, not twice, but as Lionel Richie would say, three times. Three times.

The fundamental question for this House is this, what has changed since December 2024? Where is the evidence demonstrating that the present circumstances are comparable to those that existed in 2024? If they are, tell us, so that we may, as we have done in the two previous debates, support justified legislation. We have shown that if it is justified, we will support it. Where are the

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statistics? Other than saying there were murders, where are the statistics showing, well, there were reprisals; something is happening here? Because, Madam Deputy Speaker, the evidence that has emerged from the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service suggests something quite different to the picture that has been presented here.

So, I now want to deal with it based on the statements that were made in the public domain, and one would think that the gravitas and the weight of the statements coming from none other than the Office of the Commissioner of Police, and the Office of the Minister of Homeland Security, would carry some weight. So let us interrogate the statements that are in the public domain and compare them or juxtapose them to what we are doing now.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Commissioner of Police, publicly indicated that serious crime indicators had declined, noting that the country had experienced one of the lowest murder figures recorded in recent years, and describing that reduction as a significant achievement of law enforcement operations. We say yes, and we say that ought to be commended. It cannot be, however, that the only way to achieve that is via an imposition of a state of emergency, after a state of emergency, after a state of emergency after a failed ZOSO. It cannot be. Police data also showed a decline in several categories of serious crime. At the end of the State of Emergency in 2025, the Commissioner assured the nation that the police service had the situation firmly under control. The Commissioner spoke confidently of what he described as strategic, precision-guided interventions.

If we have those, strategic and precision-guided intervention, it did not stop there. Only days ago, the population was told by the said Commissioner, praising technology and innovation, and saying that it ensured a safe Carnival 2026, and

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called it “Operation Secure De VIBES”. Added to that was a declaration, without statistics, by the hon. Minister of Homeland Security, who declared last Carnival among—no, you said it was the safest in the last 20 years.

If crime is down and “de VIBES” were secured, it was the safest Carnival in the last 20 years, how we are here now?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: How? I ask it to drive home the point of the lack of justification, because both cannot coexist. Both cannot coexist. So, now we are facing, and this country is facing, a paradox. The question is, is it a paradox of truth and trust? And this is the paradox. On the one hand, you have the police reporting declining crime indicators. On the other hand, you have the Government asking Parliament to believe that the nation faces such extraordinary circumstances that emergency powers must be one, implemented with the declaration, and two, extended. Both positions cannot logically coexist. It is counter-intuitive.

We then say that it seems that we have moved from public safety to public order. That is something that we have to interrogate a little more to understand, because one is a lower standard, you know. And if you are moving away—when the People’s National Movement implemented its State of Emergency it was for public safety. Is it now that the emphasis is on public order? What happens to the nurses who have not gotten their 10 per cent who may have decided that they want to exercise our rights under the Trade Disputes and Protection of Property Act to take action on the streets? What happens to teachers who have not been so favoured to get 10 per cent, whether all in cash—

Hon. Members: Or non-cash.

Mr. K. Scotland SC: —or some non-cash, and they have decided we will exercise

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our rights and take industrial action. What happens to the members of the CWU? What happens to members of the CWU, who may say to the country, “We want to advocate so that we could be in parity with the others”? Is it now that they will say it is a threat to public order, as opposed to public safety? That is a question, Madam Deputy Speaker, that must be answered.

But, this is where I want now to come down to nuts and bolts, and the nuts and bolts of this—and Madam Deputy Speak, I do not want to take more than half an hour, you know. I want to make my point and take my seat. But let us do nuts and bolts. Let us do nuts and bolts, Madam Deputy Speaker. This House and the population must do a mathematical exercise that will determine how long has this Government been in power. And out of the amount of time they have been in power, how much of that time have we spent under a state of emergency? That is the exercise that I intend to do. If I miss it, math was not my forte, so forgive me. Let me see if I can delve into it. Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, the length of time that Trinidad and Tobago has been governed under a state of emergency powers since the United National Congress assumed office, let us do the workings. This current administration assumed office on the 1st of May 2025. Since that time, this country has experienced two separate states of emergencies. The first state of emergency under this administration began the 18th of July, 2025, and remained in effect until the 31st of January, 2026

According to my calculation, it was a period of approximately 197 days. This Government has been in office, according to my calculation, for 320 days. If we do the math, 61 per cent of the time that this Government has had the reins of governance in Trinidad and Tobago, we have spent it under a state of emergency.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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2026.03.13

Mr. K. Scotland SC: The math, the math cannot fib. The math will speak for itself, Madam Deputy Speaker, and that is a worrisome and worrying concern for all right-thinking people in Trinidad and Tobago. Only a few weeks later, on March 3rd, 2026, having already spent 61 per cent of their time in governance under a state of emergency, this Government has declared yet another state of emergency. And that is the very proclamation that we are here debating. Madam Deputy Speaker, when these timelines are examined together, the unavoidable and inescapable conclusion is that for a significant, and for the majority of this Government tenure, Trinidad and Tobago has been governed under extraordinary emergency powers, rather than the normal framework of law enforcement and criminal justice, and yet they boast murders are down by 42 per cent.

Well, if you had that for 61 per cent of your time, then murders really should be down by 61 per cent. Yeah? Now, the question again is that this is a troubling development. It is troubling because did we envision rolling over, after rolling over of states of emergencies? Is that what we were promised on the campaign trail?

Mr. Young SC: Absolutely not.

Mr. K. Scotland SC: The answer to that is absolutely not. It is antithetical to the promises that were made. We were promised a comprehensive crime plan. What did we get? Toco/Sangre Grande

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

Mr. K. Scotland SC: I understand you know that contributions that lack substance must descend into personal attacks. I understand it. But I also understand that there comes a time when you must take the governance of this country seriously—

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Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

9.50p.m.

Mr. K. Scotland SC:—in no way envisions, in no way manifests taking this seriously. You know what I heard? Some energy contract in Spanish?

Hon. Member: Imagine that.

Mr. K. Scotland SC: How does that find its way into a debate, in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago? And some superman.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: I embraced “coal pot”, you know, so that just does not affect me. But what about the people—and Marvin still eats his Macaroni pie. What we will not eat, is what they are trying to shove down our throats here.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: I regurgitate it, what they are trying to shove down our throats, I rebuke it. Give us a plan. Tell us how do you intend to govern Trinidad and Tobago, except by extraordinary measures which infringes the rights of the citizenry. And do not tell us, do not tell us—and I say this neutrally, I say it because I have to say it. On this side here, we are law-abiding, you know. We can walk into any police station and walk out.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: I move on. The Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago envisages a state of emergency in exceptional circumstances and as a temporary response to exceptional circumstances. Are you telling us that over the past 10 months that is all we have had? It was never intended to be a recurring instrument of governance or a substitute for comprehensive crime policy and mature governance in Trinidad and Tobago. I tell the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago—

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Madam Deputy Speaker: Member, I know you said you would not take more than 30 minutes, but would you like your additional 15 minutes?

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Please, please.

Madam Deputy Speaker: No problem.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Meaning, I am down to 15?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Emergency powers invoked repeatedly for extended periods, raises legitimate concerns as whether the State is relying on extraordinary constitutional measures, rather than addressing root causes of crime. And to say that you cannot address root causes of crime in a short term manner, just betrays the fact that they are not ready to govern this country. You could govern short term on Instagram and TikTok but when it comes to implementation of plans, there are short-term plans to reduce crime and there are long-term and there are medium-term. What are those plans? Madam Deputy Speaker, having spent so much time under states of emergency, what is the Government's plan that they have promised Trinidad and Tobago, where is it?

I will not bother to quote the case of *Dayton Campbell*. Only the principle that came out of the Supreme Court in Jamaica that clarified that the constitutional meaning of an emergency:

“...a public emergency is a sudden, unexpected action or event that negatively impacts an entire community.”

That has not been presented here. We have not met the legal threshold or the evidential threshold that was set in *Dayton Campbell v Attorney General of Jamaica*.

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So, then I pose three questions to this Government. If crime indicators are declining, according to you all, what evidence demonstrates that ordinary powers of law enforcement are insufficient to maintain public safety?

Two, if this Government promised a comprehensive crime strategy, why is the principle response today another state of emergency? And three, if emergency powers were previously condemned as unnecessary under a People's National Movement, what makes it now and what facts justify, not their first, not their second, in fact, not their third, because one failed but their fourth incarnation of these emergency powers?

The selective approach to the State of Emergency—I have said that the Regulations are very similar to that implemented under the People's National Movement. You see regulation 11, which deals with public safety and which deals with orally—anybody trying to influence public opinion orally, et cetera, et cetera. The difference between a PNM administration and this administration is that a PNM administration will never weaponize that against the public. That is the difference.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: More importantly, where are the gang members who have been arrested and charged from the last two incarnations of the States of Emergencies, were they charged? If you have the information and the intelligence, why were they not charged? And, I now want to give context before I end.

Well, you know what, the hon. Member—I could not give a better context than the hon. Member for Toco/Sangre Grande. He said the ZOSO failed, take the SOE, that is it. I cannot put it more eloquently than he has, but is that the plan? That you would have security forces establish cordons around communities? That

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you will designate certain areas of Special Operational Zones, that it could remain in effect up to 180 days and if that fails, here is what, take three months of a state of emergency. This is governance by reaction, rather than governance by planning and that is our main philosophical and radical objection to this. So, I say it is the same and similar but the People's National Movement government is concerned with public safety, and we presented it and we took the population into our confidence when we brought it, that is the difference.

And, now, Madam Deputy Speaker, we wish to make it clear that when a People's National Movement government exercised the powers under the Regulations, it was done even-handedly. Today, the population of Trinidad and Tobago deserves answers. Serious issues have been raised. The country has not yet received a clear explanation as to why this is necessary outside of the normal act of governing a country that you promised to govern.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we know that areas of national security are sensitive but the People's National Movement was able to present the population with data, with empirical evidence, that although some were sensitive, others was designed to show the population why we were infringing on their constitutional rights. That has not happened in this case. Therefore, the people of Trinidad and Tobago did not elect a government to manage crime through perpetual states of emergencies. They elected a government that promised competence, leadership and solutions.

The rolling over and over of emergency powers, cannot replace sound policy. Emergency powers cannot be substituted for effective leadership. We say that emergency powers cannot compensate for the absence of planning and the absence of strategy. The citizens of this country, Madam Deputy Speaker, expect

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leadership that is deliberate and thoughtful. They expect when we come to Parliament, we show the respect for the Chair, not disregard a rule and then say, “Oh, I said it already”.

Mr. Young SC: Correct.

Mr. K. Scotland SC: I cannot believe that that happened and the Speaker countenanced that. I learnt a serious lesson today, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is what not to do when I stand up to proudly represent the people of Port of Spain South who have put me here.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: The people of Port of Spain South, from Beverly Hills to East Dry River, Woodbrook, St. James, Sea Lots 1, 2 and 3, Pioneer Production and Katanga, we deserve better than what has been presented here to us.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: And mind you, in closing, the hon. Member for Oropouche East said that the Business Sector, supporting it, he did not read the *Guardian* today. In South, the businessmen are saying despite the States of Emergencies, crime is up.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC:—and they want comprehensive action outside of states of emergencies that would address the root cause of crime. With those few words, and going out with what I promised, these are my contributions to this very important debate.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for Tunapuna.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

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 Mr. K. Scotland SC (cont'd)

The Minister of Homeland Security (Hon. Roger Alexander): Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise on this occasion to lend my support to my team, on this Oh-so important discussion, so let the classes begin.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Ms. Ameen: Schoolthem, schoolthem.

Hon. R. Alexander: Let me first treat with the Member for Port of Spain South, you asked a question earlier—the neglect of the People’s National Movement government to implement anything at all, you were the easiest one to answer. You often come here time, after time and ask about school and school and all them kinda crazy questions you all ask in here, every single week.

Madam Deputy Speaker, yesterday, the Ministry of Homeland Security held a symposium, a multi sectorial approach to the early identification, prevention and treatment of emotional and behavioural issues among vulnerable youths in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Step one. Madam Deputy Speaker, as I stand here some words immediately came to mind listening to those on the other side, ironic—

Mr. Padarath: Shameless.

Hon. R. Alexander:—hypocritical, and to some extent, moronic.

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

Hon. R. Alexander: Madam Deputy Speaker, I can play who said this, and who said that, with persons on the other side—

[*Member exits Chamber*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Let me allow the lady to leave, I will speaker after she is gone, I have respect—

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Hon. Member: Good riddance.

Hon. R. Alexander: Good riddance—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Madam Deputy Speaker, it is ironic and I want to place on record this evening, a few quotes from the opposite side. Not too long ago someone on that side said this:

“Defense forces will become de facto police officers and both are allowed to conduct searches without a warrant...

Bail will be suspended and those suspected of committing a crime...”—
 will—“...be held for 48 hours without a charge.”

Guess who said that? Who, who? Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, on December 30, 2024. It is not over, guess who said this, but we are talking about the rights, human rights and constitutional rights and all of that but they forgot what they said.

10.05 p.m.

Who said this?

““There is no doubt in my mind that we are dealing with an epidemic...””

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

That was said on the 30th of December, 2024. Guess who? He is not here. Fitzgerald Hinds.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Madam Deputy Speaker, it is sad to see that—oh, Mr. Speaker is back. Mr. Speaker, it is sad to see and to hear some of these statements of our colleagues on the other side. When they were in power, they would have suspended the rights of citizens in the same manner. But one minute, it is good

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and another time, it is bad. This is the bad time. But when they were here, it was good. And I want to address the Member for Arouca/Lopinot. He is gone? “Ah very tired fella.”

Ms. Mohit: “He fraid yuh, yuh know.”

Hon. R. Alexander: “Yeah, he fraid.” See, I often see him in Las Cuevas. I like to see when he is up there.

Hon. Members: *[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: He just would not stay away.

Hon. R. Alexander: He just would not stay away.

Mr. Speaker, he said in his contribution this evening that a lot of things are—

Mr. Scotland: *[Inaudible]*

Hon. Members: *[Interruption]*

Hon. R. Alexander: What is going on in here?

Ms. Ameen: Ignore him. Ignore him.

Hon. Member: Do not get distracted.

Hon. Members: *[Interruption]*

Hon. R. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Arouca/Lopinot in his contribution said that he was hearing the same thing from the last occasion as it relates to the State of Emergency. But, Mr. Speaker, what else he had to say? He was right here when they brought the State of Emergency, and because of the lack of governance and the inability to treat the crime and the criminal element, we are stuck with this for a number of years.

Mr. Speaker, if you understand, and this is—I wish he was here because he was not a good police to start with—

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

Hon. R. Alexander:—so I would have taught him something this evening. Mr. Speaker, when you engage the criminal element and after a while, they are released, the work continues. And in order to get the effect that you are looking for, the investigation must continue. Some of the investigations cannot continue when persons are incarcerated. They have to be released again on the nation's streets and you continue to build, and build, and build, and build until you have sufficient evidence. And the lawyers should know that. When you have sufficient evidence, then you can take persons before a court to be dealt with according to law.

Also, Mr. Speaker, tell me, if you left the police service, the intelligence agencies of the police service, under-strength, under-resourced, lack of equipment, technology and otherwise, we should have entered into government and immediately take charge of this crime situation, but we could not. You know why? Because for years, 10 years, they sat here, sitting on the dock of the bay, wasting time.

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

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, when I hear—

Ms. Mohit: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Well, he cannot help himself, you know. This is the first time he gets to talk in years.

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

Hon. R. Alexander: So now he is able to talk. He is talking so much. Yeah. “He does talk so much.” He might get up and talk about some basketball situation that

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does not exist in this Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, the lack of leadership of the People's National Movement continues to be on display right in this Parliament. They say we have no crime plan, but I want to ask them this. I was a police officer waiting for the crime plan. You know what was their crime plan, Mr. Speaker? Thank God for the COVID-19.

Hon. Member: Yeah. Yeah.

Hon. R. Alexander: Thank God for COVID-19. That was their crime plan.

Mr. Sturge: And “voops, vaps.”

Hon. R. Alexander: Yeah.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. R. Alexander: So, in other words, everybody had to cover their faces in order to feel the crime plan. So I have seen the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs here, like he is still feeling the COVID-19 crime plan because his face is still covered here today, and that is the crime plan of the People's National Movement.

Mr. Elder: Cover your face.

Hon. R. Alexander: Cover your face and wait.

Mr. Speaker, we talk about intelligence and obviously, the Member for San Fernando East does not even understand where he is. So to understand intelligence, it will take a while.

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. R. Alexander: “Yuh done? Yuh finish?”

Mr. Manning: “You could do that if yuh want, yuh know.”

Hon. R. Alexander: “Yuh finish?”

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Ms. Ameen: “He doh get enough attention at home you know. Ignore him.”

Hon. R. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, if this man—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. R. Alexander: “Yuh ain’t tired?” Mr. Speaker, let me, again, focus—

Hon. Member: Refocus.

Hon. R. Alexander:—or refocus on what is the mission ahead. At the end of the day, every single person in Trinidad and Tobago has seen and appreciated what this Government has done in terms of crime-fighting initiatives.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: And since the Member for San Fernando East is here, Member for San Fernando East, let us bring it to your reality. And like he is not sure but he will figure it out just now. Mr. Speaker, I want to find out from San Fernando East, what is his reality.

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Do you have to wait, Member for San Fernando East, until you have some children, or child, or mother, or father who is shot and killed and lying on the nation’s streets?

Ms. Ameen: “He doh care. He doh care”

Hon. R. Alexander: When does reality step in?

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Does reality step in when you see the persons on the ground bleeding?

Mr. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, can I ask you to look at 53(1)(e)? The Member for San Fernando West continues in his excessive crosstalk.

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

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Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: No, it is you. And you know very well, it is you.

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Members: [*Continuous crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Why are you persisting in this? And you are encouraging the Member for Laventille East/Morvant. Member for Laventille East/Morvant, let me employ a colloquialism to tell you about this. “Friend does carry yuh. Friend doh bring yuh.” Stop all of that.

Ms. Ameen: Respect the Chair. Respect the Chair—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: All right, Member for St. Augustine, same thing, please.

Hon. R. Alexander: Let me ask you something. What is your reality? Is your reality when somebody reaches the hospital and then you realize that they are no longer alive after being shot in the head? What is your reality? Is it more important when you go to the Forensic Science Centre to identify a body, or is it the day of the funeral? What is your reality?

Most of the Members here have children, and the ladies would have gone elsewhere as usual. What is your reality? If your children, any one of your children is shot and killed, what is your reality? But yet we have to come here, time after time, and beg for support. Beg for support time and time again, because you do not consider the people, the citizen, and their safety and security.

Some of you all have big dogs, guns—and this is another question. If things were so good, Mr. Speaker, if things were so nice, why are persons on that side applying for firearms? If things were so nice, why are you applying for firearms? Well, what applies? Let me explain to you, Member Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West. What applies is this. Giving persons an opportunity to defend themselves in

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the absence of the safety and security provided by police officers. All right? The State of Emergency provides an officer or officers with an additional power that they can use at short notice to get the job done. If that is an issue, then you really do not care about the safety and security of our citizens.

Time and time again, you come before this Parliament and make the same statements. I sat here all evening and people—repetition, after repetition, after repetition, speaking of the same thing over, and over, and over, and over. Mr. Speaker, the crime plan for the People's National Movement never materialized. But you know what? They cannot speak to us because we brought down the murder rate, as they would have never seen before. And as somebody said, they are having issues because they cannot treat with that. And they know that if this continues, they will never see the reign of power ever, ever again.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, Member for St. Ann's East, the lady, every week she comes here and talks about schools, schools, schools. I was a police officer back then. When we told them, "Listen, let us put police officers in school," the "no" was loud. A loud "no". They are afraid that the children will be shot. All kinds of nonsense they brought. And now because they see what is happening in the nation's schools, they criticize every single week.

And then my friend from—I will have to leave those guys alone, because they just came. They have a real reality too, Mr. Speaker, because they are MPs in constituencies where the crime rate is up. Now, I can say this openly, Mr. Speaker, between Port of Spain South, Laventille West, and Laventille East/Morvant, they have the largest percentage of persons charged and accused of home invasions in the country. However, that does not mean that you have to sit here and allow it to

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 (Basis for Declaration
 Hon. R. Alexander (cont'd)

continue. I would like you all to take a stand.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Represent your constituency. Member for Port of Spain South, you understand what I am saying? Take charge of your constituency. Port of Spain South, Laventille West, shots fired. They are going and they are just hugging people. People are begging them, “Let us bring back the State of Emergency, Sir.” But you see, they cannot make decisions on their own. They depend on a voice, while their community is falling apart, dying, persons are being shot continuously over a period of time.

Before I go, Mr. Speaker, let me just bring this to your attention. Mr. Speaker, who said this?

“Even as they get convicted and get into the prison, the prison has become part of the problem rather than part of the solution, and all...”—of us know—“...Madam Speaker...”

—they were quoting from that—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Yeah. Let us redirect the:

“...resources and ensure that we have a commitment that law-abiding citizens must be protected from this element of criminality.”

They said all of that. Guess who said that? Member for Diego Martin West. Back in the day.

Hon. Member: Mr. Rowley.

Hon. R. Alexander: Yeah, him. Mr. Rowley, yeah. Mr. Speaker, we could sit here all day and criticize each other and talk about statistics.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]*—the goat.*

State of Public Emergency
(Basis for Declaration
Hon. R. Alexander (cont'd)

Hon. R. Alexander: It would not matter. What we need—and talk about the goat? [*Laughter*]. What we need is a collaborative approach to this crime-fighting issue, total collaboration and partisan politics. Both sides must be able to work together and stop this craziness because you are getting nowhere fast, while persons continue to die. If I were living in any one of your constituencies, I would have voted you out.

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

Hon. R. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, I would not beg, I will just sit. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*].

10:20p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Colm Imbert (*Diego Martin North/East*): Mr. Speaker, I had not planned to speak, but since the Government has four speakers, I will be the fourth speaker on the Opposition side. I was told that the Minister of Homeland Security would speak for a short while, but he spoke for a little longer than expected. I certainly will not speak for a very long time.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would not get into the tit for tat that has found itself on the Government Benches. I would not get into name-calling, and so on. I think we need to look at this thing in a very serious way. Now, we are here today, and we are being asked to extend a state of emergency. The Attorney General, in his introduction of this matter, really did not give us any justification in any real sense. So, let me read what is considered to be the rationale for an extension of a state of emergency:

The extension of a State of Emergency is justified when the initial

exceptional threat to national security, public safety, or public order, such as violent crime, armed insurrection, or natural disaster, persists beyond the initial period requiring continued extra-ordinary measures to be effectively managed.

From none of the Members on the other side have we heard any of this. No description, no elucidation, nothing, with respect to the fact that these issues persist and require extra-ordinary measures to be effectively managed. What are the threats that we are supposed to learn about in this debate that we have not heard from the Government: That violent criminal activity, gang retaliation, or threats to essential services remain high after the initial State of Emergency; the need for law enforcement and military forces to complete operations such as dismantling criminal networks. We have heard none of this.

I want to go now to what happened on a previous occasion, Mr. Speaker, and I will go to a news report in the *Guardian*, about a year ago, and this was a report on the outcome of legal action taken during the State of Emergency at that time, and I am reading from the article. The article is entitled “Government to Remove ‘vague’ State of Emergency provisions”, and it goes on to say:

“The Government is making good on its pledge to make amendments to regulations for the ongoing State of Emergency (SoE) related to public order. Shortly after the SoE was proclaimed...”—and this is a year ago—
“...and the associated regulations published late last year, lawyers representing Vishal Persad, who is the administrator of the blog “Millennials for Change”, filed a lawsuit alleging that aspects of the regulations dealing with public order were unconstitutional.

When the case came up for hearing before High Court Judge Westmin James...lawyers for the Office of the Attorney General indicated that the Government has agreed to amend the regulations to remove the public order provisions.

In the lawsuit, Persad's lawyers Kiel Taklalsingh..."—I think that is a name that some of us might know well, as a UNC operative—"...and Keron Ramkhalwhan specifically challenged Regulations 12 and 14 and..."—a—"...schedule which deals with public order. The regulations prohibit persons from influencing public opinion in a manner likely to be prejudicial to public safety and order and empower the police to arrest, detain, and charge alleged offenders."

So that was one year ago. What is happening now? I go now to a news story in the *Express*, March 4th: Sweeping powers in new regulations. One of the powers is very, very, very similar to the power that found itself the subject of that court action, and the regulations make it an offence to influence public opinion in a manner likely to be prejudicial to public safety. So what is the difference? Over a year ago, the regulations made it an offence to influence public opinion in a manner likely to be prejudicial to public safety and public order. The public order part comes out, and the public safety remains. So, let us look at what happened in this court case. It said, after it recited the fact that the regulations prohibit persons from influencing public opinion in a matter likely to be prejudicial to public safety and order, that:

"If...convicted, offenders face a maximum penalty of a \$100,000 fine and five years imprisonment."

I am reasonably confident that the regulations that are now in effect are similar:

“It would be wrong for the Executive to regard the Regulations as giving it unchecked ability to target and detain individuals for mere trivial acts, having regard to the context of the term ‘public order’ as used in the Regulations...”

This is what Persad’s attorney said. They went on to say:

““There is no material before to evidence a real risk of violent assembly or wide-scale riot to justify the specific powers given to arrest persons in relation to endangering public order...”

They claimed that the regulations were not ‘carefully tailored’ based on the situation identified by the President.”

They further contended:

“...that the impugned regulations are unconstitutional on the basis that they are not rationally connected to the purpose described by the President in her statement to justify the proclamation declaring that a statement of public emergency exists...”

And, very importantly, and I heard nothing of this from the last speaker:

““They also pointed out that the regulations did not clearly define the parameters of the offenses, and no training was provided to police officers.

There is no evidence that the ordinary police officer is aware of the nuances of the principle of legality, nor is there any promulgation of policy by the Police Service on the restrictions/guidance in interpreting this power using specific examples of instances in which this should not be used...citizens were not given legal certainty over what conduct may be prohibited.”

And:

“The claimant...”—went on to say—“...that the...regulations are disproportionate, insofar as they create too broad of a discretion which can be applied to subject persons to serious incursions into the entrenched constitutional rights...”

As far as I am concerned, we are in exactly the same place. Which police officer can determine whether a person has done something which would influence public opinion to endanger public safety? He cannot. There is no proper definition of this. I am certain, as well, that if someone were to take this matter to court, the result and the outcome would be the same. So, let us see if that is going to happen. Let us see if somebody is going to take this matter to court and ask for a declaration that that particular regulation is unconstitutional. You see, Mr. Speaker, I really find the contributions of the Members opposite have been trivial and superficial. They have not dealt with the issues. They have not explained why this is necessary.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: If I go now, to the proclamation of the President to draw a comparison parallel to what occurred in this particular matter, what did the President say in her proclamation, in Her Excellency's proclamation dated March the 4th, 2026? She said this:

“On March 02, 2026, I was informed by Cabinet, that within the last several days, a number of violent, criminal activities had taken place with mass shootings and multiple victims, most of which have been carried forward by members of organized criminal gangs, which have endangered public safety.”

Now, I could see if there is some sort of huge set of criminal gangs

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(Basis for Declaration
Mr. C. Imbert (cont'd)

endangering public safety, that there might be some kind of rationale here, but we have not heard anything about that.

“Cabinet further informed that there had also been credible threats to attack Police Officers...”—me eh hear about that—“...Prison Officers, and other members of the Protective Services.

Additionally, Cabinet advised that the time Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS) Intelligence informed the Minister of Homeland Security, who in turn informed the National Security Council that criminal gangs in the islands of Trinidad and Tobago have increased acts of violence on a scale so extensive that it threatens persons and will endanger public safety.”

And:

“Having considered the information provided...I was satisfied that action has been taken or is immediately threatened by any person of such a nature and on so extensive a scale, as to be likely to endanger the public safety...”

Now, that is all well and good, if, in fact, there is information, none of which has been shared with us, that criminal gangs in the islands of Trinidad and Tobago have increased acts of violence on a scale so extensive that it will endanger public safety, then why did the Government not give us some information? But I go back to the case, none of this in this proclamation—it is almost identical. None of this in this proclamation deals with persons doing things to influence public opinion to cause a danger to public safety.

The entire premise of this matter is that there was nothing in the proclamation of the President a year ago, which would lead to the conclusion that that regulation prohibiting persons from speaking. Because what this does is prohibit anybody from saying anything which, in the opinion of a police officer, an

State of Public Emergency
(Basis for Declaration
Mr. C. Imbert (cont'd)

untrained police officer, who has no guidance, has no information, from saying, “Oh, dat sound like, dat thing you say just now, dat sound like you are endangering public safety or dat post yuh put on Facebook, that look like it endangering public safety or dat article yuh write there, dat look like it endangering public safety.” This is why I say I am certain that this regulation will be deemed to be disproportionate, and the outcome will be the same.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: I heard the Minister of Homeland Security say we brought down the murder rate as never seen before, okay. I saw it before, though. I saw it in every time there was a state of emergency; I saw the murder rate go down.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: It does not matter which Government it is. It is a sine qua non. It happens. It happened in the 2011 State of Emergency; the murder rate went down. It happened under the PNM State of Emergency, murder rate went down. The murder rate went down because of that. It did not go down because of better policing. It did not go down because you are dismantling criminal gangs. It did not go down because of better intelligence. It went down because you have taken away people’s constitutional rights, and we cannot live in this country, or any country, under a perpetual state of emergency.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

10.35 p.m.

Mr. C. Imbert: That is what the Government is missing. People are fed up of this, absolutely fed up of it. This cannot be the solution. It cannot be that in order to deal with violent crime and violent criminality and gangs and so on, this is what you have to keep doing over and over and over again. That is not a solution. We

State of Public Emergency
 (Basis for Declaration
 Mr. C. Imbert (cont'd)

deserve better as a country.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: And I really would have liked to have heard from the Minister of Homeland Security instead of picong. Certainly, the Minister of Energy, master of picong, and the other one, the other gentleman from Toco/Sangre Grande, really did not tell us anything that would inspire anybody to understand why this State of Emergency should be extended. I am telling you, people are getting tired of this nonsense. And, this is why we, on this side, because you have produced no evidence, you have produced no basis, because you have produced no justification, I am sorry we cannot support this as an alternative to effective policing and proper crime management. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Attorney General.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Attorney General (Sen. The Hon. John Jeremie SC): Mr. Speaker, I will not be long at 25 to 11 in the night, but permit me to address just some of the criticisms that have been made by my colleagues opposite. I am beginning with Diego Martin North/East. That is a usual good place to begin because I remember—

Hon. Member: [*Interruption*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: I am coming to you, do not worry.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: So, Diego Martin North/East says that the murder rate went down with every State of Emergency. Obviously, during Covid, nobody was moving around, and I imagine that the rate, logically speaking, might have

State of Public Emergency
 (Basis for Declaration
 Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC (cont'd)

gone down. But, the fact of the matter is that the Minister of Homeland Security is on record as saying, and the Commissioner of Police as well, that the murder rate and the rate in respect of serious violent crime is the lowest this year than it has been in 20 years.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: We have had states of emergency periodically during those 20 years. One—as I have said this evening, as I have said before, I say it all the time, one in December on New Year’s Eve, on New Year’s Adam, as some kids would say, the day before New Year’s Eve, and the criminals had absolutely no respect for them. What did they do? They shot a prosecutor on the very next day. Not only did they shoot a prosecutor the very next day, they shot him in front of his wife and children after he had come out of church and after he had come out of church talking about the virtues of security and what a state of emergency could do. That is a state of emergency, PNM style.

Now, I spent a lot of time reading from the *Hansard* this afternoon. And the *Hansard*, I want to tell my friend from Arouca, has absolutely nothing to do with personal business. Whether I like somebody, whether I call them a pig, whether I describe them as having goats that they mind, whether the goats are eating, whether the person calls me—

Mr. Hosein: A dog.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC:—a dog, I mean, really, the *Hansard* does not have anything like that. My comments were on the *Hansard*, but the Member permitted himself to jump up here and shout and carry on about, “If I have a personal issue with X, take it outside.” Well, I want to tell him something. I have a personal issue with him. But you know what? I have shut up because I have discipline.

State of Public Emergency
(Basis for Declaration
Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC (cont'd)

My mouth has a lid. His mouth has no lid.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: Every time he has an opportunity to speak, whether it is in his—I am not sure if his house is his office or his office is his house—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC:—but every time he has an opportunity to speak, he speaks of me. He used to speak of other people inside here, too, and other families inside here. He boasted of giving people strokes and carrying people to Les Coteaux. This gentleman is a piece of work.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: What has my response been to him? Colleagues, you know me, I am a man of peace.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: I am a man of love. What have I said to him? Absolutely nothing. He is irrelevant. That is what he is to me. I have dealt with the *Hansard*. I stick to the *Hansard*, and I stand by the statements, which he made in the *Hansard*, which revealed that he took crime flippantly. He has carried that party down a dangerous—to the point today where, I mean, I have been around that party for a long time, I have never seen it in the state it is in now.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: And I want to tell you all something, that party there is in danger of complete and utter destruction.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: And the main reason for that is the gentleman, my

friend, Arouca/Lopinot, was so staunch in his screaming from his place. In any event, I said that I would have the last word, and I have had the last word.

Now, there are a couple of things that I do feel that I should speak to, I think the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West spoke about the non-use of the anti-gang law. Well, I mean, there are serious problems with the anti-gang law, and we have to fix it. There are definitions, which are circular to tautologous, and it is impossible to use "gang, gang member, gang leader". All of those things are premised on one concept. And our advice is that those concepts are intertwined. Unless you find a way to target gang activity with different triggers, the Act is a dead letter. It has been used once or twice. Never successful. That is it. So, so much for the anti-gang law.

Now, there is a fundamental philosophical question on the rights of individuals and the rights of us in society. The Constitution, which you love to cite, well, it has a preamble. There is a preamble to the Constitution, which Mr. Robinson used to use at length, and if you look at (c), this is what we, the people of Trinidad and Tobago, are saying is our compact, one with the other. So it begins:

"Whereas the people of Trinidad and Tobago..."

And then (c). It says:

"...have asserted their beliefs in a democratic society, in which all persons may, to the extent of their capacity, play some part in the institutions of the national life and thus develop and maintain due respect for the lawfully constituted authority;"

The criminal gangs in our midst do not have respect for the lawful Constitution.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: I, in fact, could say one thing—I am not sure if it

State of Public Emergency
 (Basis for Declaration
 Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC (cont'd)

is good—about Dr. Rowley, it is that he recognized in his dying moments in politics, he said, “Maybe I have failed.” That is what he said. That is good. Confession is good for the soul.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: He said, “Maybe I have failed, I have waited too long, you know, there were all these things about states of emergency, they were so tough, people kept on advising us not to do it”, and so on. But you know what he did? He did declare a state of emergency. It was too late, it was ineffective, but do you know something? On paper, it was no different from the state of emergency that my colleagues on the other side have spent their entire evening here criticizing. No different. Because that state of emergency, declared by him with a glass in his hand in Tobago—

Hon. Member: By the pool.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC:—by the pool, that state of emergency told Her Excellency the President about criminal gangs in Trinidad and Tobago and the fear of reprisal killings. Do you know something? That is what gangs do. If you kill X, they kill Y. If you kill X plus A, they go and kill Y plus B. So it was no different, as a matter of fact, having drafted the Note—the hon. Prime Minister will be my witness on this—having drafted the Cabinet Note to Her Excellency the President, I will tell you what I looked at. I looked at that Cabinet Note, so it was my precedent. No different. A word here, a word there, no different. But they spent their entire evening criticizing. And do you know what else? The gentleman came, the Prime Minister came here, having sent his minions, the younger ones, his minions out to face the press like—let me behave.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

State of Public Emergency
 (Basis for Declaration
 Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC (cont'd)

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: Having sent them out to be murdered by the press, because they were murdered by the press, he finds himself here to extend the state of emergency, which is all that we are doing here this evening. We spent, however many hours, arguing the same thing that he did when he was Prime Minister. And they have been front seat, the hypocrisy to sit there and make—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC:—the most superficial, putrid, and circular argument about rights, and as if the rest of society has no rights. And that argument was for the extension of the State of Emergency.

Colleagues, the regulations that they make so much fuss [*Laughter*], this is almost funny. Do you think—the way these things operate, I have done a few of them by now, and the hon. Prime Minister has done a few of them as well. After a National Security Council meeting, this is late in the night, you give the President a little nudge, say, “Something might be coming your way.” So, do you think that we are going to sit and create regulations from scratch? I mean, I like to think that I am a bright fella, right?

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: But I sat, and you know what I did? I looked at their regulations. Okay? [*Laughter*]

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

10.50 p.m.

I told the Chief Parliamentary Counsel, who is a decent and hardworking public servant—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC:—get me some regulations which are fit for

purpose. He put the Regulations to me. I took a look at them. I saw that there was nothing offensive in the Regulations. What do I mean by that? They used the Regulations. I used the Regulations. How come they are offensive when we use them, but not offensive when they use them? Did you all hear the reason why they are not offensive when they use them? They said they are not offensive when they use them because they are in power to make sure that everything runs smoothly. I mean, that is the hubris. That is plain dotishness.

And you know something? The people of this country—children. Some of us have kids. Right? When you have children, okay, a child makes a mistake, you correct the child once, you say, “Well, okay, go in the naughty corner”. “I punish you.” You know what I cannot understand about this PNM 2026? They got their behinds—because I know that I cannot use the other word, Mr. Speaker—roasted just a few months ago. And they have learnt absolutely nothing.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: They come here, the Member for Arouca/Lopinot has not changed his style. He stands up, he takes a little bit of this, a little bit of that. I do not know what he does during the day, but he grabs the *Hansard*, he takes a little bit of this, a little bit of that, a little bit of whatever, and hey, presto, a contribution.

I do not want to say too much about my friend from Diego Martin North/East, I have been told, give him a “bligh”. I will give him a “bligh”. Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, well, there are limitations in terms of his legal background. This is a man who called me a dunce. He was my junior, and I used to correct his work with a red ink pen. But the fella from Port of Spain South, he is a lawyer and he acquits himself here mostly well.

State of Public Emergency
 (Basis for Declaration
 Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC (cont'd)

I have nothing to say about San Fernando East. I always say that. If you behave badly—you see the thing with me, if you behave badly you might encourage something else. But I know why I have nothing to say about San Fernando East, and it had nothing to do with you. Okay? It has absolutely nothing to do with you. Is that a voice I am hearing there? Is that a voice? Because I expect silence, total silence. Okay.

Now, there is a regulation inside there, which I found offensive. Not the regulation, but I am not on Facebook and wherever, and so on and so forth, but if at a time of heightened tensions with Venezuela, any of us who describe ourselves to be Trinidadians, patriotic Trinidadians, whoever we are led by, you have a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago out on Facebook or whatever the Member for Diego Martin/North East populates, saying to a foreign state, “listen, target the leader”. “This is where she is”, that is okay. In some territories, you go to jail for that. In other territories, you are shot for that.

Now, what happened in Trinidad and Tobago is that we had a State of Emergency. This would have been not just a banana republic. We would have been a silly country if we did not take action on that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: And I am proud to say that I had something to do with taking action on that—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC:—because that is behaviour that is not permissible and that as long as I have life in me, I will not permit.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: Now, I just close by saying that as the former,

State of Public Emergency
(Basis for Declaration)

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC (cont'd)

former Prime Minister said, that is the first time I call him that, Keith Rowley, as Keith Rowley said in the *Hansard*, as he was dying, in his dying moments as Prime Minister, he said words to the effect that we are now at war with criminal gangs. It took him a long time to find out that. I do not know why. He did a degree in geology. There is something about rocks and geology. I am not sure what is going on inside there. I do not want to go there. I do not want to go there. But he found out that we were at war with criminal gangs. You know what? We said so from day one.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: And the difference between them and us is that we know we are at war with criminal gangs and we intend to fight that war until it is won.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: I just want to say two things. The Minister of Defence, the Minister of Homeland Security, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and all who have spoken on this side, I am very proud of you and the Government is proud of you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: And as a citizen, I want to say that all of those who have spoken on the other side, I am ashamed of you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: We will not, Mr. Speaker, we will not stop in this fight against the criminal gangs which have held this country to ransom for a difficult and long decade. Our people are crying out for relief. I do not know what they hear, but that is what I hear and that is what we hear. We will fight for them,

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 (Basis for Declaration
 Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC (cont'd)

whether they are in our constituencies or whether they are in your constituencies. You will answer to them for ignoring them. Mr. Speaker, with those words, I beg to move.

Question put.

Mr. Padarath: Division.

The House divided: Ayes 26 Noes 12

AYES

Padarath, Hon. B.

Persad-Bissessar SC, Hon. K.

Tancoo, Hon. D.

John, Hon. J.

Moonilal, Hon. Dr. R.

Lee, Hon. D.

Hosein, Hon. S.

Ameen, Hon. K.

Alexander, Hon. R.

Maharaj, Hon. D.

Mohit, Hon. V.

Sturge, Hon. W.

Bodoe, Hon. Dr. L.

Dowlath, Hon. Dr. M.

Ali, Dr. A.

Morris, Hon. W.

Watts, Hon. P.

Seecheran, Hon. Dr. R.

State of Public Emergency
(Basis for Declaration
(Division) (cont'd)

Kesar, Hon. E.

Elder, Hon. C.

Sam, Mrs. S.

Narinesingh, H.

Roopnarine, Dr. N.

Gosine, Dr. C.

Thomas, D.

Sampson, J.

NOES

Gonzales, M.

Beckles, Mrs. P.

Imbert, C.

Gadsby-Dolly, Dr. N.

Young SC, S.

Scotland SC, K.

de Nobriga, S.

Manning, B.

Marcelle, K.

Des Vignes, H.

Birchwood, C.

Romain, D.

Question agreed to.

Resolved:

That the House take note of the Statement by the President under section 9(1) of the Constitution setting out the specific grounds on which the decision to declare the existence of a state of public emergency was based.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Attorney General, can I invite you now to move the second Motion.

**EXTENSION OF STATE OF PUBLIC EMERGENCY
(PERIOD OF THREE MONTHS)**

The Attorney General (Sen. The Hon. John Jeremie SC): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move Motion No. 2, standing in my name:

Whereas it is enacted by section 8(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago that the President may from time to time make a Proclamation declaring that a state of public emergency exists;

And whereas the President has by Proclamation made on the 2nd day of March, 2026, declared that a state of public emergency exists in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago with effect from Tuesday 3rd March, 2026;

And whereas it is enacted by section 9(2) of the Constitution that a Proclamation made by the President for the purposes of and in accordance with section 8 shall, unless previously revoked, remain in force for fifteen days;

And whereas it is enacted by section 10(1) of the Constitution that before its expiration the Proclamation may be extended from time to time by resolution supported by a simple majority vote of the House of Representatives, so however that no extension exceeds three months and the extensions do not in the aggregate exceed six months;

Extension of State of Public Emergency
(Period of Three Months)
Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC (cont'd)

2026.03.13

And whereas it is necessary and expedient that the Proclamation made by the President on the 2nd day of March, 2026, declaring that a state of public emergency exists in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago with effect from Tuesday 3rd March, 2026, should be extended for a further period not exceeding three months;

Now, therefore, be it resolved that the Proclamation made by the President on the 2nd day of March, 2026, declaring that a state of public emergency exists in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago with effect from Tuesday 3rd March, 2026, be extended for a further period of three months.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

11.05p.m.

Question put.

Mr. Padarath: Division

The House divided: Ayes 26 Noes 12

AYES

Padarath, Hon. B.

Persad-Bissessar SC, Hon. K.

Tancoo, Hon. D.

John, Hon. J.

Moonilal, Hon. Dr. R.

Lee, Hon. D.

Hosein, Hon. S.

Ameen, Hon. K.

Alexander, Hon. R.

Maharaj, Hon. D.

Extension of State of Public Emergency
(Period of Three Months)
(Division) (cont'd)

Mohit, Hon. V.

Sturge, Hon. W.

Bodoe, Hon. Dr. L.

Dowlath, Hon. Dr. M.

Ali, Dr. A.

Morris, Hon. W.

Watts, Hon. P.

Seecheran, Hon. Dr. R.

Kesar, Hon. E.

Elder, Hon. C.

Sam, Mrs. S.

Narinesingh, H.

Roopnarine, Dr. N.

Gosine, Dr. C.

Thomas, D.

Sampson, J.

NOES

Gonzales, M.

Beckles, Ms. P.

Imbert, C.

Gadsby-Dolly, Dr. N.

Young SC, S.

Scotland SC, K.

de Nobriga, S.

Manning, B.

Extension of State of Public Emergency
(Period of Three Months)
(Division) (cont'd)

Marcelle, K.

Des Vignes, H.

Birchwood, C.

Romain, D.

Question agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Proclamation made by the President on the 2nd day of March, 2026 declaring that a state of public emergency exists in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago with effect from Tuesday 3rd March, 2026, be extended for a further period of three months.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Leader of Government Business.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Public Utilities and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Barry Padarath): Thank you kindly, 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 putting the question on the Motion for the adjournment, there are two matters for which leave had been granted. I will now call upon the Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Saddle Road, Boissiere Village to Moka (Unacceptable Road Conditions)

Mr. Colm Imbert (Diego Martin North/East): Mr. Speaker, I will do—if it is okay—No. 4 first and then No. 3. Is that okay or should I do them—

Mr. Speaker: Sure.

Saddle Road, Boissiere Village to
Moka (Unacceptable Road Conditions)
Mr. C. Imbert (cont'd)

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The matter to be raised is—sorry, No. 3 first. No. 3 and then No. 4. The matter to be raised is the need for the Minister to address the unacceptable condition of Saddle Road from Boissiere Village to Moka.

Now, for those who do not know, and I suspect there will some Members opposite—

Hon. Members: *[Interruption]*

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, what is that?

Mr. Speaker: Yes. Please let us have some silence.

Mr. C. Imbert: For those who do not know, and there will be some, obviously, on that side who do not know, Saddle Road in Maraval is a severely congested single-lane artery. It is a primary arterial road for thousands of commuters on a daily basis, not just for Maraval, but also for Santa Cruz and for the entire North Coast, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the road is riddled with potholes. And when you have a road like this that is traversed by as many as 10,000 vehicles a day—and that is what the record shows. At one point in time, it was the busiest road in Trinidad—the presence of a large pothole can cause traffic to back up for hours, and this is what has been happening on Saddle Road for the last nine months.

Hon. Member: Ten years.

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, despite the boasts of the Member for Couva South—I was here when he was boasting about fixing leaks in the Point Lisas area. There is a particular leak on Saddle Road that is in the vicinity of light pole 388, Lynch Drive and—

Hon. Member: *[Inaudible]*

Saddle Road, Boissiere Village to
Moka (Unacceptable Road Conditions)
Mr. C. Imbert (cont'd)

Mr. C. Imbert: “Ah hear dat. Send it to me and fix it. Ah, big joke.” Mr. Speaker, that leak stretches across the road. It is about 10 feet by 10 feet. It was reported to the Water and Sewerage Authority on July 03, 2025; July 07, 2025; July 09, 2025; July 11, 2025; July 12, 2025, and all of this time, Mr. Speaker, you had a cavern across the road, backing up traffic for hours and miles. We got tired on July 12th, so we just endured the traffic congestion and we reported it again on September 19, 2025. Then we got tired again, and we reported it again on December 2nd. The leak is there all this time, backing up traffic for hours, a huge pothole in the road, and is nothing being done by the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, or the Ministry of Public Utilities. We reported it again on the 25, February 2026, the 4th of March, 2026, and last week. It is still there.

So, Mr. Speaker that is just one. There is another hole higher up in the village, by an electrical supply store called Mepco, a cavern across the road for the last nine months, reported on at least 20 occasions to both the Ministry of Public Utilities, and the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure; a carvan.

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

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, the business people in the area got so frustrated with the inaction of the authorities, that they took it upon themselves to acquire materials, paving materials, and they patched the hole. The Government would not patch it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: The villagers patched it. That is just one.

Mr. Speaker, if you drive through Boissiere Village, you will see bush on the side of the road, taller than you.

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

Saddle Road, Boissiere Village to
Moka (Unacceptable Road Conditions)
Mr. C. Imbert (cont'd)

Mr. C. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]—under this administration

Mr. Speaker: Let me assure you, I drive through there every single day.

Mr. C. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]—you see the bush.

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

Hon. Member: Let him come out and measure the bush, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, this is ridiculous. Come on. Pothole, after pothole, after pothole, after pothole.

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

Mr. C. Imbert: And the Government would not lift a finger to deal with it. And, Mr. Speaker, as I said, 10,000 cars pass through there every day. I mean, enough is enough.

Hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. C. Imbert: These roads, like any other main road, like any other arterial road in the country, these roads need continuous maintenance. That is the issue. Continuous maintenance, Mr. Speaker. That road has never been like that before.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: I was the MP—I have been the MP for 34 years and under the Panday administration, they fixed the road.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Under the first Persad-Bissessar administration, they fixed the road. “What happen now? What happen now?”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: “Is ah hate yuh have for de people who pass dey?”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: What is going on? I have never experienced this. And I have all

Saddle Road, Boissiere Village to
Moka (Unacceptable Road Conditions)
Mr. C. Imbert (cont'd)

kind of people talking to me: UNC supporters, former UNC Ministers who live in my constituency, current UNC Ministers, judges, calling me and quarreling and asking me to do something, and I have to tell them, “I am not in government anymore.” When I was there, the road was in good condition. Now it is another government and they just do not care.

So I am calling—and I heard the Minister of Public Utilities said, “Just tell me and I will fix it.” “What happen?” It is 20 times we reported the thing.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I am just asking the Minister of Works and Infrastructure—I do not know what is going on with the Minister of Works and Infrastructure. We had a budget debate, we had a finance committee, and we pointed out to the Minister that the Government had not given that Ministry any money for road paving and maintenance—

Mr. Gonzales: Correct.

Mr. C. Imbert:—not a cent, and it seems that this persists. And that has to be the reason, because I cannot believe that the Minister of Works and Infrastructure would want to victimize and discriminate against the road users in that area. “Ah cyah believe dat.” She is not getting any support from the rest of the Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: So I am calling on the Government, support the Minister of Works and Infrastructure. Fix the road in Maraval.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: The Minister of Works and Infrastructure. But before I do so, I want to disclaim any knowledge whatsoever that I have ever seen any bush in Boisseire taller than me. Minister of Works and Infrastructure.

Saddle Road, Boissiere Village to
Moka (Unacceptable Road Conditions)
Mr. C. Imbert (cont'd)

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker: All right. All right.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Jearlean John): Mr. Speaker, in this season of—it is not only Eid but Lent, and I usually see the Member's car park at a certain church every now and again. So I say, Father, forgive him. He knows not what he does this hour of the night, you know. It is kind of late, you understand? And it is hard to know that bush, maybe four-inch bush, is taller than you, or three inch bush. I do not know what it is. It is very hard.

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

Hon. J. John: So I know the stress that he is under. Mr. Speaker, listen, we are not a government that discriminates. We are everywhere. As a matter of fact, we are working very, very closely with WASA, because as the Member said, he is seeing leaks, but he is so confused as to what he is seeing. I suppose because of the height challenge. I too am challenged at times, you know. He does not know what he is seeing, whether it is water leak, or a road that needs patching, or what have you.

But notwithstanding that, the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, we have been working very, very closely with WASA because in some instances, we cannot patch anything until the pipes are fixed under the road. But this is about 10 years of neglect, you know. This Member was Prime Minister for about 25 times.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: He acted for 25 times until they—[*Inaudible*—the Government and gave his colleague. On top of that, he was the Minister of Finance and he did not find money to fix those pipes under the road. That was not about the 28th of

Saddle Road, Boissiere Village to
Moka (Unacceptable Road Conditions)
Hon. J. John (cont'd)

April, you know, as much as they are trying to “zess” here this hour of the—look at the hour of the night. “Dis time is just for parrot and douen, and look at him, eh, behaving like dat.”

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. J. John: “Parrot and douen, yuh know.”

Notwithstanding, I have been told there are 13 leaks there. Now, you will go out there and say that it is 130. I do not know, “but I eh playing no count with you dis hour of de night.” Three have been fixed so far. There are, I think, seven. We are working with WASA, because they need to fix the leaks.

Hon. Member: “Hmmm”.

Hon. J. John: No, we work very collaboratively with WASA. We do. We have to, you understand?

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. J. John: No, it is about seven—no, it is about eight leaks actually, and there is one that they have just completed and we are waiting for it to settle. There is some kind of protocol where they have to wait a couple of—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. J. John: No, they have to wait a couple of days because then the leak will burst again. Relax yourself. You understand? These leaks did not come on the 28th of April, as you know, Mr. Speaker. I do not know—you probably live in that area, but it is in all—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

11.20 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Minister, I can assure you that I drive by every day, twice a day. I have seen no bush, and I certainly have encountered no cavern.

Saddle Road, Boissiere Village to
Moka (Unacceptable Road Conditions)
Hon. J. John (cont'd)

Hon. J. John: Quite frankly—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. J. John: Quite frankly—

Mr. Speaker: Not in Boissiere.

Hon. J. John: Quite frankly, Maraval is—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: There is bush, but not in Boissiere.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. J. John: Quite—listen—just now, okay. Mr. Speaker, we take these things very seriously.

Hon. Member: “Produce yuh pictures”.

Hon. J. John: We take—listen, please. We take these things very seriously. We are working with the Ministry of Public Utilities. They are also very engaged. So maybe in about two weeks’ time he will see them.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. J. John: No, but we are there. You know we are there. Also, why you did not talk about what we have already fixed?

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. J. John: No, why you did not fix them?

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

Landlord Business Surcharge (Implementation Guidelines)

Mr. Speaker: Diego Martin North/East.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]—“Gi dem performance. Gi dem.”

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. C. Imbert (*Diego Martin North/East*): Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, this matter is as follows: Mr. Speaker, many of the supporters of the Members on that side are affected by this, so, I would ask them to settle down. This one is the need for the Government to provide clear and unambiguous guidance on the implementation of the Landlord Business Surcharge. And as I indicated, this does not just affect PNM supporters; it affects UNC supporters as well. In fact, I dare say, there may very well be an equal distribution of rental properties owned by PNM supporters, as owned by UNC supporters, or even more owned by UNC supporters.

So I would ask you Mr. Speaker, to ask them to settle down. Now, the Landlord Business Surcharge was enacted into law in the Finance Act—

Hon. Members: [*Continuous interruption*]

Mr. C. Imbert: “Mr. Speaker, ah doh know who making noise but ask all ah dem to—[*Makes hand gesture*].”

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker: I think both sides are equally guilty, but let us get some silence. Come on, let us move on.

Mr. C. Imbert: The Landlord Business Surcharge was enacted into law by the Finance Act No. 14 of 2025. Now in this Act:

a “‘landlord’ means any person who is in receipt of rents and includes an agent of such person;”

The “‘premises’” are defined as:

“‘premises of every description and includes buildings and structures whether or not attached to the soil together with the curtilage thereof;”

Landlord Business Surcharge
(Implementation Guidelines)
Mr. C. Imbert (cont'd)

“‘Rent’ includes all income received by a landlord and declared as rent on the approved form...”

Now, Mr. Speaker, the first problem—and this is a question that has been asked of me, has been asked in the public domain, and has been asked by many, many landlords, Mr. Speaker. And let me declare I have an interest in landlord properties before the Members on the other side start to jump up and down. And Mr. Speaker, one of the questions that has been asked that has not been answered—because one of the biggest problem is that if you go to the Ministry of Finance, Board of Inland Revenue website, you are not going to see any instructions with respect to this Landlord Business Surcharge, other than download the form, fill it out, and drop it in.

There is a need for guidance, and there is a need for instructions. One of the first questions that needs to be answered is: If you are the owner of multiple rental properties, do you have to register each property individually and pay the \$2,500 registration fee for each one? I have lost count of a number of persons who have asked me that question. And there is no information in the public domain, there is no information on the Ministry of Finance website, and there is no information on the Board of Inland Revenue website to answer that question. So I would like the Minister to answer that. If you own multiple properties, do you have to do multiple registrations and pay the \$2,500 registration fee for each one? That is the first ambiguity that needs to be resolved.

The second issue that needs to be resolved is a statement made by the Minister in response to questions from the public, and that is whether this is a tax upon a tax. Is it a double tax? And I have in my possession a media release from

the Ministry of Finance, February the 6th, 2026. And at the end of it, these are the following words:

“Minister Tancoo noted the Landlord Business Surcharge is now creditable to your final annual tax liability, and as a result, is not a double tax.”

I am afraid that many attorneys have come to me on this matter; they have questioned it, and they have said that it is simply incorrect. And that flows from a particular wording in the Income Tax Act, Mr. Speaker. And in the Income Tax Act, there is an allowance on your chargeable income for rates and taxes on real estate.

Now, just for the benefit of Members opposite—because these are the questions people are asking, including senior attorneys—what is real estate? Real estate is defined as land and any permanent, immovable improvements attached to it. What is a tax on real estate? A tax or rate on real estate is an ad valorem tax based on value levied by a government authority—property tax, for example.

So, the allowance in the Income Tax Act that can be claimed against chargeable income is on a tax or rate on real estate, which is on property. However, the Landlord Business Surcharge is on rental income, not property. And therefore, that section in the Inland Income Tax Act cannot be used to claim an allowance in terms of the Landlord Business Surcharge.

Many attorneys have told me this, and I agree with them. Because a tax on real estate is not a tax on rental income. That needs to be fixed. That ambiguity needs to be corrected in the law. And there are many other ambiguities that need to be corrected in the law. Let me speak to another one. There is a section in the

Landlord Business Surcharge
(Implementation Guidelines)
Mr. C. Imbert (cont'd)

law that refers to the termination of a rental agreement between a landlord and a tenant, and it reads as follows, Mr. Speaker. It says that:

“Registration under this Act terminates if—

- (a) the landlord and the tenant agree to terminate the tenancy and the landlord so notifies the Board;”

But in any rental agreement, Mr. Speaker—I have no idea whether you have a rental property or not, but I am sure as a very experienced lawyer, you have from, time to time, seen tenancy agreements. In any tenancy agreement, the tenancy comes to an end; it naturally expires, and it naturally terminates at the end of the rental period. So, you may rent somebody a property for a year, and at the end of the year, it terminates. So, this needs to be clarified as well. Is it that when you have an agreement with somebody to rent them a property for two years, three years, one year, as the case may be, or a month, and it comes to an end—it terminates—does this mean you have to go and re-register? That has to be fixed, Mr. Speaker.

The other problem is that we are supposed to be in the digital age. I watched a press conference the other day. It was the Minister of Homeland Security and other officials about the launch of the new immigration online system. And I heard a lot of talk about this administration bringing us into the digital age. But what is going on with this landlord tax? You have to go on the website, download a form, print it, fill it out, then drop it in a drop box at the Inland Revenue, and you are told that you cannot drop it off at any district revenue office. You can only drop it off at the Port of Spain regional office, the San Fernando regional office, the Tunapuna regional office, and the Tobago regional office. And based on the information I have from the last census done, there are about 77,000 rental properties in Trinidad

Landlord Business Surcharge
(Implementation Guidelines)
Mr. C. Imbert (cont'd)

and Tobago, Mr. Speaker. They only have four locations. Why are you restricting it? Why are you saying you cannot drop it off at a district revenue office?

With respect to the property tax, it took us a long time to create a digital online registration system for property tax. Why is the Government rushing this thing? Why, if you know that thousands of people are going to converge on these four offices, rush in there with their forms, at the last minute—as a country, this is what we do—why have you not created an online registration system? So, these are the questions people are asking. These are very serious questions, Mr. Speaker, and there are many more ambiguities; many more ambiguities in this law that need to be corrected.

What about the fact that somebody pays you for rent in January that was due in December? What about the fact that the registration date has been extended to May, but the law states that you have to pay the tax within one month of the end of March? So, how can you be required to pay tax one month after the end of March, but the registration is extended to the 30th of May? These are issues that need to be sorted out. If the registration is on the 30th of May, what happens on the 30th of May? You send in your form, you line up down by Wrightson Road, or you send somebody to go and line up for hours to drop it in the drop box, and then the Ministry of Finance, the BIR, has to process all of these forms. This needs to be dealt with, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Finance and Minister in the Ministry of Planning, Economic Affairs and Development (Hon. Davendranath Tancoo): Thank you very

Landlord Business Surcharge
 (Implementation Guidelines)
 Hon. D. Tancoo (cont'd)

much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is now 11.31 p.m. It troubles me greatly to be here at this hour to have to respond to the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East in his theatrical manner, presenting information that he says is desperately needed by his friends and colleagues. I am appreciative that the Member started—in fact, he did not start, but at some point, he indicated his own interest as a landlord. I think he also indicated unwillingly, his own ignorance of the law and the legislation and how the law works. Mr. Speaker, in his wind-up in his last few sentences, the Member indicated that, “Why is the UNC—why is this Government rushing this?” “Why are they rushing this?” Mr. Speaker, I think he is mixing up himself. Because that Member, when he was on this side, was responsible for the same property tax that he is talking about now, where he attempted to rush it through, and a matter had to be taken to court in which it was found that his actions were illegal and unconstitutional.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: That is the Member opposite, who now comes today, having breached the law then, having had to be corrected—

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 48(6).

Hon. D. Tancoo: I am now about to answer.

Mr. C. Imbert: Standing Order 48(6).

Hon. D. Tancoo: But it is you who raised the matter. It is you who raised the matter.

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, there is no action of mine found to be unconstitutional. I have never been found to be unconstitutional.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Is this a decision you are referring to, Minister?

Landlord Business Surcharge
(Implementation Guidelines)
Hon. D. Tancoo (cont'd)

Hon. Member: Unconstitutional.

Hon. Member: “He doh kno what he referring to.”

Hon. D. Tancoo: I will withdraw. I will withdraw. It was found that the actions taken—I believe it was the Court of Appeal.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: “Nah, not just de Auditor General.” The actions taken with regard to the attempt by the Member opposite and the government of the PNM—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: Can I?

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]—unlawful.

Hon. D. Tancoo: Can I? With specific regard to the property tax—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo:—the ruling of the court was in 2022, and it was found that your actions were wrong in law.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: “Take it how yuh want tuh take it”. How I want you to take it, Sir, is given your—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, 48(6).

Hon. D. Tancoo: Please, do not interrupt my—

Mr. Imbert: I was not a defendant in that matter. You cannot find my actions wrong if I am not a subject of the action.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Let us just move on.

Hon. D. Tancoo: Mr. Speaker, if I may be allowed to respond to the issues you raised in your presentation.

Landlord Business Surcharge
(Implementation Guidelines)
Hon. D. Tancoo (cont'd)

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: I am doing that right now. What I want to tell you, Sir, is this is not the PNM here. We take our time. We take actions based on consensus.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Tancoo: We take actions based on legal precedent and legal discussions, Mr. Speaker, and as a result of that, I would not be goaded and misled by that Member opposite to step outside of my line.

11.35 p.m.

It is ironic that the very same Member stood up here today to talk about the Motion that basically says that there is a need for more information about the implementation and then stood up here, ironically, and started off by reading out the amount of information that is already in the public domain. He himself referred to the landlord registration form and the request for information—the material that is here already. He was complaining that it should have been more digitalized.

Mr. Speaker, the facts of the matter are that there is a lot still to be done. The extension of the period for registration has been put in the public domain. The indications and the deadlines have already been put in the public domain. All other details are currently being engaged at the Cabinet level and when it is finished at that level, it will be brought here to this Parliament, where you will have the opportunity to raise your concerns at that point. We are not at all inclined—I am not going to be goaded by the Member for San Fernando East. I wish at any point in time the Member for San Fernando East could have entered the debate, and he did not choose to.

Landlord Business Surcharge
(Implementation Guidelines)
Hon. D. Tancoo (cont'd)

Mr. Speaker, all the requests, all the answers that the Member wants will be provided during the debate of the Finance Bill, which he very well knows. But the Member comes at 11.31 to 11.36 to look for a headline at this hour. That is atrocious. Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much for the opportunity.

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

Mr. Speaker: There is one matter of business that I think we need to deal with before I put the question on the adjournment. As we all know, next week the nation celebrates the national holiday of Eid-ul-Fitr. I will now invite Members to bring greetings and short greetings on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr. Princes Town.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Eid-UL-Fitr Greetings

Dr. Aiyana Ali (*Princes Town*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This evening, I am honoured to deliver Eid greetings on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the Prime Minister, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC, to our Parliament, as well as, the citizens of our beautiful nation on this auspicious occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr, which will be celebrated on Friday 20th, March 2026. Mr. Speaker, I am extremely proud to be a young Muslim woman—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. A. Ali:—selected by the hon. Prime Minister and elected by the people to represent the constituency of Princes Town. Having created history as the first hijab-wearing woman to sit as the Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. A. Ali:—it gives me immense pride to speak on behalf of the Government on this sacred occasion that Muslims hold dear to them. Mr. Speaker, as the sacred

Eid-Ul-Fitr Greetings
Dr. A. Ali (cont'd)

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month of Ramadan draws to its blessed conclusion, Muslims throughout Trinidad and Tobago and across the world, prepare to celebrate the joyous and deeply meaningful occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr. It is an occasion marked, not only by celebration but also by introspection, thankfulness and a renewed commitment to the values that uplift humanity.

For the past month, Muslims have observed the Ramadan through fasting from dawn to sunset, through increased prayer, acts of charity and deep spiritual reflection. Mr. Speaker, this period of devotion is not simply about staying away from food and drink. Rather, it is a journey of our inner selves, a time to cultivate discipline, humility, patience, care and compassion for others, particularly those who are dispossessed and who face hardship each day.

Eid-ul-Fitr therefore, represents far more than the end of fasting. It is a celebration of renewed purpose, of personal growth and of gratitude to the Almighty Allah for the strength and guidance granted throughout the holy month. It is a day when families gather, when communities open their doors to one another, when children celebrate with joy and when generosity and charity flow to ensure that even the most vulnerable members of our society can share in the blessings of the day.

Mr. Speaker, one of the most beautiful traditions of Eid is the giving of charity known as Zakat al-Fitr. This ensures that those in need are not forgotten. This tradition reminds us that the well-being of a society is measured and not only by its prosperity, but by how compassionately it cares for those who struggle. It is a powerful reminder that responsibilities extend beyond ourselves, beyond our families and into the broader community.

Eid-UI-Fitr Greetings
Dr. A. Ali (cont'd)

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Mr. Speaker, here in Trinidad and Tobago, we are fortunate to live in a nation defined by its extraordinary diversity. Our country has a vibrant mix of cultures, faiths and traditions. Eid-ul-Fitr like many of the religious observances celebrated throughout the land, reflects the spirit of unity that lies at the heart of our national identity. It reminds us that while our faiths may differ, the values they teach—kindness, generosity, respect and service—are universal. In communities across our nation, during the holy month of Ramadan we witness acts of kindness that transcend religious boundaries. Neighbours share meals, families support charitable efforts and communities come together in solidarity and goodwill. These moments serve as powerful reminders that our strength as a nation ally in our ability to respect and celebrate one another's traditions while standing united as one people.

As Members of this honourable House entrusted with the responsibility of serving the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, there is much that we can learn from the spirit of Ramadan. These values cultivated during the sacred month, discipline, empathy, fairness and compassion are precisely the values that must guide us in our work as public servants.

Mr. Speaker, the practice of fasting instils patience and humility within us, and has the effect of making us a people who are righteous as we are reminded in the words of the Almighty in the *Holy Quran*:

O you who believe fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you that you may attain righteousness. Chap. 2 verse 183.

Mr. Speaker, fasting reminds us of the struggles faced by those who live with scarcity and hardship. It encourages us to approach our duties with a greater understanding and with sincere commitment to improving the lives of those we

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represent. In this way, the lessons of Ramadan extend far beyond the individual and speak directly to the responsibilities we hold as Members of this honourable House.

For the people of Princes Town and for the communities throughout Trinidad and Tobago, Eid-ul-Fitr is a cherished time. Masjids are filled with worshippers offering prayers of gratitude. Homes are filled with the warmth of family and friendship and communities gather in celebration of faith, resilience and hope. Mr. Speaker, I must say that this year this was seen perhaps more than ever before, as Members of this Government visited various masjids throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. A. Ali: Time was spent with the Members of various Jamaats throughout and we attended to break the fast, which we call Iftar. This is leadership, Mr. Speaker. As our Prime Minister, has always advocated, that as Members of Parliament, we must meet, interact and listen to the people we represent. Ramadan provided the ideal opportunity for this to happen. But, Mr. Speaker, perhaps most importantly Eid, as a time of deep renewal, a moment to carry forward the lessons of Ramadan into the months ahead. It is an opportunity for each of us to recommit ourselves to kindness, to justice, to generosity and the shared responsibility we hold in building a stronger and more compassionate society.

Mr. Speaker, as we acknowledge this special occasion within this honourable House, on behalf of our Government led by the hon. Prime Minister, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, I wish to extend sincere Eid greetings to the Muslim community of Trinidad and Tobago. May this Eid bring peace to our hearts, harmony to our homes, and blessings to our families. May it inspire continued acts

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of compassion and unity within our communities and may it strengthen the bonds that hold our nation together. Eid Mubarak, happy Eid-ul-Fitr, thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Arima.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. Penelope Beckles (Arima): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Ramadan Mubarak to Members of the Muslim community of Trinidad and Tobago on behalf of the entire Opposition of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, once the Muslim community undertakes the sighting of the crescent moon at sunset on Thursday the 19th, of March 2026 which marks the end of the 29th fasting day in the holy month of Ramadan, the commencement of the month of Shawwal and the observance of Eid-ul-Fitr will be formally determined. Should the moon be sighted on that evening Eid-ul-Fitr will be observed on Friday the 20th, of March, 2026. However, should the moon not be cited, Ramadan will complete 30 days of fasting and Eid-ul-Fitr will instead be observed on Saturday the 21st, of March 2026.

Eid-ul-Fitr, the festival of breaking the fast, marks a joyful culmination of the sacred month of Ramadan, a period devoted to fasting, prayer, charity and deep spiritual reflection and through self-sacrifice, the attainment of closeness to the Lord and a deeper connection to fellow humanity. After a month of sacrifice and devotion, this day stands as a celebration of gratitude to Almighty Allah for the privilege to observe this holy month laden with blessings and gifts from Him through fasting. Hence the attainment of spiritual and mental strength, discipline and faith that carried the faithful through the observance of Shawwal. As in other parts of the world, Eid-ul-Fitr in Trinidad and Tobago, is marked with great

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sadness and jubilation. Sadness that the blessed month of the mercies of Ramadan has ended, and great happiness that the fast has been completed, and Insha'Allah, God willing, the fast would have been accepted.

Throughout Ramadan, Muslims have embraced the noble call of the *Holy Quran* to cultivate righteousness, patience, humility and compassion. As Almighty Allah reminds believers in the Holy Quran:

Fasting has been prescribed to you, as it has been to those before you, so that you may earn piety.

From the quiet moments of prayer, to the generosity extended, to the vulnerable through acts of charity and Zakat, the month has served as a powerful reminder of the values that elevate both the individual and society. Eid-ul-Fitr therefore, represents not only the completion of fasting but also the renewal of the believer's commitment to a life guided by faith, kindness and service to others. It is a moment when hearts are filled with gratitude and communities gather, in unity to give thanks for the mercy and forgiveness bestowed during Ramadan.

Across Trinidad and Tobago, families will gather for the special Eid prayer, share meals with loved ones and extend generosity to those who need Zakat-al-Fitr and other acts of charity. These traditions reflect the enduring spirit of Eid, one of fellowship, compassion and gratitude. The morning of the first day begins with an early meal, followed by a special charity in the form of money, food or produce which is given to the needy or to Islamic organizations.

Our nation has been strengthened by its rich diversity of faiths, cultures and traditions. The observance of Eid-ul-Fitr reminds us of the enduring importance of mutual respect and understanding, values that continue to shape Trinidad and Tobago in a society where freedom of worship and cultural expression flourish.

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During this holy period, we remember the faithful who face hardships and conflict, particularly in Sudan and Palestine. Further, we remember those who have been affected in the Middle East. We pray for relief for the suffering, comfort for the grieving and lasting peace in those lands and throughout the world.

11.50p.m.

As we celebrate this blessed occasion, may the spiritual lessons of Ramadan continue to inspire us to show greater compassion to one another, to strengthen our communities, and to work together for a more just, caring and united nation. As the holy month of Ramadan comes to a close, we recognize the deep spiritual devotion, sacrifice, discipline and reflection that have marked this sacred period.

Eid ul-Fitr is a time of gratitude to Allah of renewal and of joyful celebration of family, friends and community, with the hope and intention towards continuing this growth throughout the year ahead until the next Ramadan. The values that define this holy occasion: faith, compassion, charity, humility, and service to others, are values that can continue to guide us as a people and strengthen our nation.

In these challenging times, may Eid remind us all of the power of unity, understanding and shared humanity. Trinidad and Tobago is richer because of the enduring contribution of our Muslim brothers and sisters to our national life, and today we join in recognizing and celebrating this important and sacred observance. May this Eid bring peace to everyone, comfort those in need, and renew hope for our beloved nation.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Opposition, I extend best wishes to all observing this sacred celebration. May your prayers be accepted, your charity rewarded, and your homes be filled with peace, happiness and the blessings of

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Almighty Allah. To the Muslim community of Trinidad and Tobago, and to the Muslims across the world celebrating the blessed festival of Eid-UI-Fitr, we in the Opposition extend warm greetings and heartfelt wishes for peace, joy, and continued blessings of Almighty Allah upon you and your families. Eid Mubarak. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I too should like to join in expressing heartfelt wishes to the Islamic community, and all citizens of Trinidad Tobago, as we journey onwards to the observance of Eid-UI-Fitr. I wish to preface my remarks with a quote from an inspirational Islamic poet:

The crescent moon has appeared, bringing tidings of joy,
after a month of devotion, where the soul has found its employ
The hearts that fasted are now light and free,
bathed in the light of divine decree...

Thirty days of reflection, sacrifice, and spiritual discipline during the holy month of Ramadan, our Muslim brothers and sisters will break their fast to celebrate a hard-won victory of the spirit over the physical self. It is my distinct honour to extend my warmest greetings to the Muslim community. March 20th will be more than just the conclusion to fasting, it is a profound celebration of community, charity, togetherness, renewal and revitalization. Eid serves as a powerful reminder of the values that in part bind us together as a society, regardless of faith, geographical location, race, or otherwise.

We share the virtue of gratitude as we acknowledge the blessings of life and sustenance. We share the virtue of generosity through the medium of Zakat al-Fitr, ensuring that no member of our community goes hungry or remains forgotten

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during this time of plenty. We share the virtue of unity, standing side by side in prayer and celebration, reinforcing the social fabric that makes our nation strong. We also share equality and the liberty of mind and spirit.

In a world that often moves too fast, the discipline of Ramadan teaches us the beauty of patience and the necessity of empathy for those less fortunate. As we traverse into the other quarters of this year, let us carry the essence of mindfulness into our public discourse and our private lives. It teaches us that hunger and deprivation are not abstract concepts to be discussed in polite drawing rooms. It brings to us the experiential foundation of hunger and deprivation. As Bob Marley says:

“He who feels it, knows it...”

On March 20th, as the festive prayers conclude and the celebrations begin, let us all take a moment to appreciate the diversity that defines our country. Our strength lies in our ability to celebrate and reflect on one another’s traditions, and to find common ground in our shared humanity, whilst holding steadfast to our own faiths and our own beliefs.

To every family gathering for a meal, to every child receiving a gift, and to every individual offering a prayer for peace, may I wish you Eid Mubarak. May your homes be filled with light, your hearts with contentment, and your year with prosperity.

On behalf of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, and indeed my family and myself, I wish you all, Eid Mubarak.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

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Adjourned at 11.56 p.m.