HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, October 30, 2026

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PAPERS LAID

1. Notification of Her Excellency, the President in respect of the nomination of Mr. Anand Ramesar, Assistant Commissioner of Police for appointment to act in the Office of Deputy Commissioner of Police. [*The Minister of Homeland Security* (*Hon. Roger Alexander*)]
2. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Institute of Marine Affairs for the year ended September 30, 2016. [*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 Institute of Marine Affairs for the year ended September 30, 2017. [*Hon. D. Tancoo*]
4. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Chaguanas Borough Corporation Mayor's Fund for the year ended September 30, 2023. [*Hon. D. Tancoo*]
5. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Chaguanas Borough Corporation Mayor's Fund for the year ended September 30, 2024. [*Hon. D. Tancoo*]

6. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the San Fernando City Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2012. [*Hon. D. Tancoo*]
7. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Committee for the year ended September 30, 2014. [*Hon. D. Tancoo*]
8. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Committee for the year ended September 30, 2015. [*Hon. D. Tancoo*]
9. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the North Central Regional Health Authority 20 for the year ended September 30, 2016. [*Hon. D. Tancoo*]

   Papers 2 to 9 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.
10. Consolidated Financial Statements of the Urban Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited (UDECOTT) for the year ended December 31, 2022. [*Hon. D. Tancoo*]

    Paper 10 to be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.
11. Annual Administrative Report of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development for the fiscal year 2023/2024. [*The Minister of Housing* (*Hon. David Lee*)]
12. Annual Administrative Report of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development for the fiscal year 2024/2025. [*Hon. D. Lee*]
13. Annual Administrative Report of the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago for the fiscal year 2013/2014. [*The Minister of Public Utilities and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister* (*Hon. Barry Padarath*)]

14. Annual Administrative Report of the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago for the fiscal year 2014/2015. [*Hon. B. Padarath*].

15. Annual Administrative Report of the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago for the fiscal year 2015/2016. [*Hon. B. Padarath*].

16. Annual Administrative Report of the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago for the fiscal year 2016/2017. [*Hon. B. Padarath*].

17. Annual Administrative Report of the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago for the fiscal year 2017/2018. [*Hon. B. Padarath*].

18. Annual Administrative Report of the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago for the fiscal year 2018/2019. [*Hon. B. Padarath*].

19. Annual Administrative Report of the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago for the fiscal year 2019/2020. [*Hon. B. Padarath*].

20. Annual Administrative Report of the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago for the fiscal year 2020/2021. [*Hon. B. Padarath*].

21. Administrative Report of the MIC Institute of Technology Limited for the period October 1, 2018 to September 30, 2019. [*Hon. B. Padarath*].

22. Administrative Report of the MIC Institute of Technology Limited for the period October 1, 2024 to September 30, 2025. [*Hon. B. Padarath*].

23. Annual Report of the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus for the year 2018/2019. [*Hon. B. Padarath*].
24. Annual Report of the Fair Trading Commission for the financial year for the ended September 30, 2019. [*Hon. B. Padarath*].
25. Annual Report of the Fair Trading Commission for the financial year for the ended September 30, 2023. [*Hon. B. Padarath*].
26. Administrative Report of National Flour Mills Limited for the fiscal year ended December 31, 2023. [*Hon. B. Padarath*].
27. Annual Administrative Report of Caribbean Airlines for the year ended December 31, 2022. [*Hon. B. Padarath*].
28. Annual Administrative Report of Caribbean Airlines for the year ended December 31, 2023. [*Hon. B. Padarath*].
29. Annual Administrative Report of Caribbean Airlines for the year ended December 31, 2024. [*Hon. B. Padarath*].
30. Annual Administrative Report of Caribbean Airlines for the year ended December 31, 2025. [*Hon. B. Padarath*].
31. Annual Report of the Statutory Authorities Service Commission for the year 2025. [*Hon. B. Padarath*].

URGENT QUESTIONS

Murders in Central Trinidad (Actions to Ensure Safety of Citizens)

Mr. Speaker: Member for Arouca/Lopinot.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Marvin Gonzales (*Arouca/Lopinot*)**:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Homeland Security. In light of the murders in Central Trinidad of a former police officer/attorney and the double murder of two women, what urgent action is being taken to ensure the safety of citizens?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister of Homeland Security.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Homeland Security (Hon. Roger Alexander): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Member for the question. Mr. Speaker, first of all, let me send my condolences to the families of the persons involved in this tragic incident. Mr. Speaker, I am advised by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service that the response to those activities in central includes intelligence-led operations, targeted patrols and investigative efforts to identify those responsible for such heinous crimes. However, Mr. Speaker, for operational reasons, I will not disclose, specifically, what our intentions are. However, Mr. Speaker, as soon as those persons are identified, they will be dealt with in accordance with the law. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister. Minister, in a supplemental question, can you say whether the police have arrested anyone for questioning in relation to these crimes?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister.

Hon. R. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, every lead that the police receives will be followed and will be investigated. Mr. Speaker, at this time, I do not want to inform members of the public whether someone was arrested, because from the time we do that, they start to believe that other persons who may be involved believe that the police are being assisted by that particular individual. So, Mr. Speaker, I want to leave that at this time. All I can say is that the matter continues to be investigated, and we wait on the outcome from law enforcement.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Minister, a follow-up supplemental, these heinous crimes—and we, too, join in our condolences to the families that are affected by these heinous crimes and these homicides.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Young SC: Is the police service, the Central Division, in particular, are they properly staffed and maned or are they facing shortages like some of the other divisions?

Mr. Speaker: Minister, I do not see how that arises as a supplemental to the question which has been asked, and I do not see how it arises as a supplemental to the answer given. So let us move to the next question. Member Arouca/Lopinot.

Increase in Robberies and Home Invasions
(Measures to Combat)

Mr. Marvin Gonzales (*Arouca*/*Lopinot*)**:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Homeland Security. What additional measures are being put in place to combat the reported increase in robberies and home invasions, including robberies of citizens following bank withdrawals?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Homeland Security (Hon. Roger Alexander): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to thank, again, the Member for the question. However, the Member must understand what an increase is. There is no increase in any robberies or home invasions. However, persons continue to seize the opportunity, from time to time, to relieve persons of their valuables. It is also, Mr. Speaker, the emphasis is not just on law enforcement, but law enforcement continues to have conversations with the banking system, the banking that has persons going in the ordinary section of the bank and withdrawing large sums of money—

"Brrrrrrrrrrrrr!" You hear the machine moving about.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. R. Alexander: And you hear the machine moving about, and, as a result of that, Mr. Speaker, it is a total risk—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. R. Alexander: "Yuh geh frightened?" All right, sorry, sorry. But, Mr. Speaker, understanding that this machine, if persons are smart, they are able to calculate exactly how much money someone is receiving to leave the bank. So, I suggest—again, law enforcement is continuing to engage the financial system for the sector to have this rectified. Also, Mr. Speaker, again, the citizens on the whole have a responsibility, and also the business owners. If you tell persons that you are leaving to drop money to the bank, among your staff, you do not know who is loyal to you or not. So, Mr. Speaker, the responsibility is also on the citizen, not just the police, the bank, the citizens, and all other members of the community or society on a whole.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, your two minutes are up. Member for Arouca/Lopinot, first supplemental.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Minister, supplemental question. Minister, have the police put any additional measures in place—I have heard what you have said with respect to what citizens have to do, what business places have to do, but I am asking, as a supplemental, whether the police engaged in any additional activities to ensure that we have a reduction in the reported increases in robberies and other cases in many areas?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister.

Hon. R. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, again, there is no increase.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: However, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of persons who would have committed those offenses before, and they are put before a court now. There are persons who were involved in home invasions, and when they are challenged by the police now, there is a confrontation, and they succumb to their injuries. So, there are no increases, Mr. Speaker. However, Mr. Speaker, both marked and unmarked patrols are being done in the area, and again, Mr. Speaker, we call on the citizenry to play their part. This is a holistic approach, and the Government intends to do everything to protect the citizens in the streets. So, crime is down at this time, Mr. Speaker. We are looking at 46 per cent at this time.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, this has not been seen in the last, as my grandmother would say, donkey years, which is as far back as 2007, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Young SC: Minister, having listened to your response very carefully, and looking at *Hansard* to see how they record your vocals—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Young SC: —you mentioned home invasions, which, of course, are a very serious scourge. How many charges have been laid under the Home Invasion legislation so far?

1.45 p.m.

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

Mr. Young SC: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: Yes, but it must relate to the question. Read the question.

Mr. Young SC: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: No.

Mr. Young SC: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: All right, no. The second one was asked.

Mr. Young SC: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: The Clerk knows it is an illegitimate attempt to get us to a question. Come on, let us move on.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Mr. Speaker: Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. Sorry, Leader of Government Business, sorry. I beg your pardon.

The Minister of Public Utilities and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Barry Padarath): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Chief Whip has advised that questions 14 and 15 have been withdrawn. The Government is prepared to answer question No. 13, and the one question for written notice will also be answered today. So, the Government is prepared to answer all questions.

WRITTEN ANSWER TO QUESTION

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

Can the Minister provide the names of each Attorney, including English Barristers, retained by any arm of the State, including, but not limited to the Commissioner of Police, Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, Minister or the Ministry of Homeland Security, the Attorney General and any other that may have been involved, to:

a) advise and/or appear in any litigation related to the arrest and issuance of Preventive Detention Orders issued by the Minister of Homeland Security on June 27, 2026, in the names of Dominic Hadeed and

b) Genevieve Hadeed and for each Attorney and/ or Barrister; and

c) provide the amount of fees requisitioned to date with the particulars or each?

Awaiting written response.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The following questions stood on the Order Paper in the name of Mr. Hans Des Vignes (Diego Martin West):

Carnival 2026 Prize Money and Allocations (Outstanding Payments)

In light of reports that approximately $9 million in Carnival 2026 prize money and allocations remain outstanding to stakeholders, can the Minister state when all outstanding sums owed to mas makers, bandleaders, pannists and other cultural practitioners will be paid?

Shortage of Medical Testing Supplies Under NCRHA (Details of)

With respect to reports of a critical shortage of basic medical testing supplies across health facilities under the North Central Regional Health Authority (NCRHA), as at September 1, 2026, can the Minister state:

a) whether there is current or partial shortage of urinalysis test strips at primary health centres and hospitals under the NCRHA; and

b) if the answer to part (a) is in the affirmative, what alternative diagnostic measures are being implemented to ensure that diabetic, prenatal, emergency and kidney-care patients requiring such testing are not clinically disadvantaged or forced to seek private testing?

Questions, by leave, withdrawn.

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

Fuel Subsidies November 1, 2025 to August 31, 2026
(Costs Incurred by Government))

13. Mr. Stuart Young SC (*Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West*) asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries: Would the Minister advise what costs have been incurred by the Government, for the period November 1, 2025, to August 31, 2026, in subsidizing each of the following fuels:

a) diesel;

b) super gasoline; and

c) premium gasoline?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister.

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Mr. Speaker, the Member, of course, raised some of these matters and related matters some time ago in our business before the House. It is question No. 13. The Government incurred approximately TTD 1.1 billion in costs associated with the subsidy of diesel, super gasoline, and premium gasoline for the period November 1, 2025, to August 31, 2026. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Young SC: I understand that there may be some difficulty on the other side, but the question is very, very clear. It breaks it down, subsidizing each of the following fuels:

a) diesel.

b) super gasoline; and

c) premium gasoline.

So, may I ask the Minister to please provide the amount of subsidy for diesel separately, super gasoline separately, and premium gasoline for the period 1st of November 2025 to the 31st of August 2026. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are just getting the figures, thank you. For the period 1st of November 2025 to 31st of August 2026, premium $8,536,551.04; super gasoline, $283,467,985.07; diesel, $849,290,436.65.

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

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much. Minister, for the answer to the premium gasoline, I think you said $8,000. What is the correct—would you please just give the correct figure?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: It is $8,536,551.04.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS.

United States Embargo against Cuba (Trinidad and Tobago's Position)

Mr. Speaker: Member for Tabaquite, the hon. Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs.

The Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs (Hon. Sean Sobers): Mr. Speaker, the Cabinet has authorized me to make the following statement on Trinidad and Tobago's position on the United Nations General Assembly Resolution relating to the United States embargo against Cuba.

On Wednesday, 28th of October 2026, Trinidad and Tobago joined over 45 countries worldwide that chose not to support an annual resolution sponsored by the Government of Cuba relating to US sanctions on that country. This year's support for the Cuban resolution has dropped to its lowest level. When the United Nations General Assembly first voted on this matter in 1992, three countries opposed it. As I indicated this year, over 45 countries chose not to support the Resolution.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Sobers: The countries in the Western Hemisphere, which chose not to

support the Resolution by voting no, were Trinidad and Tobago, Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Paraguay. Those who chose to abstain were Chile, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, and Peru. Those who chose to absent themselves were Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Venezuela, and St. Lucia. In other words, Mr. Speaker, more than half of the CARICOM members within the region chose not to support the Cuban Resolution.

Before the Cuban revolution, Cuba possessed one of the largest and most prosperous economies in Latin America. It enjoyed Latin America's highest per capita consumption of meats, fruits, and vegetables, along with high levels of ownership of cars, telephones, and radios. Several decades later, the failed economic policies of socialism under a dictatorship are responsible for the hardships and suffering faced by the Cuban people. For those who are not aware, this annual vote in the United Nations is non-binding. UN resolutions do not, I repeat, UN resolutions do not have the legal force to compel the United States to lift its sanctions. Only the United States Congress has the constitutional authority to end sanctions on another country.

Mr. Speaker, since coming into office in April of 2025, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has undertaken a comprehensive review of this country's foreign policy to ensure it delivers on making Trinidad and Tobago stronger, safer, and more prosperous. In respect of Cuba, our vote was not against the Cuban people. I repeat, for complete pellucidity, in respect of Cuba, our vote was not against the Cuban people. Our vote, rather, was for the Cuban people, and our position on this matter was clearly telegraphed by the hon. Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar, of Senior Counsel, MP, when she had the courage to categorically call for change in Cuba during her address—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Sobers:—at the 50th Regular Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of CARICOM in St. Kitts and Nevis in February of this year. The ethos of our position is based on the Government of Trinidad and Tobago's firm and unwavering commitment to democracy, freedom, and the fundamental rights and dignity of all people.

The hon. Prime Minister has consistently stated that it is inconsistent to demand free and fair elections, multi-party systems, and political freedoms in our own countries while remaining silent when those same rights are denied to the Cuban people. We cannot demand democracy, free and fair elections, freedom of expression, and political rights for ourselves while remaining silent when those same freedoms are denied to the Cuban people.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Sobers: Our position is against military dictatorship and supportive of the Cuban people's right to democratically elect a government of their choice.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Sobers: Mr. Speaker, it is not surprising, I repeat, it is not surprising that those on the other side believe that advancing the interests of the Cuban people must be based on supporting the diplomatic initiatives of a dictatorship. They seem attracted to the notion that power should be held and transferred without free and fair party and national elections. In fact, that is their track record.

Nevertheless, true solidarity is not silence. True solidarity is standing with the Cuban people in their demand for political reform, democratic rights, and freedoms, and for a future where Cuba's prosperity depends on the freedom of its people, not on the preservation of a dictatorship. Trinidad and Tobago will continue to advocate in CARICOM, in the United Nations, and in all international

fora for a Cuba that is free, democratic, and prosperous for all Cubans. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago stands for democracy, freedom, human dignity, and the right of every citizen—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Sobers:—including the people of Cuba, to freely determine their own political future. May God bless the people of Cuba, and may God continue to bless the people who live within the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Arouca/Lopinot. The one question for elucidation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Marvin Gonzales (*Arouca/Lopinot***):** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Minister, having regard to the fact that the Prime Minister, when she was Prime Minister between the period 2010 and 2015, pledged her support to the Cuban Government and people. What has suddenly changed?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister?

Hon. S. Sobers: Yeah, thank you for your question, Member. Member, the Prime Minister has been on record on a number of occasions indicating that we must constantly and consistently review our foreign policy positions in an ever dynamic, changing world.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Sobers: It is based upon that and looking at the position that the Cuban people are currently facing with a government that is being ruled in an autocratic manner, that this is Trinidad and Tobago's position in relation to the same. Things have to change.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Trinidad and Tobago's Energy Sector Performance
(Update on)

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to make a statement. Today, I am authorized by the Cabinet of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago to make the following statement during this wonderful Divali period, interrupted just a few minutes ago by what appeared to be a poorly attended funeral procession—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:—where I believe my friends opposite could not even muster their own party to support a march.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, they brought friends, family, and daddy and failed.

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

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: But let me get to the good news, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to provide an update to this honourable House and to the public on Trinidad and Tobago's performance in the energy sector in the recent past. The growth of the energy industry remains subject to changing market dynamics and increasing competition for investment. Notwithstanding many factors outside of our control, Trinidad and Tobago is demonstrating that our energy sector remains resilient, attractive to investors, and full of opportunity. The achievements which we will outline today represent tangible progress of Government's efforts to

revitalize the energy sector and strengthen production.

One of the significant developments recently has been the advancement of the Manatee Project, pursued by Shell. In 2026, Trinidad and Tobago witnessed the successful loadout and installation of the Manatee topside and jacket. We want to acknowledge the work of TOFCO and local employees' skilled labour for this performance. The Manatee Project is expected to become a significant contributor to our national gas supply, with peak production of the facility expected at approximately 600 million standard cubic feet per day. When combined with Loran, peak production of approximately 900 million standard cubic feet per day is expected, Mr. Speaker.

The Government remains actively engaged with Shell as we progress agreements needed for the Loran I project, which targets 1.7 trillion cubic feet of natural gas for the commercialization within Trinidad and Tobago. The Ministry is progressing the extraterritorial measurement agreement. May I add, we are pursuing that agreement with a complete and perfect English translation—

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

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:—required for the measurement of the gas. And we expect to engage with the Republic of Venezuela very soon, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: I am happy to indicate that with the work of the Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs, we expect to engage with the Venezuelan authorities very shortly to sign off on this major agreement. So, while we celebrate the progress of Manatee, we recognize the other major offshore production sites.

2.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, that negotiation agreement signals a clear intention on the part of this Government to engage with Venezuela, and very soon, we will be across

there to say, "*Hola*".

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, in October 2026, momentum in the energy sector continued as we successfully completed the load-out of the Coconut Jacket. This represents the second major offshore jacket dispatched from the local facility. The Coconut project being advanced by the joint venture between OEG Resources and BPTT is another demonstration of the capacity of our local industry to support complex offshore developments. This project will strengthen natural gas supply to sustain operations of our petrochemical and downstream sectors.

Mr. Speaker, following successful negotiations by the NGC, they have completed those negotiations for 100 per cent of EOG's share of the gas from the Coconut field. First gas from Coconut is expected in 2027, with peak production of approximately 300million standard cubic feet per day that is expected. Mr. Speaker, these two projects demonstrate the significant investment and project execution taking place. In October2026, Trinidad and Tobago's energy sector recorded yet another milestone as BP announced that its Juniper facility achieved a record daily production rate of 700million standard cubic feet of natural gas per day.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: This represents the highest daily production rate achieved by Juniper since it commenced operations in 2017. This is a significant accomplishment, particularly in the mature gas province. It is important to note, Mr. Speaker, that the work of the People's Partnership Administration in 2010/2015 under the leadership of Prime Minister, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC, provided the incentives and framework necessary to secure the investment back then by BPTT in the Juniper facility, a facility which is setting

records today in 2026. This is a big achievement, Mr. Speaker, and it all followed from decisions taken by the People's Partnership in 2010/2015.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Another area of progress, Mr Speaker, is the renewed interest in exploration within Trinidad and Tobago deepwater acreage. The return of ExxonMobil to Trinidad and Tobago and the company's activities in the ultra-deepwater Block TTUD-1 represent a significant development in our efforts to expand production.

Mr Speaker, the Government remains in close communication with ExxonMobil and all the related energy stakeholders. We will continue to provide updates on this exciting project. Mr Speaker, we recognize that failure to explore today can mean lost opportunities for tomorrow. Our strategy is to create the conditions for responsible investment, and we are working closely with our partners.

Recent developments in the energy sector are not confined to offshore operations, as Touchstone Exploration continues to advance its development and production activities across the WD-4—Western District 4—Ortoire and Central Blocks. In September 2026, the company announced the completion of two drilling locations in the WD-4 Block and the mobilization of a drilling rig for a two-well drilling programme. Mr Speaker, we are advancing those projects with Touchstone. Further, the Government continues to actively progress on the Dragon project, which is being executed by Shell and NGC.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: This project—named after the Member here, from Caroni Central—has gained momentum in recent past, with development-related activities underway. Very recently, the NGC, as part of its equity share in the project, has

contributed sums required for the execution of the project. First gas is expected in 2028 at a peak rate of 415 million standard cubic feet per day. This project targets reserves of 1.2 trillion cubic feet of gas. Mr Speaker, outside of the upstream sector, other projects are underway in the energy and mineral sectors. You will note that quite recently the Prime Minister handed over in Tobago a mining licence and processing licence to Studley Park Enterprise Ltd.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: The issuance of these licences is an important step towards the sustainable commercial development of Tobago's mineral resources. Mr Speaker, the performance of the NGC has been breathtaking. On October 25, 2026, NGC announced a record financial performance for the first half of 2026. For the six months ended June 30th, NGC recorded profits of TT $2.2 billion. When this is compared to the same period in 2024, it is an increase of 174 per cent compared to 2024, the corresponding period.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr Speaker, another important dimension is our performance through exports of petroleum products. We have continued engagement with international markets, particularly the United States. The latest available trade figures, when analyzed on a quarterly basis, demonstrate that in the second quarter of 2026, Trinidad and Tobago recorded its highest level of exports of crude oil and petroleum products to the United States since the third quarter of 2021. This reinforces the strategic importance of the US markets to our petroleum industry. Mr Speaker, these developments I outlined today tell an important story. We have seen major offshore projects advancing towards completion. Mr Speaker, I would like to add that, in parallel with the developments in Loran, NGC is in active and advanced discussions with Shell and XRG to execute arrangements to

acquire a percentage of the 6 trillion cubic feet of gas to fulfil NGC's domestic petrochemical and LNG supply obligations. Mr Speaker, these achievements translate into sustainable economic benefits for the people. This means more jobs for our citizens, and more opportunities for local contractors and service providers. Mr Speaker, I can go on and on and on, but time will not permit. So Mr Speaker, I rise today to tell you and the national community that we are on track to turn around the economy via the energy sector.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: And we would like to record, Mr. Speaker, the enormous contribution of the state sector under the direction and guidance of the hon. Prime Minister, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, SC. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Not one question. What could you ask?

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. According to Standing Order 24(4), and having sat here and listened very patiently, I want to applaud the PNM for all of that work done—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC:—and ask the poor Minister the following question: Minister, the unprecedented—meaning, it has never, never, never been done before—exploration and production licence which also includes the export of natural gas which was signed with the Government of Venezuela in December 2020—

Mr. Speaker: Member—Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, Standing Order 24(4):

"The Speaker may permit one (1) question for the purpose…"—

Mr. S. Young SC: That is the question there.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, but there is another part of the Standing Order:

"Such question shall not exceed fifteen (15) seconds in length, must be asked without argument or opinion, and shall not address more than one matter of general Government policy."

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Thank you.

Mr. S. Young SC: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: The 15 seconds are up.

Mr. Young SC: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: No, no, no. Have a seat, Minister—15 seconds up. Hon. Minister of Public Utilities.

Mr. Young SC: Dragon gas deal signed by the PNM.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Workers of T&T
(Wage Negotiations Settlement)

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 am authorized by Cabinet to make the following statement: Today I am pleased to announce another significant victory for the workers of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, earlier today, I saw a placard, and it read, "Workers are on 2013 salaries in 2026". Mr. Speaker, the last time thousands of public servants received increases in salaries was under the People's Partnership, UNC-led Government led by the hon. Member for Siparia, Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, it is in light of that, bit by bit—to borrow the words of Moruga/Tableland—bit by bit we are fixing it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Prior to the General Election 2025, and thereafter, this administration never telegraphed to the population that on day one, all matters relating to industrial matters will be settled. But what we did give was the commitment that during our tenure, we will address this.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, I stand today to deliver this statement against the backdrop that over 136 wage negotiations were settled during the period 2010 to 2015 under the Member for Siparia, giving her commitment to public servants then, but demonstrating through her actions, promise made, promise kept, and now, in her second tenure, more to come.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, PowerGen and Oil Field Workers Trade Union (OWTU) have reached a historic $66.1million wage settlement, bringing closure to nine and a half years of outstanding wage negotiations. Mr. Speaker, nine and a half years. Nine and a half years of unresolved negotiations under the former PNM administration. But today, through meaningful dialogue and decisive action, we have delivered a settlement that puts workers first. The agreement covers the outstanding bargaining period—listen to this one, Mr. Speaker—the outstanding bargaining periods 2016 to '17, and 2018 to 2020 when our friends opposite were in government and sat on their hands, delivering absolutely nothing to workers at PowerGen.

Mr. Speaker, providing a 9per cent cumulative wage increase over five years, representing this increase. This benefits approximately 150 eligible workers with outstanding payments scheduled to be made by the 15th of December,2026—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath:—which means more workers will be going home with money

in their pockets under Kamla Persad-Bissessar administration for Christmas 2026. Mr. Speaker, that is $66.1million in compensation being settled for workers who have waited far too long. Bit by bit, we are fixing it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, what makes this achievement even more significant is that the matter was resolved through bilateral negotiations rather than a ruling, compared to what has happened with my friend opposite in the Industrial Court. Where there was deadlock, we delivered dialogue. Where there was uncertainty, we delivered results. Just yesterday, the hon. Prime Minister, the Member for Siparia publicly challenged trade union leaders to put their members' interests above political considerations. Today, we are putting the people first.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, they deserve fair compensation and tangible results, and that is precisely what this Government is delivering. Mr. Speaker, earlier this month in the budget debate, I announced where we have settled COLA and outstanding settlements for hundreds of T&TEC workers. Today, that is a continuation of that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: I would like to thank the Member for La Brea, the Minister in the Ministry, for leading the charge in terms of guiding the process and assisting T&TEC and PowerGen, alongside the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla for their leadership in the Ministry of Public Utilities on these particular matters.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, I commend PowerGen's management and leadership of the OWTU for their maturity, cooperation and commitment to bringing this matter to a successful conclusion. I also wish to briefly address the

recent electricity interruptions experienced across several communities in Trinidad. These disruptions resulted from unplanned generator trips and independent power producing facilities. I recognize the inconvenience to citizens and businesses and wish to assure the national community that T&TEC is working closely with TGU and other power producers in actively implementing measures to restore generating capacity and stabilize the electricity supply.

Mr. Speaker, this has been as a result of poor maintenance of several of the power purchase companies over the last nine and a half years under my colleagues opposite. Restoration works are progressing, enhanced monitoring is in place, and technical investigations are being undertaken to identify the causes and minimize the risk of recurrence. Our commitment is not simply to restore supply, but to strengthen the reliability and resilience of our electricity system. Mr. Speaker, today these representative bodies who have negotiated and bargained through OWTU, for PowerGen and T&TEC workers did not rush days before a general election to accept zero, two and four per cent. Today they receive their just due under a Kamla Persad-Bissessar-led administration.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, there is no fake outrage when a UNC Government is in power—with some of the unions. We cannot say that for all of the unions—and therefore, we stand in solidarity with our partners in OWTU who today have delivered just what the workers of PowerGen and T&TEC deserved, and not those who sought to prop an incompetent PNM administration in 2025, days before a general election. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

2.15 p.m.

MUNICIPAL CORPORATIONS (AMDT.) BILL, 2026

Senate Amendments

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Hon. Khadijah Ameen): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Be it resolved that the Senate Amendments to the Municipal Corporations (Amdt.) Bill, 2026 listed in Appendix III be now considered.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 10.

Senate amendment read as follows:

In paragraph (c), in the proposed –

(a) subsection (1C), delete the words "The Mayor", and substitute the words "Notwithstanding section 62(2), the Mayor"; and

(b) subsection (1D), delete the words "If the", and substitute the words "Notwithstanding section 62(3), if the".

Ms. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House agree with the Senate in the amendments to clause 10 of the Municipal Corporations (Amdt.) Bill, 2026. Mr. Speaker, clause 10 inserts a new subsection (1A) to (1E) into section 27 of the Municipal Corporations Act. The new subsection (1C) requires the Mayor, within seven days of receiving the certified notice of resignation or expulsion from the

CEO, to convene a special meeting of the Council at which the notice is laid and the office declared vacant.

Mr. Speaker, new subsection (1D) provides that if the special meeting is not held within the seven days, the office is deemed vacant on the expiry of that period. That, Mr. Speaker, is to ensure that even if the public officer fails in their duty, even if the meeting fails to convene, the law is still upheld and democracy will be preserved. So, this amendment really tightens upon preserving the intention of that clause. Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: Just to get clarity, is the hon. Minister dealing with them one by one, or all?

Mr. Speaker: Well, I was wondering whether, for convenience, we could take all the clauses seriatim as they appear on the Appendix, and then—right. So, perhaps we could put all—because there are three amendments, so we could put all three and then—

Mr. Imbert: Okay.

Senate amendments read as follows:

Clause 11.

In paragraph (c), in the description of "WEST", at lines 21 and 22, delete the words "proceeding in a generally northerly direction along the said river".

Clause 12.

A. In paragraph (b), in the description of "SOUTH AND WEST",

(a) at line 12, after the words "western corner" insert the words "of the

lands of Alexis Bernard"; and

(b) at lines 22 and 23, delete the words "north eastern corner of" and substitute the words "northern boundary of the".

B. In paragraph (c), in the description of "NORTH", at line 18, after the words "Mahadeoh;" insert the words "thence southwards along the western boundary of the said lands to the northern boundary of a proposed Forest Reserve;"

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, perhaps I can invite you now for 11 and 12, dressed, and then you could beg to move, and I will put the question on 10, 11 and 12 when the time comes to do so.

Ms. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, with your permission, I do not mind expanding a little more on 10. Clauses—

Mr. Speaker: Is it relevant to 11 and 12?

Ms. Ameen: It is relevant to 11 and 12. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your guidance to this House that we debate clauses 10, 11 and 12 together because they really are related, and rather than having three debates here today, we could have one and bring all our points across. Because this Bill, Mr. Speaker, as you are aware, was passed by this House. It was also passed in the Senate with these three very minor amendments, and with the agreement of the Independent Bench bar one. So, in the Senate, the amendments that came to us—and I want to share with you a few details to get them on the record in this House.

Clause 10 in the Bill deals with the vacation of office of a councillor or alderman, and in this amendment—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, may I draw your attention to Standing Order 74 as it relates to procedure on Senate amendments? As far as I understood it, the Minister already dealt with clause 10, because she moved and concluded her debate on clause 10. So, I cannot understand how clause 10 is being considered again. May I have a ruling on that, please?

Mr. Speaker: Whilst I accept that observation, I think the hon. Minister was linking some comments from clause 10, which the hon. Minister said is relevant to the amendments proposed in 11 and 12. So, Minister, if you could confine your remarks and demonstrate the relevance, I am prepared to hear you on that.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, just one further elucidation, please. The Minister specifically said she had concluded her remarks on clause 10—

Mr. Speaker: Yeah, I accept that.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis:—but now she would like to reopen clause 10.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: No, I do not think she quite—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: She did say that.

Mr. Speaker: All right. Let us not get into a spat about this, right? I do not think the hon. Minister quite said that she wanted to reopen her comments on clause 10. I think she prefaced what she had to say with regard to 11 and 12 by saying, "I will revisit comment on clause 10 to show the relevance to clause 11 and 12." So, Minister, can I just invite you to—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: [*Inaudible*]

Mr.: Trincity Maloney, am I going to be allowed to speak, or are you going to—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I was just doing a little crosstalk with Couva South.

Mr. Speaker: Oh, I thought it was directed to me. Perhaps my misapprehension.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker: Minister, can I just invite you, please, to confine the comments to 11 and 12, and where you require recourse to clause 10, to strictly limit it to that narrow line of relevance, please? Thank you.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today's debate, as I said, should not be long because the Senate amendments were very minor, very small, and really, what essentially the Senate amendments did was, for want of a better phrase, neaten up some of the legal descriptions, some of the language, to put more succinctly the descriptions. So, for instance—well, I do not want to reference too much to 10, but I will deal with 11 and 12—in 11 and 12 in particular, where there were descriptions to boundaries.

Mr. Speaker, in clause 11(c)—clause 11 in the original Bill substitutes the new boundaries for the Borough of Arima, and in our description, part of it where they said "headed west"—that is in the Bill that was passed in the House—read:

> "…thence proceeding in a generally north-easterly direction along the east bank of the Mausica River from the Churchill Roosevelt Highway, (obliquely opposite the Arima Race Club) proceeding in a generally northerly direction along the said river to the northern boundary of the Eastern Main Road…"

The Senate, Mr. Speaker, deleted the words, proceeding in a generally northerly direction along the said river, which repeated what had just been said and stated the travel direction twice.

So, the eastern boundary of the borough continues to be the same line geographically in practice, which is running along the eastern bank of the Mausica River from the highway to the Eastern Main Road. So, while you have a change in the language, a change in the description, it simply removes a deletion and neatens the description, but it does not change the actual boundary that this House agreed on. So, it does not change the substance of what the House did, but it changes the wording that describes the same thing. So, the actual boundary, Mr. Speaker, remains the same.

This is particularly close to my heart because I am very familiar with that boundary because it is also the eastern boundary of the St. Augustine constituency, and that Mausica Road is a major road, and this is in keeping with what we described on numerous occasions in the past, that these boundaries should be boundaries that are well recognized, well established boundaries, such as main roads, highways, major watercourses, and it also means keeping communities together. So, communities that are separated by a minor road, for instance, should not be separated and belong to different electoral districts or different regions. So, Mr. Speaker, that takes care of clause 11(c).

Clause 12(b)—I now move to clause 12(b). Mr. Speaker, clause 12(b) is related to the Second Schedule, the description of the boundaries for the Borough of Diego Martin. Clause 12(b) reenacts the Borough of Diego Martin, as first described in the Miscellaneous Provisions (Establishment of the Borough of Diego Martin and the Borough of Siparia) Act, 2023.

The Senate made two corrections, which we are asked to examine today, and that is really to the description where we have headed south and west. So, Mr.

Speaker, first, where the line runs along the northern boundary of the lands of the Eugene Dublano to its north-eastern corner, and the words "of the lands of Alexis Bernard" were inserted after the word "corner", so that the corner from where the land next proceeds south-ward is identified as that of the Bernard lands and not the Dublano lands. The description goes on to follow the western boundary of the Bernard lands, so the insertion makes the text match the line that is already drawn. Mr. Speaker, this revision makes it a little clear for those who might be familiar with that region and familiar with the lands belonging to these respective persons.

2.30 p.m.

This boundary was actually the boundary of a current electoral district and it exists in the boundary description of the electoral district. So what we have here in this description, it really means that the description that the Senate put here does not change the line, the boundary, the demarcation that this House agreed to. It changes the description, but it does not change the line. I see the former Chairman of the then Diego Martin Corporation, the Member for Diego Martin Central, nodding, because I know he is familiar with that geography of that region.

Mr. Speaker, in clause 12(b), secondly, the Senate made one other in 12(b). Where the line runs along the western boundary of the lands of St. H. Titus, and I quote:

"...to the north-eastern corner of lands of the Earl of Dundonald..."

The Senate substituted, Mr. Speaker, in their description, the words:

"…to the northern boundary of the lands of the Earl of Dundonald…"

The description then proceeds westward along that northern boundary. The western boundary of the Titus lands meets with the Dundonald lands along their

northern boundary and not at a corner. So the former wording described a point which does not exist on the ground.

So the Senate amendment feels that the current—well, what the amendment put forward, better describes what actually happens on the ground, because it is not a point at which the two lands meet. So this description more aptly fits the boundary that we already agreed on. It does not, once again, change the actual boundary that this House agreed on, but rather the wording and the description for it.

Mr. Speaker, the next amendment is clause 12(c). Clause 12(c)—before I move to 12(c), 12B, Mr. Speaker, the boundaries for the Diego Martin region. As you will recall, Mr. Speaker, the boundaries of Diego Martin region were revised or last described in the Miscellaneous Provisions Act of 2023. In that Act, Diego Martin Regional Corporation was changed to Diego Martin Borough Corporation. The descriptions in the current Miscellaneous Provisions 2026 are similar to those in 2023, with a few exceptions that this House already agreed upon. Those descriptions have been accepted by the Senate, and what we have before us is a change in how the description is worded, rather than the substance. It does not change the geographic line.

I now move, Mr. Speaker, to clause 12(c). Clause 12(c) deals with the Second Schedule, which describes the borough of Siparia. Clause 12(c) enacts the boundaries of the borough of Siparia, and in the description, headed north, the Bill carried the line along the Southern Main Road, eastward, to the point where it meets the western boundary of the lands of Mahadeoh, and then, quote:

"...in a generally easterly direction along the northern boundary of the

proposed Forest Reserve..."

—without saying how the line passes from the road to the Forest Reserve. So the Senate, Mr. Speaker, essentially inserted that after the word "Mahadeoh", when we speak of the lands of Mahadeoh, in the description, they now insert the word:

"…thence southwards along the western boundary of the said lands to the northern boundary of a proposed Forest Reserve;"

So the amendment really provides a missing link. It gives a more pellucid description where you have that line from the Mahadeoh land, that western boundary, the Mahadeoh land, and a description of how it connects better to the Forest Reserve, the lands there. So the line now runs south along the Mahadeoh lands to the Forest Reserve and then go east as before. Once again, this is not a description that changes what the geographic boundary is on the ground.

For those who know the region of Siparia and those lands—I mean, there are a lot of vacant forest reserve lands there, and it is important, I think, for this description so that when you are actually driving along that road, because there is a road there. When you are actually driving along the road, you can point out where the Forest Reserve is, if you know where the lands of Mahadeoh are, and when you are driving you can very clearly see it. But this description makes it a little clearer when you are going down the road, how is it linked to the next parcel of land, that is the boundary. So, Mr. Speaker, I think this really clears up that missing link and is a little more open.

These amendments, Mr. Speaker, I must reiterate, correct the description. It corrects the written description of a line that the Bill that we all debated and that was passed in this House has already drawn. The line does not change. The

boundary does not change. Two of the descriptions, correct descriptions, that were carried over from the 2023 Act, those two are the description of the borough of Diego Martin, that I mentioned previously, and the borough of Siparia. Members will recall that in 2023, there was a Bill just to change the name of the borough of Diego Martin and the borough of Siparia, and those Bills had a full description. The description was the same of the region that was already established, but when the former Government chose to rename those corporations, they brought back the same description. So it is in line with the description in the 2023 Act.

None of the wording that we are going to agree to today, that the Senate amendments entail, shifts a boundary. None of the wordings that we have here transfers a community or moves a village into another region, or shifts anything into another municipality—into one municipality or another. It does not affect the municipal, the electoral districts, which remain for the Elections and Boundaries Commission to delimit. So when this Bill is proclaimed, the Elections and Boundaries Commission, within 90 days of proclamation, under the amendment to section 4 of the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government and Tobago House of Assembly) Act, made by clause 14 and the Schedule, the EBC will do a report. In that report, using the descriptions that the Parliament agrees upon for the regions, they will then determine the number of electoral districts and the boundaries for those electoral districts in a region.

The Parliament has the authority to determine the number of districts in a city and the number of electoral districts in a borough. So the EBC will do their work upon the proclamation of this Bill. Even as the Parliament agrees to the number of seats in a city and a borough, the EBC will decide on the boundaries for

those electoral districts, but they are limited by the number that Parliament determines. The EBC also has a formula, which they apply in a region. Based on the electorate of that region, the EBC will apply their formula, which should give them the number of electors that should be in a district.

So, Mr. Speaker, one of the amendments pertaining to the Diego Martin amendment, the Diego Martin boundaries, the Senate inserted, after "north-eastern corner", without deleting the word "its", so the passage that is amended reads:

"…to its north-eastern corner of the lands of Alexis Bernard…"

So, you see, once again, it is just the language and the description. The sense is not in doubt, and the Law Reform Commission's own explanation reads the passage as:

"…to the north-western corner of the lands of Alexis Bernard…"

So were this House to amend the Senate Amendment by substituting "the" for "its", the Bill would return to the Senate, which we have no Sitting scheduled. So, Mr. Speaker, the recommended course is that the House agrees with the Senate Amendments as transmitted, as we all have circulated before us, and the surplus word does not affect the line on paper. It does not affect the line on a map. It does not affect the line if you are driving. It does not affect the boundary of the region without—it does not affect the thing.

So, the Senate list and the Appendix III, you also have in print, "north eastern", without the hyphen in the Bill. That is a matter for the Clerk in preparing the Bill for assent, and it really calls for no action from this House. It is a hyphen, it does not change the essence of the word "north-eastern". Whether there is a hyphen or not, it is the same cardinal direction. So, Mr. Speaker, once the House

agrees, this Bill can proceed to the President for assent.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, clause 2 of the Act comes into operation on the date fixed by proclamation. So the new municipalities take legal effect only when the EBC has delimited the electoral districts and the vesting and administrative arrangements of the new corporations are in place.

Mr. Speaker, I want to give this House, and the public, the assurance that these administrative arrangements rest with the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, and we are very excited about the changes that are to come. The changes will mean for us, ensuring that the new municipalities, the three new municipalities have their administrative structure from the CEO, go down. It means we must have chief officers, such as engineers, corporate secretaries, medical doctors—

Mr. Speaker: Can I just ask you to confine your comments to the clauses, which are before the amendments, the proposed amendments, please.

Ms. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: I think we are running afoul of 74 and 48(1). The comments have to be confined to these three clauses.

Ms. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: So, please, can I just ask you to do that?

2.45 p.m.

Ms. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, I thank you for your guidance. Because this Bill, as I indicated, will come into effect upon the proclamation, I also am indicating the proclamation, as well as the administrative arrangements for the new corporations,

which, forgive me, I am very excited about it. The Ministry and this Government stand ready. Those corporations will be ready when this Bill is proclaimed.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, it is also important for me to emphasize that no worker will lose employment, that the terms and service and the union representation that rests on clauses 15 and 16, which the Senate did not touch—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: I understand that. But can we just make it relevant to these three clauses, please?

Ms. Ameen: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the issue of people's jobs and job security is very critical.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. Ameen: I feel it is important for us to mention it because "those on de other side does go out there"—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Ms. Ameen:—"and try to bamboozle people".

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, I want to—

Mr. Speaker: [*Inaudible*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I am on my legs.

Ms. Ameen:—my only mention of that—

Mr. Speaker: All right.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: But the Speaker is on his legs, so I cannot raise my—

Mr. Speaker: Please. Let us confine the comments to the clauses in the Bill that are before us now.

Ms. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, my only mention of that was to inform this House that the Senate did not touch clauses 15 and 16—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. Ameen:—which deal with workers', employment, terms and conditions and union protection. Mr. Speaker, this Bill has received a lot of feedback from the public. A number of persons in academics—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 74 and Standing Order 48(1), please.

Ms. Ameen: Oh gosh.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Oh gosh, what?

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Ms. Ameen: Relax.

Mr. Speaker: All right. So—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: [*Inaudible*] way over this amendment we are doing.

Ms. Ameen: Oh, God. "Relax yuh self. Relax yuh self".

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: We are not doing a whole Bill.

Ms. Ameen: "Relax yuh self".

Mr. Speaker: All right. There is no need for this exchange. Member, I can understand if you want to put some contextual relevance to this, right. But can I just ask you, please, to confine your arguments to these three clauses. I understand contextual relevance. I am a big fan of contextual relevance. But, please, contextualize it properly.

Ms. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, I was in the process of riling up—winding up.

Mr. Scotland SC: Riling up, you were.

Ms. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, I do not know—

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

Ms. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, I was in the process of winding up. I do not know why the other side is riling up.

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

Ms. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, the amendments to this have been aired in this House and publicly. Those in the academic fields, those in local government, have had the opportunity to have their say. The amendments, the changes that this makes to the substantive Act 21 of 1990, are long overdue. Mr. Speaker, the amendments that the Senate has put forward do not change what this House already agreed to in substance. Therefore, I see no reason why this House should not agree. I beg to move.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Diego Martin North/East.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: I think I have to put the question.

Question proposed.

Mr. Speaker: Diego Martin North/East.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*],

Mr. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we did not agree to the clause in the Bill, which we deemed to be the "Siparia clause", where the

Government, having lost control of the Siparia Borough Corporation, has brought legislation to try to deal with that situation in a way that is completely—

Mr. Speaker: I just—

Mr. Imbert: But that is the amendment.

Mr. Speaker: No. That is not the amendment.

Mr. Imbert: Well, what is the amendment, Sir?

Mr. Speaker: The amendment is simply on a line. Just as you asked me to keep the Minister in line and relevant, right, you also need to do so. So, address the lines.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, this says:

"'Notwithstanding section 62(3)…'"

It is seeking to tighten up the Government's ability to deal with that problem in the Siparia Borough Corporation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: We did not agree to it then. And we do not agree to it now.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: I have to say why. Because, obviously, they realized there is a problem with section 62(3). Obviously, they have to say, "Notwithstanding 62(3)". It is all part of a problem that they have in Siparia, where they now want to give the mayor—and the mayor is mentioned here:

"'Notwithstanding…62(2), the Mayor'…"

That is 10(a). The mayor will now have the ability to declare a seat vacant, Mr. Speaker. We do not agree with this.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: There have been numerous members of the PNM who have gone to the UNC. We do not agree. They welcomed PNM. Look, they have one standing right opposite me.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: They welcome PNM members with open arms when it is in their favour. They want to punish UNC people who cross to the PNM.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: We do not support this amendment.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Minister of Rural Development and Local Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, you know, what amazes me with Diego Martin North/East?

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Ms. Ameen: Several things. But, you know, today—

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Ms. Ameen: No. Today, what amazes me is that he knows better.

Hon. Members: He?

Ms. Ameen: The Member knows better. The Member very often comes to this House and throws up his arms as though, you know, in some "kind ah riling up he self, riling up de public" and trying to rile up his Bench. Mr. Speaker, the contribution made by the Member is of no consequence. No value.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, I will tell you why. In the amendments brought by the Senate, in the Municipal Corporations (Amdt.) Bill, 2026, in the miscellaneous, 2023, in the Act 2021 of 1990, it refers to a chairman and to a mayor. The provision that the Member described, there is a mayor of the Siparia region now. This does not say, "The Mayor of Siparia". It says, "The Mayor". "The Mayor" refers to the mayor or the chairman of any municipality, whether it is a corporation, city or borough

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, what it references is the clause 10 that allows the variation for an office where it has a resignation or an expulsion of a member from a party. It means, Mr. Speaker, that section 62 of the Act, which deals with the meetings of council, that subsection (2) that permits the mayor also permits the chairman to convene the meeting. That is what it does. So, by coming here and saying, "The Mayor" and "the Mayor of Siparia", this is for every mayor or chairman in the country.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, subsection (3) permits the members who signed the written request for the meeting to convene it themselves, where the mayor has not done so within seven days. That refers to the mayor or the chairman. Because in some municipalities, you have a chairman and, in a borough, and city, you have a mayor. This applies to all municipalities, Mr. Speaker. So, the Member for Diego Martin North/East is misleading the House and "riling up de Bench for nothing".

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, the Senate, therefore, they inserted, Mr. Speaker, that that seven-day duty in subsection (1C) and the members' power under section 62(3) could be said to offer an alternative to the automatic vacancy in subsection (1D). The Senate, therefore, prefixed subsection (1C) with the words, "Notwithstanding section 62(2)". So, the Member is creating a non-issue. The subsection (1D) and the words in 62(3) where section 62 continues to apply to every single meeting of the region, of the borough, and of the corporation.

The Law Reform Commission adopted this course, Mr. Speaker, because there was a matter, the *Ravi Balgobin Maharaj v. The Cabinet of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago* matter. That is why the Law Reform Commission advised that these words be used, to prevent the "kind ah run away t'ing dam dem was doing", you know, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Ms. Ameen: So, Mr. Speaker, when the Privy Council held that a change of the law governing the local government representation must be clear and express, that is what the Ravi Balgobin matter ensures. That is why you have the Law Reform Commission giving the advice that, in keeping with the ruling in the *Ravi Balgobin Maharaj v. The Cabinet,* that the language be very clear. Mr. Speaker, if the Member for Diego Martin North/East does not know that by now he should go home.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. Ameen: I beg to move.

Question put.

Mr. Gonzales: Division.

Mr. Speaker: A division having been called for, let us take the division.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Padarath: The division has to be taken in silence.

Mr. Speaker: Yes. Could we get some silence for the division, please.

Mr. Padarath: Members.

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

Mr. Speaker: **"**We taking dis division or we not"?

Mr. Gonzales: Yes. We are.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker: Oh. I thought we were going to do otherwise. Let us go.

The House divided: Ayes: 23 Noes: 13.

AYES

Padarath, B.

Tancoo, D.

John, Ms. J.

Moonilal, . Dr. R.

Lee, . D.

Hosein, . S.

Ameen, Ms. K.

Alexander, . R.

Maharaj, . D.

Sturge, . W.

Bodoe, . Dr. L.

Dowlath, . Dr. M.

Ali, Dr. A.

Morris, . W.

Benjamin. . M.

Sobers, . S.

Watts, . P.

Seecheran, . Dr. R.

Kesar, . E.

Sam, Mrs. S.

Narinesingh, H.

Roopnarine, Dr. N.

Gosine, Dr. C.

NOES

Gonzales, M.

Beckles-Robinson, Mrs. P.

Imert, C.

Gadsby-Dolly, Dr. N.

Young SC, S.

Scotland SC, K.

Robinson-Regis, Mrs. C.

de Nobriga, S.

Manning, B.

Marcelle, K.

Des Vignes, H.

Birchwood, C.

Romain, D.

Question agreed to.

3.00 p.m.

MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS (ALCOHOL, CANNABIS, DANGEROUS DRUGS, GAMBLING AND TOBACCO) BILL, 2026

Senate Amendments

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Attorney General.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Attorney General (Sen. The Hon. John Jeremie SC): Mr. Speaker, it is my understanding that, by agreement with the other side, the Senate amendments to the Miscellaneous Provisions (Alcohol, Cannabis, Dangerous Drugs, Gambling and Tobacco) Bill, 2026 are to be taken now. So I beg to move the Motion which now stands in my name:

> *Be it resolved* that the Senate amendments to the Miscellaneous Provisions (Alcohol, Cannabis, Dangerous Drugs, Gambling and Tobacco) Bill, 2026 be now considered.
>
> *Question proposed.*
>
> *Question put and agreed to.*
>
> *Senate amendments read as follows:*
>
> *Clause 3(a).*
>
> In paragraph (v), in the proposed subsection (2BB), after the words "(2)(f)" insert the words "or (2)(g)".
>
> *Clause 9.*
>
> A. Delete subclause (c).
>
> B. Renumber subclauses (d) to (g) as subclauses (c) to (f).
>
> C. In the renumbered subclause (c) –

(a) at the end of paragraph (ii), delete the word "and";

(b) renumber paragraph (iii) as paragraph (iv);

(c) insert after paragraph (ii) the following new paragraph:

"(iii) by inserting after subsection (1) the following new subsections:

"(1A) A person dispensing cannabis in accordance with subsection (1) shall, before completing the dispensation, require the person requesting the cannabis to produce a valid form of national photo identification establishing that the person has attained twenty-five years of age.

(1B) If the person requesting cannabis fails to produce a valid form of national photo identification upon request, the person dispensing shall immediately refuse to complete the dispensation."; and"

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Attorney General.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, apologies. Can we not take them all together, just as we did the other one?

Mr. Speaker: That is what we are doing.

Sen. Jeremie SC: It is just two.

Mr. Speaker: Yeah, I put the—that is what we are doing, that is what we are going to do. So the hon. Attorney General will include both 3 and 9 in his contribution.

Sen. Jeremie SC: Mr. Speaker, the Bill was debated in the other place on the 6th

of October, 2026; 17 Senators contributed to the debate before it was wound up. It was then committed to the committee of the whole for consideration clause by clause and was approved with two amendments. The two amendments approved in the other place do not affect the substance of the Bill which came to this House on the 30th of September, 2026. Rather, they seek to correct:

A. A reference which was inadvertently omitted in relation to the Dangerous Drugs Act, Chap. 11:25 and;

B. Two misplaced subsections which were inserted in the Cannabis Control Act, 2022, that is, Act No. 10 of 2022.

If I could treat with the Dangerous Drugs amendment first, that is made to clause 3(a) of the Bill in the proposed subsection (2BB). At present, that proposed new subsection provides that where a police officer has reasonable grounds to believe that a person referred to in subsection 2F is under the age of 25, he shall require the person to produce a valid form of national photo ID.

The new subsection (2BB) is intended to refer to persons who are in possession of legally permissible quantities of cannabis, namely those persons referred to in both sections 5, 2F, and G. That is 5, 2F, a person over the age of 25 who has in his possession not more than 30 grammes of cannabis or 5 grammes of cannabis resin, or subsection 5, 2G, a person over the age of 25 who cultivates or has in his possession not more than four growing plants of the genus cannabis. As mentioned, the reference to subsection 2G was omitted in error, and we now seek to correct that error by inserting the relevant reference.

The second amendment is with respect to the Cannabis Control Act, to clause 9 of the Bill. That amendment is necessary to correct two misplaced

subsections which were to be inserted in section 49 of the Cannabis Control Act. The amendment made in the other place merely corrects the placement of the proposed new subsections, 1A and 1B, in section 49 of the Act. I ask this House now to consider and approve the amendments made in the other place to the Miscellaneous Provisions (Alcohol, Cannabis, Dangerous Drugs, Gambling and Tobacco) Bill, 2026, and I beg to move.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, the Attorney General did not fully explain the meaning and effect of these amendments, so I shall do so.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Jeremie SC: Thank you.

Mr. Imbert: You are welcome. The first amendment to 3(a):

"In paragraph…"

I am reading it Mr. Speaker, I do not want to run afoul of your earlier ruling:

"In paragraph (v), in the proposed subsection (2BB), after the words '(2)(f)' insert the words 'or (2)(g)'".

Now, in its previous form, the legislation did not require the production of ID from a person who is cultivating cannabis. So, the law as it currently stands, before this amendment, the Miscellaneous Provisions (Alcohol, Cannabis, Dangerous Drugs, Gambling and Tobacco) Bill, 2026 takes effect, allowed persons who were tending four plants to avoid prosecution. This amendment now not only makes it—well, it

is already an offence to be in possession of cannabis, marijuana, "ganja," whatever you want to call it and I am hoping you would allow me some contextual references, Mr. Speaker.

This legislation already criminalizes the possession of cannabis by persons under the age of 25. But this amendment now criminalizes or makes it a requirement for the production of ID by someone who is found tending to or cultivating cannabis, and this is anywhere. And, in fact, it gets into the home because the main location where the cultivation of permissible cannabis takes place, the four plants, is the home.

So this now allows police officers to enter somebody's home and demand ID to prove that the person, he is not smoking it, he is not drinking it, he is simply tending to plants, must now produce ID to prove, in his home, that he or she is under the age of 25. Now, we did not agree to the substantive provision and we certainly do not agree to this. We see this as an invasion of privacy and as a breach of the right to property, Mr. Speaker. So that is the first amendment that is being done here. It is now allowing police officers to enter persons' homes and demand ID if they think the person who is cultivating the plant, as I said, not using it, not selling it, not smoking it, but just putting some fertilizer on it or something like that, they now require them to produce ID. Just more oppression, Mr. Speaker.

But let us go to the second one. This is extremely oppressive, and I am of the view that it breaches religious freedom and it breaches the right to practise one's religion and I hope you will allow me some context, Mr. Speaker. When the original law was passed some years ago allowing the dispensation of sacramental cannabis or sacramental marijuana by Rastafarian priests in their places of

worship, the age at which that was set was 18. The substantive law has now changed that to 25. But what this amendment does, and as far as I am concerned it is extremely oppressive, is if a person who practises the Rastafarian faith is in a Rastafarian place of worship, and I have one of those in my constituency, Mr. Speaker, down in the Bagatelle area where I believe it is 12 tribes. If—

Hon. Member: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Imbert:—no, do not laugh, you may not have any Rastafarians in your constituency, but I have in mine, Mr. Speaker, people who practise the Rastafarian religion.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: And what this now means is that if a Rastafarian priest is dispensing sacramental cannabis to someone in the place of worship during a service or otherwise, the priest must now demand identification from the person, Mr. Speaker. And if the person does not produce identification, the priest is now required to refuse the dispensation of sacramental cannabis.

Now, this amendment requiring the production of ID, where a priest must demand ID from somebody in a Rastafarian community before they dispense it, is unique, Mr. Speaker, in the Caribbean. And I have looked at various countries in the Caribbean, various countries that allow cannabis, and none of the countries I have examined, and I am going to list them for you, Mr. Speaker, and this is entirely relevant in my view, none of the Caribbean countries I have looked at under its cannabis law requires the production of ID before receiving sacramental cannabis.

Let us go to Barbados. I looked at the Sacramental Cannabis Act, and they

actually have a text on this, Mr. Speaker, in Barbados, and the—Mr. Speaker, please, could you quell the noise down on that side?

Mr. Speaker: Member for Toco/Sangre Grande, you seemed to have forgotten that this Member requires a certain degree of silence to concentrate and make his contribution. Shall we afford him that opportunity, that luxury?

Mr. Sturge: Yes, please.

Mr. Speaker: Which he normally does not afford to others, but shall we make an effort to do so? Thank you.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, it is actually a requirement of the Standing Orders, it is not me.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: It is not personal to me. It is not personal to me.

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps you should follow it more steadfastly.

Mr. Imbert: That is my point; it is not personal to me. So—

Mr. Speaker: Seeing that you know it so well.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In Barbados, the Sacramental Cannabis Act contains no identification or age verification duty for worshippers. Barbados, okay?

3.15 p.m.

So, if you are a follower of the Rastafarian faith in Barbados, and you are part of a Rastafarian community, and you go to a Rastafarian place of worship to receive sacramental cannabis, you are not required to produce your identification or any ID.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: Please.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Come, please, please, let us not.

Mr. Imbert: In Jamaica, there is no requirement in the law for proof of age, or even proof of faith requirement for sacramental use, and there is no requirement for the production of identification. In Antigua, there is no requirement for the production of ID with respect to the dispensation of sacramental cannabis to the Rastafarian community. In St. Vincent, there is no ID requirement. In St. Kitts, there is no ID requirement, and the Bahamas currently has draft legislation for the use of cannabis, which does not require a production of ID.

As far as I am concerned, Mr. Speaker, this amendment, which is now telling a Rastafarian priest and telling adherents of the Rastafarian faith that they have to produce ID, otherwise they have a big problem, is anti-religious and anti-the-Rastafarian-faith, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: This Government, as far as I am concerned, are against religious freedom. They are against religious freedom.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: You know, as a contextual part, Mr. Speaker, there is no Commonwealth country in the world that bans the partaking of sacramental wine during communion.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: Trinidad and Tobago is now an outlier, more like "ah pariah".

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Imbert: You are making it the only country in the world that bans the use of sacramental wine during communion—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert:—the only Commonwealth country. The only Commonwealth country in the world. You are anti-religion. You are anti-the-Catholic-church.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: And you are anti-the Rastafarian religion. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Attorney General.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Jeremie SC: Mr. Speaker, today is not a day for me to shout as loudly as my friend opposite. All that I have to say is that, to read into a requirement to produce ID, a right in the police to enter into premises without a warrant, that requires some sort of gymnastics, which I am sure the lawyers on the other side who—"well, leh we not go there"—the lawyers on the other side will be able to counsel him. I do not intend to do that.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Sen. Jeremie SC: This is simply a requirement which requires the production of ID. It has nothing whatsoever to do with search and entry into premises. That is the first amendment. With respect to the second amendment, I think that the Member's contribution was inflammatory and devoid of merit. Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question put.

Mr. Imbert: Division.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Clerk: Mr. Padarath—

Mr. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, can you advise Members that the vote must be taken in silence, please?

Mr. Speaker: Yes, please. So, the same silence you were demanding just now, the division requires even more silence. Thank you very much.

The House divided: Ayes 24 Noes 13

AYES

Padarath, B.

Tancoo, D.

John, Ms. J.

Moonilal, Dr. R.

Lee, D.

Hosein, S.

Ameen, Ms. K.

Alexander, R.

Maharaj, D.

Sturge, W.

Bodoe, Dr. L.

Dowlath, Dr. M.

Ali, Dr. A.

Morris, W.

Benjamin. M.

Sobers, S.

Watts, P.

Seecheran, Dr. R.

Kesar, E.

Elder, C.

Sam, Mrs. S.

Narinesingh, H.

Roopnarine, Dr. N.

Gosine, Dr. C.

NOES

Gonzales, M.

Beckles-Robinson, Mrs. P.

Imbert, C.

Gadsby-Dolly, Dr. N.

Young SC, S.

Scotland SC, K.

Robinson-Regis, Mrs. C.

de Nobriga, S.

Manning, B.

Marcelle, K.

Des Vignes, H.

Birchwood, C.

Romain, D.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the result of the division is as follows: 24 Members voted in favour of it, 13 Members against, there were no abstentions. Thank you

very much.

Question agreed to.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: [*Inaudible*]—on to Motions. Hon. Attorney General, now that that is over, I think the phrase you were looking for is "mental gymnastics of Olympian proportions". Port of Spain South will recall that quote from the case. Port of Spain South, you remember that famous quote?

Mr. Scotland SC: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: We often used it before Mr. Justice Deyalsingh. All right. Minister of Homeland Security.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER OF POLICE (AG.)
(NOMINATION OF MR. ANAND RAMESAR)

The Minister of Homeland Security (Hon. Roger Alexander): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

> *Whereas* section 123(1)(a) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago ("the Constitution") provides that the Police Service Commission shall have the power to appoint persons to hold or act in the office of Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of Police;
>
> *And whereas* section 123(3) of the Constitution provides that the Police Service Commission shall submit to the President a list of the names of persons nominated for appointment to the office of Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner of Police;
>
> *And whereas* section 123(4) of the Constitution provides that the President

shall issue a Notification in respect of each person nominated under subsection (3) and the Notification shall be subject to affirmative resolution of the House of Representatives;

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

And whereas the President has on the 20th day of October, 2026 issued a Notification with respect of the nomination;

And whereas it is expedient to approve the Notification;

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

Mr. Speaker, we were here before.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. R. Alexander: We stand in the same position as previous. However, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Ramesar is a career police officer. He came from the rank of constable to the rank of Assistant Commissioner of Police in his 34 years' service. Mr. Speaker, he has a Masters in Criminology and Criminal Justice, a Bachelor of Laws degree. He also has human resource management, a Postgraduate Certificate in Business Administration. Mr. Ramesar also deals with the youths. He has extensive training, Mr. Speaker, in quality management, transformational leadership, performance management, and the use of analytics, and the improvement of police management and community relations.

Mr. Speaker, I could speak to Mr. Ramesar all day, all night. But, Mr.

Speaker, something came to mind. I remember two years ago, I was on patrol as a police officer, on a static patrol and sitting in the vehicle. Mr. Speaker, and those on the other side was on this side, and they were, in fact, trying to elect a Deputy Commissioner of Police. Mr. Speaker, the name came up, Mr. Wendell Lucas.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Yes, Assistant Commissioner of Police then. He was acting. Mr. Speaker, I sat in that vehicle on patrol in complete amazement when the then Minister of National Security, Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds, stood up—

Mr. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, point of order. That has no relevance to the matter that is before us.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: I think what the hon. Minister is doing, he is laying his foundation for relevance. Let us give him a little opportunity.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, and as I said, we were here before, and on the last occasion, they all said "no" to Mr. Ramesar. But let us pause for a cause, and the cause is this, Mr. Speaker. On this side—when they were on this side, the then Minister of National Security, he spoke like this, "Mr. Wendell Wallace, good officer, career police officer"—

Mr. Scotland SC: Wendell Wallace?

Hon. R. Alexander: I am sorry, Wendell Lucas, sorry. I humbly apologize. He said, "Dedicated police officer, years of service." He said—they went so far as to say, "He was responsible for one of the most important cases in Trinidad and Tobago," the one with "Balo" Maharaj, the man who was kidnapped in Aranguez,

and his body parts found elsewhere, where 13 persons were extradited to the United States to face the charges. They said, "He was responsible for that, great officer." All of this they said, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, you know, in a matter of an hour and 10 minutes, they asked, "Those who approve say aye," they remained silent. But the one thing I can remember, Mr. Speaker, they asked, Trincity/Maloney, and she said "no." And then the no continued down the line, "no, no," and 20 persons, Mr. Speaker, said "no". So, apparently, they are in the habit of not supporting police officers as they advance.

Mr. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, what is the relevance of the matter that is before us? 48(1).

Mr. Speaker: That is the relevance, because the Minister laid the relevance on the last time Mr. Ramesar's name was proposed, it was opposed. So, he is laying the relevance for it. Minister, continue, please.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, so when we hear the goodly gentlemen and them make those statements, we wonder sometimes.

3.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, that day in particular, I heard they ripped the character of Mr. Lucas, ACP.

Mr. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, 48(1). He continues on this matter—48(1), relevance.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: As I said, the Minister is laying the foundation, but I am not going

to give you much leeway on that right. I think you have, right, you are close to exhausting your run-up on that. So let us get to the matter at hand, and you can take a little on that run-up, but let us get to the matter at hand.

Hon. R. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, all I was saying is that they ripped the individual apart in the presence of the whole world to hear, because we were right here—statements without basis, but we are not thinking that sometimes what we do here, we are destroying persons' lives while we sit or while we stand.

Mr. Speaker, the same thing happened with Mr. Ramesar a couple of weeks ago. They were making statements about Mr. Ramesar, and if they did not understand—they tried to blame it on the present Government. They did not understand that the procedure involves the Police Service Commission.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, the Police Service Commission had a process. The process was followed: Persons applied, interviews took place, and then they had a merit list. The independent organization called the Police Service Commission—Mr. Speaker, we are not in the habit of pulling a list and putting who last, first and who first, second to last and all of that. We are not in the habit of doing that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, this Government we are not interfering with the police service leadership we are improving the police service delivery of services.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, so for those who do not understand what a merit list is—the persons were interviewed, and they were chosen in terms of one,

two, three, four, five, as the case may be.

Ms. Ameen: Down the line, no interference.

Hon. R. Alexander: Now that this short acting pops up, the person who is number one at this time on the merit list is chosen. "That is all de maths yuh kno." There is no mathematics in this.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: So, when I heard statements about Mr. Ramesar doing this, and Mr. Ramesar doing that. The Government of the day had no hands in, hands out, hands around the decision-making process by the Police Service Commission, and if "allyuh cannot deal with dat", we cannot teach that here. We cannot teach that here because we are aware—we are not going that road today. We are aware that you all might do things differently, but we are not.

Mr. Speaker, as I said before, Mr. Ramesar, police officer, this is a short time to act every year. Every year, the Police Service Commission, again, has a process, and those who qualify will apply, and the process will continue, and then there will be another merit list. So, if anybody on that side could apply to be the Deputy Commissioner of Police, or anybody on that side wants to be the Commissioner of Police, they could apply, and then might appear on the merit list, and then we will see how it goes from there. Until such time, Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Port of Spain South. Alright. Hold on. Hold on. Yeah, just now.

Question proposed.

Mr. Speaker: Port of Spain South.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Keith Scotland SC (*Port of Spain South*)**:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we really reach in Trinidad and Tobago. Imagine we are being lectured about understanding by Tunapuna. He was able to count one, two, three, four, five, and we say yay to that. But we want to correct the record of Parliament as it relates to Wendell Lucas.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: At no time, and I am sure you were listening, but you just did not understand the debate. At no time, when Wendell Lucas, his name, came to this Parliament, did any Member of the People's National Movement Government malign the name of Wendell Lucas. We said nothing.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: What happened was—when there was a time for the vote. We voted in a certain way, but we did not malign his name by any contribution made in this Parliament.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: I am not finished, Mr. Speaker. I am not finished. I want to give you context. Unlike Barataria/San Juan and Oropouche East, when Suzette Martin, her name, was brought here—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: —"Dey say she bounce ah child".

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: "She bounce ah dog."

Mr. K. Scotland SC: "She bounce ah dog." Mr. Speaker, they made every conceivable granular point about the integrity of DCP Suzette Martin.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: But I have come to understand, they look in the mirror, and they expect everybody to descend to where they do when it comes to a debate. We do not operate so in the People's National Movement.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Hon. Member for Tunapuna, we hold ourselves to a higher standard than maligning people's names.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: And when we make an objection, Mr. Speaker, it is not a capricious objection. It is based on grounds that are objective, and we will speak to Trinidad and Tobago about the grounds of objection that we have without maligning the name of Anand Ramesar.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: So, as we are counting, let me make point number one.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: We have received the Notification from Her Excellency dated the 19th of October, 2026. Where Assistant Commissioner of Police Anand Ramesar was recommended to act as Deputy Commissioner. We understand the intricacies that it was a recommendation from the Service Commission that went to Her Excellency, and Her Excellency, under the law, brought it to the Parliament on the basis of the merit list.

Point number two, we have examined scrupulously the résumé of Mr. Ramesar. And point number two, subsection (b) and (a), (b) coming after (a), we caucused on it, and we have serious concerns. I now turn not to speak to the Members of the other side because we understand where that goes, but to speak through you, Mr.

Speaker, to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Leader of the Opposition, hon. Pennelope Beckles-Robinson, as Leader of the Opposition, leads with principle, leads with consistency and integrity.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: And as a responsible Leader of the Opposition—and ad nauseam Tunapuna—the hon. Leader of the Opposition has said that if a piece of legislation is good and the litmus test of good is a legislation or piece of legislation that is good for all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. If it is good, we will support it on this side as we have done in the past. That is consistency and integrity.

Point number three, therefore, as an Opposition, we take an objection to a piece of legislation or even a nominee. This objection is justiciable, and it is justified by objective rationale.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Justiciable

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Yes, justiciable. We make it pellucidly clear that it is not a capricious objection, Tunapuna, Mr. Speaker, and most importantly, it is not personal. It is not personal. It is based on a principle, and the principle is—point number four—due to the antecedence of the nominee and the prevailing circumstances in Trinidad and Tobago, at this point the Opposition is disinclined to acquiesce to supporting this nominee.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: That is it. That is it. We have before us, and we have done our research. You, being a police officer of several years, you know about

investigation. We have done our investigations.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Yes, a distinguished career. We will not hesitate to say that. It does not behove us to bring down anybody to aggrandize ourselves. That is not what we do. That is not what we do at all.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: But we looked at the antecedents of the nominee, and we will not condescend to particulars relative to those antecedents because we understood what happened the last time with Suzette Martin. They were granular. Oropouche East spoke with—listen, you spoke with gusto. Barataria/San Juan, you went down the road.

Mr. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, 48(1). What is the relevance of that?

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

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Very relevant.

Mr. Speaker: You know I rule against you, but you know you run the risk of being hoisted on your own petard. Barataria/San Juan, we will allow him because of the context.

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

Mr. Speaker: Member for Arouca/Lopinot to borrow the word of Port of Spain South, I call you because of antecedence—[*Laughter*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

All they did not do with Suzette Martin was to pronounce and say "guilty", go across by the Hall of Justice and say that although the allegations were unproven at the time and still remain unproven, they brought it here, as opposed to this

nominee who has been found guilty of the allegations. So, they are no longer allegations.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: They are no longer allegations. They are proven facts according to due process, proven facts, which make our objections greater in its weight and greater in its gravitas. When we say, therefore, that in the People's National Movement we hold ourselves to a higher standard, this is exactly what we mean.

Point number five I come to. When persons come forward to volunteer themselves for national service—we do not want to come in the Parliament here and malign their names, which will discourage persons of worth from coming forward because they are afraid that some Member will get up and bring out something that when they were two years of age, "dey sucked a sweetie." That is what happened in this Parliament, when they were in Opposition.

What we say as an Opposition is that we are concerned about this nominee due to the nature of the proven allegations made against him. Mr. Speaker, those allegations were not minor allegations. They touched and concerned an issue of discreditable conduct. We have noted also as an aggravating factor the response of the nominee in the public domain in that he has expressed remorse, which means therefore *a fortiori* that he may not have learnt from his proven errors. That means that he is prone to reoffend. That is our analysis when we come here to say we cannot support it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Because there was no demonstration of remorse, and that,

Mr. Speaker, exacerbates our disquiet. As to his suitability to hold the post of DCP, even if for a day—because, Mr. Speaker, on this side our objections are maintained due to his conduct before and his conduct after.

Mr. Speaker, I have pursued the documents provided to this Parliament, and I am sure you have, you being an avid reader. I have looked at Her Excellency's nomination. I have looked at the Notification. I have looked at the curriculum vitae of the nominee. And all the documents provided, we are uncertain at this point whether the Commissioner took his antecedents into consideration before coming to that merit list—because it is certainly absent from the documents provided to us.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

3.45p.m.

Mr. K. Scotland SC: So maybe, maybe, hon. Member for Tunapuna, in your rejoinder, you can tell the Parliament, and by extension, the people of Trinidad and Tobago, whether or not the Commission was provided with the antecedents of the nominee. And I hope that you do not hide under the veil of national security concerns and you are transparent with us, and as we teach each other, and I am sure I can learn from you, hon. Member for Tunapuna, we would like you to be transparent with us today on this point.

Mr. Alexander: As usual. [*Inaudible*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: So, the fact, Mr. Speaker, that we have not been provided with that information further strengthens our disquiet as to the suitability of the nominee and the basis upon which that nomination was made and whether or not the Commission had all relevant and pertinent information in its possession at the

time of the making of the decision.

Mr. Speaker, the nominee and the nomination taken, and the recommendation taken in the context of all documents provided, leaves this Opposition in reasonable doubt, based on the prevailing circumstances in this country at this time, whether or not this is a suitable nominee. When I say the prevailing circumstances in this country at this time, what do I mean, Mr. Speaker?

The Opposition is acutely aware, alert and sensitive that there is now in Trinidad and Tobago, based on recently passed legislation, a heightened need to scrutinize all appointments in the police service, based on legislation passed in this House as recently as September 2026, and particularly, the draconian Special Operations Act, which gives police the powers to supervise seven districts in Trinidad and Tobago and gives them expanded powers. We must therefore be extra careful who we recommend to act in high and even sometimes medium and low positions in Trinidad and Tobago at this time, Mr. Speaker, at this time.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: And we demand, respectfully, that any nominee, particularly those with proven false on their record, prove themselves to have turned away from that because that affects the concept; it buffers, reinforces public trust. And when I speak of prevailing circumstances and public trust, I also speak, Mr. Speaker, about the need for nominees now and even then to have what we call in that other branch of law an unblemished record, Mr. Speaker, an unblemished record.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: And we say, in order to lead the police service at this time,

you need persons with an unblemished record.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: That is my point. And this Government, Mr. Speaker—Mr. Speaker, if 55(1)(b) had a name, if tedious repetition had a name, it would be the UNC.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: "Ah tired hear of how Rowley—I tired hear Rowley went and intercepted the list. Ah tired." In fact, it is not Rowley; it is Dr. Rowley went and intercepted the list. Or that crime is down by 42 per cent. Well, if crime is down 42 per cent, tell that to the family of Taradath Singh.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Tell that to the family of Taradath Singh. Brutally murdered. After he was shot up on the 28th of September, the police did nothing to ring-fence him. So now he is gone. What about the double murder in Couva at the spa?

Mr. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, 48(1), this debate is about the resume of Mr. Anand Ramesar and his appointment.

Mr. Speaker: I think I have given you a sufficient amount of leeway. Come on. Let us rein it in and keep it a little tighter.

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Mr. Speaker—rein it in and the fact—the point I wish to make on this issue, issue number five, is that the prevailing circumstances of runaway crime in this country demand persons of integrity who have a clean record. That is the point I make.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: And no amount of rhetoric and boasting about 42 per cent could cure anything. And whoever comes after to talk, they could come with their rhetoric and try to convince the country, "nobody listening to allyuh".

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: The Square was alive with the sound of protest.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: The Square was alive with the sound of protest. And as the proud Member for Port of Spain South, I was proud to see Woodford Square today.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Not with people paid with money to come and full up maxi taxi, but people earnestly coming so they could get money to pay a maxi taxi. That is the people who were outside there. Workers who need money to pay a maxi taxi. So, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Elder: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: "Sir, Lyle Townsend turning in he grave about you. Shame on you."

Hon. Members: "Ohhh", [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Shame on you.

Mr. Speaker: Why, why? Port of Spain South, what is the need for that? Why are you—

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I apologize if there is any collateral damage—

Mr. Sturge: Sit, sit, sit.

Mr. Speaker: What is the need for that? Is there really a need for that? Come on.

I have given you a sufficient amount of leeway. Let us just rein it in now and keep it along the lines, right? Please.

Mr. K. Scotland SC: Mr. Speaker, what I have to say then, is that we are just tired of the rhetoric. We want action, we want performance.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland SC: And this nominee does not engender confidence that there will be suitable action or suitable performance in the position of DCP in the police service. That is us. This Government cannot get anything right; 20 months you all are in power, get one right, "nah", one. And in those circumstances, Mr. Speaker, we are genuinely, based on all the reasons advanced, in light of the foregoing, we cannot support in any good conscience on principle this nomination. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Minister of Homeland Security.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Homeland Security (Hon. Roger Alexander): It saddens me to even respond to this. I wonder why sometimes the Member for Port of Spain South even gets up.

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

Hon. R. Alexander: Because at the end of the day—you see again, those on the other side do not understand procedures. So, are you saying to us, Member for Port of Spain South, that the person who nominated the Police Service Commission is not a person of integrity? Are you saying that? re you saying that, because you said to us, if you want to question the Police Service Commission and

their choosing of persons, then you have to question who elected them, who selected them. Who selected them?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: So, you see "Scotty"— Sorry, sorry, sorry.—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. R. Alexander: "Ah so accustomed calling my good friend by his name." Sorry, Port of Spain South. So, if it is that you are saying what you are saying, then one must look at the total record, and the record would show that if we are talking about the People's National Movement, then we should talk about Commissioners. And remember I was in the chambers, you know, I was inside, I was a member of the Shaolin Temple, you know.

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

Hon. R. Alexander: So, when are you talking about Police Commissioners and things, and you are boasting here, boasting here, I was inside, "eh", and I can start from A to Z, and we will come up with nobody. So let me tell you this. When you are talking, and you speak how you speak, we are talking about hypocrisy. Because you and your Member stood right here and said all kinds of nice things about a man and then said, no. At a certain time, I thought he was the only plant in the garden of roses, the lovely things you had said about the man, and then in a matter of seconds you said, no, no, no; 20 persons said, no, and destroyed the man on a whole, right here. But now you come to say that you have information about somebody and you do not think the qualification is good. Well then go and question the person who elected these persons—who nominated them. Go and question the person who nominated the person to become members of the Police

Service Commission. I think that is the best bet. And if you "eh" question as to why, if Mr. Ramesar have the documents available, freedom of information, ask them or ask the person who would have nominated him. I think that is the right way to go.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Because I cannot see 400 people gathered in Woodford Square—

Hon. Members: Two hundred and fifty.

Hon. R. Alexander: Four hundred? Two hundred people?

Ms. Ameen: "It ain't cross ah 100."

Hon. R. Alexander: About 100 people.

Hon. Members: Two hundred and fifty.

Hon. R. Alexander: One seventy-five?

Ms. Ameen: "Look it dey, yuh ha to squint to see them, watch. Yuh ha to squint to see them."

Hon. R. Alexander: And I am only seeing a particular individual; I am seeing a particular individual here who is their talking point. But they should ask the Northern Division Gang Unit as to who that individual really is. Anyhow—

Hon. Members: "Ooooh."

Hon. R. Alexander: And we understand from the police, the police had advised—it was difficult to prove who was going for lunch and who was part of the parade that they were having on the nation streets.

Mr. Hosein: And they estimated 400.

Hon. R. Alexander: And they estimated 400, eh. And, Mr. Speaker, you know it

is difficult when Members on the other side question the integrity of independent institutions. They question it, independent institutions. Why, why, why?

Mr. Ramesar, as I said before, is a career police officer. You all were in Government before. You all knew of the incident that you are speaking about; why did you not take action? Why did nobody there take action with respect to the incident if you have so much information? Why did you all not take action?

Mr. Scotland SC: We cannot, because it is an independent commission.

Hon. R. Alexander: "Orrr." That is what I wanted you to say. So, I lured you. You see, you see, I lured, I lured you, Port of Spain.

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

Hon. R. Alexander: Port of Spain I lured you. I brought it out of you. I brought it out of you. You see, all of a sudden now you know— "Orrr", it is an independent Police Service Commission.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. R. Alexander: He now knows that, yeah. But you now said it. You just said it. But you see, again, twisted tongues, serpent tongues are the same thing.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, the police service continues to progress. The last time those on the other side were sitting there, we were trying to hide our face in the sand because we were looking at 600. Around this time, it was 602 or 603, if I was not mistaken. Remember I was in the "chowlin", you know, I was in the chamber.

Mr. Scotland SC: You say "chowlin".

Hon. R. Alexander: Yeah, I was in the Shaolin.

Mr. Speaker, having said that, at this time the crime rate is one you have to understand what the police officers are doing, how we communicate with members of the public, how we are treating young persons how to be different. And you know I often like to challenge those on the other side, instead of encouraging persons to march, why do you not encourage persons to stay away from persons' homes so there will be no home invasion?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Why do you not encourage people to educate themselves so they would have a better life? Why you all do not encourage people not to set fires to buildings and all these things?

Hon. Members: "Ohhh."

Hon. R. Alexander: You see this is what we need to do. So, when we do these things then we will have a better society. Instead of "allyuh" coming on one side and protesting because you all want this done and protest and protest and protest, and all we are doing is showing the people how to oppose. Well, I guess why. You all are on the Opposition. Having said all of that, Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question put.

Hon. Member: Division.

Mr. Speaker: Let us take the division.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Let us get some silence, please.

The House voted: Ayes 25 Noes 13

AYES

Padarath, Hon. B.

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.

Sturge, Hon. W.

Bodoe, Hon. Dr. L

Dowlath, Hon. Dr. M.

Ali, Dr. A.

Morris, W.

Benjamin, Hon. M.

Sobers, Hon. S.

Watts, Hon. P.

Seecheran, Hon. Dr. R.

Kesar, Hon. E.

Elder, Hon. C.

Sam, Ms. S.

Narinesingh, H.

Roopnarine, Dr. N.

Gosine, Dr. C.

Thomas, D.

NOES

Gonzales, M.

Beckles, Ms. P.

Imbert, C.

Gadsby-Dolly, Dr. N.

Young SC, S.

Scotland SC, K.

Robinson-Regis, Mrs. C.

de Nobriga, S.

Manning, B.

Marcelle, K.

Des Vignes, H.

Birchwood, C.

Romain, D.

Question agreed to.

Resolved:

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

4.00 p.m.

PROTECTION OF NEW PLANT VARIETIES (AMDT.) BILL, 2026

Order for second reading read.

The Minister of Land and Legal Affairs and Minister in the Ministry of

Agriculture and Fisheries (Hon. Saddam Hosein): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I beg to move:

> That a Bill to amend the Protection of New Plant Varieties Act, Chap. 82:75, be now read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Land and Legal Affairs, I am happy to bring this particular amendment to this honourable House, which touches and concerns, in particular, the Intellectual Property Office. And this Government reaffirms its commitment to further strengthening the national intellectual property landscape of Trinidad and Tobago through the implementation of the 1991 Act of the International Convention for the Protection of New Plant Varieties, UPOV, through the amendment of the Protection of New Plant Varieties Act of Trinidad and Tobago, Chapter 82:75.

UPOV, Mr. Speaker, is a French acronym for the International Union for the Protection of New Plant Varieties. This Convention represents the global framework for plant variety protection, standardizing how member states will provide national legal rights to breeders who develop new plant varieties, while ensuring that farmers, researchers and the wider agricultural sector benefit from innovation and improved crop performance.

Mr. Speaker, the Government is pleased to indicate that the Bill was passed in the Senate on Friday, 18 September, 2026, without amendments. This constitutes part of Trinidad and Tobago's Intellectual Property Office's evolving robust legislative agenda, which seeks to ensure that our IP laws respond to the needs of our creators, inventors, innovators in a competitive global landscape.

I wish to proudly indicate that this legislation unionizes the portfolio as Minister of Land and Legal Affairs, including intellectual property. Mr. Speaker,

the participation of our Government in IP legislative reform is not new. As early as 1996, IP Bills were piloted by the then Minister of Legal Affairs, the Member for Siparia—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein:—the Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: According to the *Hansard* records, Mr. Speaker, the debates happened in 1996, July, August 1996, concerning the IP legislation, and such reform was further addressed on the 11th of April, 2000, through the Intellectual Property (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill. This historical commitment demonstrates our recognition of IP as a driver of creativity, innovation, trade and economic development. Mr. Speaker, the parent Act that we are amending is Act 7 of 1997, and this particular piece of legislation was, in fact, introduced by Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC in 1997, and today she returns as Prime Minister and now comes to amend this particular piece of legislation—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein:—to lend further protection, Mr. Speaker, to breeders and innovators in the agriculture industry. As such, the introduction of this suite of IP laws brought Trinidad and Tobago into conformity with international standards, including the World Trade Organization's Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of IP. These Acts modernized our IP system and provided comprehensive statutory protection for key aspects of IP. They continue to influence the legislative agenda, which now focuses on moving from the UPOV 1978 Convention to the UPOV 1991 Convention to reflect contemporary realities. Trinidad and Tobago being a member of the 1978 Convention of the International Union for the Protection of

New Plant Varieties Act in 1998, but our legislation reflects an earlier version of the Convention that has limited scope.

Protection currently applies to only specific plant families listed in the legislation, such as cocoa, orchids, heliconia, pineapple, pigeon peas, Vigna, which is black-eyed and bodi. In addition, the varieties are given an extended period of protection under the UPOV 1991 Convention as opposed to the UPOV 1978 Convention, to which Trinidad and Tobago is a party. These limitations and the types of protectable plant families place breeders in Trinidad and Tobago at a definite disadvantage in relation to other countries that have acceded to the 1991 Convention. Having a wider variety of plant material that can be protected puts Trinidad and Tobago in a better position to compete on the global market. In this respect, UPOV 1991 Convention must be understood within the broader context of plant variety protection. During consultations with stakeholders from the private and public sectors, which brought about fruitful discussions and ultimately led to an overwhelming consensus of the importance of acceding to the 1991 Convention.

Our agriculture sector faces modern challenges such as climate variability, pests and disease pressures, productivity gaps, and the need for higher-quality crops that both meet domestic and export market standards. The 1991 Convention offers an opportunity to address these challenges by strengthening innovation in plant breeding and improving access to superior plant varieties. One of the most immediate benefits of UPOV 1991 membership is greater access to newer, improved plant varieties developed both domestically and internationally. Evidence from multiple countries shows that when a country adopts a plant variety protection system aligned with the UPOV standards, the number of new crop varieties available to farmers increases significantly. For example, Peru saw a

number of protected plant varieties triple after adopting UPOV-compatible legislation, leading to improved blueberry varieties with superior qualities available to local farmers. Similarly, the Republic of Korea, after establishing a plant variety protection system and joining UPOV, received hundreds of applications from breeders, dramatically expanding the number of varieties available to farmers. For Trinidad and Tobago, this means farmers would gain access to higher-yielding, climate-resilient and pest- and disease-resistant or tolerant varieties of plants and seeds, improving productivity and profitability.

The 1991 Convention does not only benefit foreign breeders, it also encourages domestic innovation. When plant breeders know their innovations are legally protected, they are willing to invest time and resources into developing new varieties. Research institutions, universities and private breeders benefit from the ability to receive returns on their investment, which can then be reinvested into further research. Countries that implemented plant variety protection systems have reported: A, the increased participation by universities and public research institutes in plant breeding; B, growth in private breeders and seed companies; and C, greater collaboration between public and private research sectors. For Trinidad and Tobago, institutions such as the UWI and the agricultural research bodies, such as the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI), could benefit from new opportunities to commercialize locally developed crop varieties.

Another benefit is technology transfer. Breeders are often reluctant to introduce valuable new varieties into countries where their intellectual property is not protected. UPOV 1991 Convention conveys a great degree of assurance to international and national companies and research institutions to introduce improved varieties into their jurisdiction. This means they have access to cutting-

edge plant genetics, increased agricultural productivity and greater competitiveness in the export markets. Importantly, the 1991 UPOV Convention contains a complete breeder's exemption, which allows farmers, researchers and breeders to use protected varieties as a basis for developing new ones and to commercialize those new varieties. This promotes ongoing innovation and knowledge exchange. The experience of several developing countries demonstrates that UPOV 1991 can help create entirely new agricultural industries. A notable example is Kenya, where plant variety protection supported development of the cut-flower industry, now a major export sector supplying markets in Europe. This industry employs millions of people across farming, packaging, logistics and marketing.

Such developments illustrate how plant breeding innovation can drive rural employment, agricultural exports and value-added industry. For Trinidad and Tobago, sectors such as cocoa, horticulture, fruits, vegetables and ornamentals could similarly benefit from improved varieties and access to international markets. Strengthening food security and sustainable agriculture has been a core consideration for governments around the world for quite some time now.

Plant breeding plays a crucial role in addressing global challenges such as climate change, emerging plant diseases and food supply stability, to name a few. UPOV 1991 promotes continued development of improved crop varieties, contributing to sustainable agricultural development and food security worldwide. For small island states like Trinidad and Tobago, resilient crop varieties will be essential for ensuring food availability and reducing reliance on imports.

CARDI has developed new varieties of cassava, sweet potato and yam that are climate-resilient and market-acceptable. Establishing new plant variety protection in accordance with UPOV 1991, these crops can allow breeders to

market and sell these crops in areas with similar climatic issues.

4.15 p.m.

This, in turn, can create jobs, increase the country's gross domestic product and help to diversify the economy in a very significant way. Outlined in the '25/'26 budget is an agricultural allocation plan, which targets food security by 2030 through modernization, reduced import reliance and export growth. A key element of this allocation plan is to cut the national food import bill by the year 2030 via integration, infrastructure upgrades and stakeholder partnerships. The endeavours of this allocation plan fall squarely on the shoulders of the 1991 Convention.

The need for better seed varieties and plant varieties by our local farmers is a critical part of being able to reduce the import bill and establishing security by 2030. Additionally, giving our farmers the ability to protect any new varieties they develop on the international market creates more sustainable growth and development for the local farmers. These factors are critical to establish in order to achieve the goals outlined in the agricultural plan.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, the emergence of a new cash crop, which has entered the Trinidad and Tobago market, is called the Wambugu apple. A new variety of apple, which has been adapted to thrive in tropical climates, has surfaced which has been imported from the African continent. Mr. Speaker, it is reported that this new cash crop, which has been in high demand due to its novelty and increased publicity, it has been echoed that one acre of land can produce up to 500,000 apples, and that could be produced annually, as noted by an article in the local newspaper. Mr. Speaker, so no longer will we have to spend our precious foreign exchange on importing apples.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: In fact, Mr. Speaker, there is a place beyond the lighthouse called Longdenville, and that place is where you have this project actually happening. Only this morning we made contact with the person who is, in fact, responsible for that project, and they have already harvested several hundred apples, Mr. Speaker, and they are coming in terms of the next six months for a further harvest. That is in your constituency, Caroni Central?

Mr. Lee: Yes, Longdenville.

Hon. S. Hosein: So, Mr. Speaker, we have very creative farmers in Trinidad and Tobago, and this piece of legislation is going to give them the protection that they deserve.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Trinidad and Tobago has long held the reputation for having some of the finest varieties of cocoa in the world. It is therefore good to note that the varieties of Trinitario were examined for new plant variety protection at the Trinidad and Tobago Intellectual Property Office, and I see some of the officers here from the IP Office—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein:—a very hard-working technical team, which comprises several experts. Mr. Speaker, what we can say is that very recently, we had launched the certification mark for the Trinitario cocoa in Trinidad and Tobago, something that was never done. It was a historical day for us in Trinidad and Tobago to market and tell the world the varieties that we really have right here. And, you know, Mr. Speaker, this Trinitario is a very, very famous product that we produce right here. My colleagues opposite, when they were in charge, left that industry to rot.

Through the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, and the Ministry of Land and Legal Affairs, and my colleague, Sen. Ratiram, we are trying to boost this industry, Mr. Speaker. Several of us in this Chamber enjoy chocolate. Would you know that some of the major brands of chocolate, like Lindt, for example, use what we call bulk cocoa, which is the cheap cocoa, and that is mass-produced on the continent of Africa. But in order to flavour that, now, they use the locally manufactured and harvested Trinitario cocoa to enhance the flavour of their product. This product is used all over the world, and it is this Government that gave that industry the protection that it deserves.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: In fact, Mr. Speaker, I was on a trip last year in November, and we happened to visit a very popular store in England—everyone knows Harrods—and I happened to have a meeting with the Managing Director of Harrods, and when I met with him, Mr. Speaker—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: For Landmark.

Hon. S. Hosein: Not for LandmarkTT, because we are building very high-quality homes that you soon can purchase yourself, Trincity/Maloney.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: In fact, Mr. Speaker, I was trying to market the product to the gentlemen, and he said, "Minister, do not say anymore"—and I hope I do not get in trouble for breaching the Standing Orders. He said, "You have a bloody good product." Those were his exact words. Those were his exact words, which means that we in Trinidad and Tobago, this Government, appreciate our local heritage—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein:—something my colleagues opposite did not, in fact, pay any

attention to.

Mr. Speaker, as I proceed, the UPOV system is designed to balance the interests of multiple stakeholders. Breeders receive protection and incentives to innovate whilst gaining access to improved varieties and higher productivity. Researchers retain the freedom to use protected varieties for further breeding. Consumers benefit from improved quality and food supply. National economies benefit from increased agricultural investment and trade.

The Government remains firmly committed to the development and protection of IP as the strategic tool for economic growth, innovation and competitiveness. This commitment extends to the protection of geographical indications—GI—and certification marks. For example, my colleague from Moruga/Tableland, they have the Moruga Hill rice there, very popular. They also have some very great varieties of pineapple in the Moruga area also. Jamaica was one of those jurisdictions that uses GI marks with respect to their Blue Mountain Coffee, which is very, very famous in terms of their export and so on.

So, these GIs, Mr. Speaker, are signs used on products that have a specific geographical origin and possess qualities or a reputation that are due to that origin, whilst certification marks are signs indicating that goods and services have been certified by an independent body in relation to one or more characteristics. An initiative such as the Trinitario cocoa certification mark, which we launched recently, and the protection of local GIs, reflect a broader strategy to leverage IP for national branding, export competitiveness and rural development. Together, these measures strengthen competition by distinguishing authentic Trinidad and Tobago products on the international market.

I am reliably informed, Mr. Speaker, that through the CARIFORUM IP

Rights and Innovation Project of the European Union Intellectual Property Office, there is an agreement by the EUIPO to provide technical assistance to Trinidad and Tobago through the TTIPO for the registration of the geographical indication for Trinidad and Tobago Trinitario cocoa, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: So that will benefit constituencies, such as Caroni Central—Mayaro has a lot of cocoa producers. We have a lot of farmers. I believe Princes Town also may have a few of those farmers, Mr. Speaker, and in Cedros also.

Mr. Speaker, taken as a whole, the Bill will support fair remuneration and further stimulate innovation throughout the agriculture sector. It will also contribute to cultural preservation, economic growth and stability, as well as the alignment with international standards, while striking the balance under the new plant variety law. This Bill, although few in clauses, is wide in scope and of significant national importance.

This Bill is borne out of the need to recalibrate our legal framework so that it resonates with the realities of today's technological developments and agricultural endeavours. As agricultural innovation continues to evolve in form, reach and commercial significance, the safeguards that uphold it must evolve in tandem. The legislation, therefore, redefines the boundaries of protection, expanding to all plant genes and species that can now be protected, and the different actors that can now also be considered breeders.

In so doing, it casts a wider shield over the fruits of creative labour. Simply put, the main clause changes protection available for new varieties of not only the specific species listed in the Schedule, but to now all, all, all plant species, and I will now go through the Bill clause by clause. Mr. Speaker, this is an exceedingly

technical piece of legislation with respect to what we are amending. And I must say that we would have collaborated with UPOV that is situated in Geneva, Switzerland. They would have also lent to the TTIPO technical assistance when drafting this particular piece of legislation. So, it is a good piece of law that we have introduced as a government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Clauses 1 to 3, Mr. Speaker, include the short title, the commencement and the interpretation.

Clause 4 amends the definition of the terms "breeder" and "Convention". The expanded definition of "breeder" would now include persons who have bred, or discovered, or developed a variety; their employers; persons who commissioned the work of persons who breed, discover or develop a variety; or the successors entitled of any of these categories of persons.

"The definition of 'Convention' would now include the date of adoption of the International Convention for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants in 1961…"—and the relevant revised dates of the Convention in 1972, 1978 and 1991.

Clause 5 inserts a new section 2A:

"...to provide for the application of the Act to all plant...species.

Clause 6 amends section 3 of the Act to provide for plant breeder's rights to be granted in respect of plant varieties of any genera or species."

This is a consequential amendment based on the insertion of the new section 2A.

"Clause 7 repeals and…"—replaces—"…section 4 of the Act. This amendment…"—considers that—"…a plant variety…"—is—"…new where the propagating or harvested material of the plant variety has not been sold,

or otherwise disposed of by the plant breeder, or with his consent, by certain time limits before the filing date of his application for a plant breeder's right.

Clause 8 repeals and substitutes section 6 of the Act. This amendment clarifies that a plant variety would be considered when it satisfies specific conditions.

"Clause 9 repeals section 8 of the Act."

The clause removes the requirement for the Minister to publish a list of all the plant species, because now all plants are protected prior, or the current law, Mr. Speaker, is this, that if you want to protect a particular species, the Minister, by Order, must publish which plant species. Now we are saying no to that. It will apply to all, all, all.

"Clause 10 amends section 9 of the Act to remove all references in the section to a successor in title of a plant breeder…"—as—"…the definition of 'breeder'…now include…"—a—"…successor in title of a plant breeder."

"Clause 11 repeals and substitutes section 10 of the Act…"

The new clause provides for:

"(a) the provisional protection of an applicant for the grant of a plant breeder's right during a particular period, and

(b) a plant breeder…"—can—"…be entitled to equitable remuneration from any person who has carried out acts, during a particular period, which require the plant breeder's authorisation under section 15 of the Act."

Clause 12 replaces the term "owner" in section 12(1) with "breeder", and the amendment to the definition of "breeder" includes references to the term "owner".

"Clause 13 repeals and substitutes section 15 of the Act and inserts sections

15, 15A and 15B. The new section 15 increases the number of acts which require the prior authorisation of the plant breeder, in respect of—

(a) the propagating material of a protected plant variety;

(b) harvested material obtained through unauthorised use of a protected plant variety; and

(c) products made directly from the harvested material obtained through unauthorised use of a protected plant variety."

The new section 15A introduces exceptions to the plant breeder's rights required under section 15. Moreover new section 15B provides for the exhaustion of a plant breeder's rights for materials of the protected variety, except in specific circumstances.

"Clause 14 repeals and substitutes section 17 of the Act. This…"—sets—"…plant breeder's right…for twenty years, and in the case of trees or vines for twenty-five years.

Clause 15 amends section 19 of the Act. This clause amends section 19(2) of the Act to provide the…"—reasons—"…by which the Controller of the Intellectual Property Office shall declare a plant breeder's right null and void at the request of any person. This clause also amends section 19(4) of the Act to provide the grounds by which the Controller of the Intellectual Property Office shall declare a plant breeder's right forfeit."

And the Controller of the IP Office will be the regulator if this piece of legislation.

"Clause 16 amends section…"—

4.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Member, before you go on to clause 16, it is now 4.29.40 p.m. I propose to take a half-hour break for tea this afternoon. We will return at 5.00.

But before we do so, before we suspend, there are two things: I want to tell Members, and remind all Members, that all Members are invited to the Divali function that we are having outside when the House is adjourned this afternoon. I want to remind all Members that they are invited. And can I just ask the entire House to join me in wishing the Member for Chaguanas East a happy birthday.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: We will return at 5.00, thank you very much.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for Barataria/San Juan—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker:—you have four more minutes of original speaking time. Would you require your additional 15 minutes?

Hon. S. Hosein: Yes, please, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Now that everybody has refreshed themselves with cooked plants, let us proceed, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was on clause 16 before we broke for tea, and clause 16 amends section 22 of the Act by strengthening the right of priority and the evidence requirements for applicants.

> The amended—"…section 22(1) of the Act…"—requires that—"…an applicant for the protection of a plant variety who wishes to make use of…"—their right of—"…priority…"—shall—"…also submit to the…"—IP—"…Office samples or other evidence that the plant variety is the same in both applications. This clause also amends section 22(4) of the Act to provide for the length of time that an applicant shall be entitled to furnish

the…"—IP—"…Office with information, documents or material for the purpose of the examination of the application and the plant variety under sections 30 and 31 of the Act."

Clause 17 amends section 24 of the Act and sets out the rules for designation, registration and use of variety denominations as well as aligning the terminology. The amended clause 17 includes the following, (1) which:

"(1) Provides that a plant variety…"—shall be—"…designated by a denomination which will be its generic designation."

(1A) Provides that:

"Subject to section 27 of the Act, no rights in a variety denomination shall hamper free use of it in connection with a plant variety, even after the expiration of the plant breeder's rights;

(3)(c) and (4) adjust the terminology from—"State" and "State party to the Convention'…"—to—"…'Contracting Party', as defined in section 2 of the Act."

It also:

"(d) provides that the Intellectual Property Office shall refuse to register the variety denomination or require the plant breeder to propose another denomination within a prescribed period where the variety denomination does not meet the requirements of sections 24(2) and (3) of the Act; and

It requires—"…a variety denomination to be registered by the…"—IP—"…Office at the same time that the plant breeder's right is granted.

Clause 18 amends section 25 of the Act."

Through—"…this amendment, upon the publication of a periodical required

under section 25 of the Act, any Authority of a Contracting Party to the 1991…Convention may address its observations on the registration of a variety denomination to the…"—IP—"…Office.

Clause 19 amends section 27 of the Act."

The new section 27(2):

"...provides that the Controller...shall require a plant breeder to submit another denomination for a plant variety, in instances where, by reason of a right of priority, the use of the denomination is forbidden to a person who is obliged to use the denomination in accordance with section 26(1) of the Act.

Clause 20 amends section 31 of the Act."

This clause—

"(a) amends section 31(1) of the Act…"—demanding—"…the Controller…"—to—"…reject an application where the plant variety does not fulfil the conditions under sections 3 to 9 of the Act."

It also:

"(b) amends section 31(4) of the Act..."—to empower—"...the Controller…"—to—"…grow the plant variety or carry out other necessary tests or cause the same to be done where the Controller determines that it is expedient to do so in the course of an examination of an application; and"—shall take into account the results of the tests already carried out.

And it:

"Repeals section 31(8) and (9) of the Act.

"Clause 21 repeals and substitutes Part X of the Act to remove the process for oppositions against a grant of a plant breeder's right and provide for a process for the invalidation of the grant of a plant breeder's right by the

Court.

Clause 22 amends section 34(1) of the Act to require that proceedings for the forfeiture of a plant breeder's rights shall be initiated by the Controller...or a third…"—party—"…if any of the conditions under section 19(4)...are fulfilled.

Section 23 amends section 36(1) of the Act. This is a consequential amendment based on the amendment to Part X of the Act to provide for process for the invalidation of the grant of a plant breeder's right by the Court.

Clause 24 amends section 44 of the Act. This clause amends section 44(4) and (5) of the Act to provide for the payment of equitable remuneration by the holder of a compulsory license under section 44 of the Act to the licensor.

Clause 25 amends section 46(a) of the Act."

This amendment is—

"…based on the amendment to Part X of the Act to provide for a process for the invalidation of a grant of a plant breeder's rights by the court.

"Clause 26 is a savings and transitional clause…"—which ensures continuity for existing orders and applications.

"This clause provides that the Protection of the New Plant Varieties Order, Chap. 82:75 shall continue in force for one year from the date of commencement of this Act. This clause also provides that…"—the—"...plant variety belonging to a genus or species not listed in the Protection of…Plant Varieties…"—Orders—"…shall be considered to satisfy the condition of novelty under section 4 of the Act under certain conditions.

The latter only applies for"—the—"applications for…plant breeder's right that are filed within one year from the date of commencement of the Act.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is a very non-contentious piece of legislation. This piece of legislation will give protection to farmers, innovators, and breeders. Madam Deputy Speaker, this is a piece of legislation that I am proud that I now commend to this House for consideration. I thank you very much, and I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for Arima.

Mrs. Penelope Beckles-Robinson (*Arima*): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. And, of course, I joined this debate. And I would like to say that, as the honourable Minister just indicated in going through the clauses, this Bill has 26 clauses. So, it is not really a very long Bill. And as the Minister indicated, it is a very technical Bill. And the Government stated that they are basically giving a technical update to bring our law in line with international standards. This Bill, of course, is all about seed.

And seed is not necessarily a technical matter, but it's all about the beginning of food, whether it is the farmer from Moruga, Tableland, Fishing Pond, any part of Trinidad and Tobago, Mason Hall, carries one season's work into the next. Seed is how knowledge passes from one generation of farmers to another. So, let me say at the outset where the Opposition stands so that there is no misunderstanding. We are not against plant breeders. We are not against science. We are not against innovation. We are not against investment or exports. Trinidad and Tobago has protected breeders since 1997. And we support that protection.

The Bill moves us from one international treaty to another. And from the 1978

version of the Plant Variety Convention to the 1991 version. And the question I will put to this House again and again is a simple one. What more to do, or shall I say differently, what more do we get from the 1991 version that we did not already have? And who pays for it? That is the question we are asking. Madam Deputy Speaker, I will show that the answer to the question has not been given. That is the first one. And I will show that the answer to the second question is farmers, small farmers, communities in Trinidad and Tobago who have kept our varieties alive for generations and who were not asked.

I will show that no treaty requires this, Bill. That the Bill goes further than even the 1991 treaty requires. The United Nations warned us as it relates to this very model, and interestingly, Madam Deputy Speaker, the United Nations, in dealing with this matter, dealt with it two days before the Senate voted. And Trinidad and Tobago has binding obligations to its farmers that this Bill does not even mention. And I will ask this House to do what the Senate did not, and that is to pause, listen to those whose lives this law will govern, and we are making it very clear that our request is to send this Bill to a joint select committee.

Madam Deputy Speaker, let me begin by giving plant variety protection its due because it deserves it. We all know that breeding a new variety takes years. A breeder crosses, selects, tests, discards, and tests again. At the end of that work, there is something of real value. A cocoa that resists disease, a bean that matures faster, a crop that survives drought. Without some protection, anyone could take that work the day it is released, multiply it and sell it, and the breeder who spent 10 years discovering that can find that the breeder will get absolutely nothing. This is the case for plant breeders' rights, and it is a fair case. A breeder's right says for a limited time, "If you want to multiply and sell my variety commercially", very

simple, "You need my permission."

We have people in this country who do this kind of work and do it very well. I can only make reference to the Cocoa Research Centre at the University of the West Indies, which holds one of the most important cocoa collections in the world. Our horticulturists have bred anthuriums of international standards, and we know that very often at Chelsea, when there are the awards that Trinidad and Tobago almost every year is successful. The Ministry of Agriculture's own research stations developed improved varieties for our farmers. Those people deserve the protection of the law. So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I accept the purpose. Protection encourages breeding. Protection can attract investment. Protection can help bring improved varieties to our farmers. None of that is in dispute.

Madam Deputy Speaker, here is what the Government has not told the country plainly. The fact is that we are aware that the protection of which I speak already exists. The Protection of New Plant Varieties Act came into force on the 1st of December, 1997. Trinidad and Tobago joined the International Union for Plant Variety Protection, UPOV, under the 1978 Convention, and became a member on the 30th of January, 1998. For almost 30 years, a breeder of a new variety in this country has been able to apply for a private right over it. The Minister of Land and Legal Affairs, the hon. Saddam Hosein, told the other place that the Intellectual Property Office examined 11 Trinitario cocoa varieties and granted protection to eight. Madam Deputy Speaker, if that is so, I welcome it. But notice what it proves. Cocoa is already protected under the existing law.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: And that protection has been granted since 1978. The Government's own best example shows that the law we have already worked,

works for the purpose of what the Government says it wants. The Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, the hon. Ravi Ratiram, spoke of a black-eyed pea that matures in 65 days instead of 90 days. Of course, we congratulate the researchers, but the black-eyed peas are Vigna beans, and Vigna beans are already on the list protected by the existing Order.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: So, nothing in that achievement is needed in this Bill. And I must put on record what UPOV's own statistics show, compiled from returns made by our own Government. In every year for which figures are reported up to 2024, no application and no grants in Trinidad and Tobago, and if you can refer to the UPOV Council, C/50/7, page 11. The barrier to local breeding in this country has never been the strength of the breeders' rights.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this Parliament has seen this piece of legislation, or this particular issue, way back, as the Minister said, and that was in 1997. In 1997, we chose the 1978 Convention deliberately, and we will say why. In the Senate, of the 6th of March 1997, Sen. Vimala Tota-Maharaj, speaking for the Government, told the country that Trinidad and Tobago was set on course to develop the necessary legislative and institutional frameworks for our plant genetic resources, including the conservation of farmers' varieties and the fair sharing of benefits.

5.15 p.m.

And in the very House, on the 21st of March 1997, the Minister of Legal Affairs explained the choice, and at that time, it was the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, now Prime Minister. And if I may quote with your leave:

> "The 1991 revision of the Convention, also eroded farmers' privilege to use their harvested material…"

The then Minister of Legal Affairs indicated that the 1991 Convention confined its use to material produced on their own holdings, and to be used only for their own holdings. The Minister continued:

> "If we acceded to the 1991 Convention, we would not be able to retain the farmers' privilege that we have spoken about."

I, of course, could not put it better, and I totally agree with what the Minister said at the time. The own holding limit, the Prime Minister rejected in 1997, is exactly what clause13 of the Bill is now prohibiting.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: I raise it because it was right then, and nothing the Government has said explains why it is wrong now. And let me be fair—the pressure to move to 1991 has crossed administrations. The Intellectual Property Office promoted it under the last government too. That is precisely why it must be judged on evidence and not just on what is proposed. What has changed since 1997? What evidence does the Government have that the farmers' privilege no longer matters? We have heard none. And I am asking the hon. Minister to give us that kind of information so we can be comfortable that that was properly taken into consideration.

Madam Deputy Speaker, so the question is not whether to protect breeders—we do, as I have already demonstrated. The question is what more we would get by moving to 1991? Let that be the simple question. And let me take the changes one at a time, and for each one ask the same three things: What changes? What do we gain? And who pays? Today, the Act covers the plant groups the Minister listed: orchids, bromeliads, emporiums, heliconias, cocoa and its family, pigeon peas and vigna beans.

Clauses 5, 6 and 9 extend the protection to every plant and species on the day the Act comes into force and repeal the Minister's power to choose. So what do we gain? The Government says a breeder of hot peppers, root crops, or citrus will now be able to protect a new variety. Madam Deputy Speaker, they could have done that yesterday. Because section 8 of the existing Act already allows the Minister to add any species to the list by Order. Section 8 of the existing Act already allows the Minister to add the species to the list by Order. If there is a breeder of hot peppers waiting for protection under the existing legislation, all the Minister has to do is sign that Order. No new treaty is needed. No new legislation is needed. And I ask the hon. Minister to tell me if what I am saying is false.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Who pays? The Intellectual Property Office must not examine claims over any plant that grows in this country from the first day, with no national testing station and no record of varieties our farmers already grew. That is how a variety that is old in the village becomes new in the registry. What changes as it relates to reproduction? Today, the breeder's permission is needed for:

"(a) the production for purposes of commercial marketing;

(b) the offering for sale…"—as well as for—

"(c) the marketing,"

That is section 15 of the Act. A farmer who saves seeds and plants it again is outside of this altogether. Under clause 13, the breeder's permission is needed for:

"(a) production or reproduction…"—of any kind for—

"(d) conditioning for…

(e) exporting…"—for—

"(f) importing…"—as well as for—

"(g) stocking..."

So, who gains? The breeder can now control what a farmer does with his seed after the harvest. Who pays? The farmer pays. That is the heart of the Bill. Saving seed is no longer a freedom; it becomes a permission granted back by the exception under the limits the Minister will set later. As it relates to harvest and the product, what changes? Under the new section 15, the breeder's rights can follow the seed into harvest, and then into products made directly from the harvest. Who gains? Stronger enforcement from the rights holders further down the Chain. Who pays? The processor, the exporter, the nursery, and the agro processor.

Think of cocoa. If the budwood of a protected variety was propagated without a license, the claim can follow the beans, and then the products made from them. Our chocolate makers and exporters carry that risk. Close copies: What changes? The right extends to essentially derived varieties—varieties bred mainly from a protected one. What do we gain? It stops someone from making a cosmetic change to another breeder's work and calling it new. That is a fair aim, and I accept that. But who pays? Our own public breeders—the Cocoa Research Centre, the Ministry's station, and our university. Before the release of a variety developed from a protected material, they will need to be sure that they are not infringing someone else's rights. Longer protection: What change? Fifteen years now becomes 20. Eighteen years for trees and vines now becomes 25. What do we gain? A longer period of royalties for the rights holders. Who pays? Those, of course, who pay for the royalties.

For cocoa and citrus, a 25-year right covers most of the productive life of an orchard. No more seed from abroad without permission. What changes? Under

the new section 15(b), once a protected variety is sold abroad, it still cannot be brought into Trinidad and Tobago without the breeder's permission. Who pays? The farmer who might have found the same seed cheaper elsewhere. No assessment has been published of what this does to the price of the seed.

The public's right to object: What changes? Today, any person can object to a grant before it is made, and that objection can be made within three months for a fee of $150. Clause 21 abolishes that. The only route left is the High Court after that right has been granted. And I ask myself why the Government would remove this section and why the Government would now include the High Court, when we understand how difficult it is for matters to be completed within a reasonable time? What do we gain? Nothing. Nothing as far as I am concerned.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: The only beneficiary is the applicant who would rather not face the objection. So, I am asking the hon. Minister if he can tell us and share with us why it is that the court is the medium that you want to use for this section. Madam Deputy Speaker, let us put all of these together. In each case, the gain goes to the holder of the right. In each case, the cost falls onto the farmer, processor, public breeder, and eventually, of course, the public. Who will hold these rights? Section 12 of the Act allows any "national or resident" of UPOV to apply. That is as it should be under the treaty. But we should be clear about the market these rights operate in. The United Nations report—and that is the report that this Government should pay very close attention to—speaks about four companies: Bayer, Corteva, Syngenta, and BASF—control more than half of the global seed market of some US $81 billion, and the 10 largest control 70per cent. I, of course, am not making any allegations, but I say only that when you open

every crop to private claims, the applicant's best place to use that opening is clearly not going to be our small farmers.

The Government says investment will follow. Madam Deputy Speaker, the most thorough comparative study of countries in our position found that claims are not necessarily supported empirically. China, for example, still under the 1978 convention, has the largest number of plant variety applications in the world. New Zealand's own Government found no evidence that it was missing out on new varieties staying with the 1978 legislation. So, I ask the Minister directly: Where is the assessment? What will this cost our farmers in seed? What will it cost the country in royalties paid abroad? Foreign exchange—what will it do to the price of food? If the Government has done that work, please, we are looking forward to that kind of information and analysis. That will help us to understand why the Government is taking this particular position.

The Government will say these are rules of the 1991 convention. If we want to join, we must accept them. So let us test that. First, nothing requires us to join, so the Government—there must be some reason why the Government is bringing this piece of legislation. I mean, really, we have not gotten any explanation as to what the reason is. The World Trade Organization requires plant variety protection, but Article27.3b of its intellectual property agreement lets each country design its own system. It does not mention UPOV. Our agreement with Europe, Article149 of the Economic Partnership Agreement, says only that we:

"...shall consider acceding to…"—the 1991 convention.

And in the same Article, it protects the right of farmers:

"…to save, use, and exchange…seed…"

Consider, Madam Deputy Speaker, not accede. And second, the Bill goes further

than even the 1991 convention requires. Let me list the choices this Government made that the treaty did not make for it. One, new section 15(4) extends the breeder's right to:

"(c) products made directly from the harvested..."

Article14(3) of the 1991 convention says that a country may do this. It is optional. This Government chose to do it. Clause21 abolishes the public's right to object before a grant. Nothing in the 1991 convention requires that. The European Union, which itself is a member of the 1991 convention, still allows objections before grants in its own system.

I am very fascinated as to why the Government would not allow this objection. New section 32(2) gives the High Court grounds to cancel a right that go beyond those Article 21 of the convention allows. And it joins the four grounds with the word "and" so that a farmer challenging a wrongful grant must prove all four at once. That is not a treaty requirement. In my humble view, that has to be a drafting error, and it falls on the farmer. Article3 of the convention gives a country already under the 1978 convention five years to extend protection to every species. This Bill does it on the first day and repeals the Minister's power to phase it in. And the question I ask myself: If the 1978 convention talked about five years to extend the protection to every species, why is it that this Bill does it on the first day? Very interesting.

5.30 p.m.

Clause26 opens a one-year window in which varieties already sold in Trinidad and Tobago for up to four years, six for trees and vines can still be treated as new—and I am referring to Article 6(2), which says a country may do this, again, optional. In our case, we did not accept the "may".

Madam Deputy Speaker, every one of these choices tilts in the balance the same way towards the holder of the right and away from the farmer and the public, these are not obligations; these are decisions. What are those limits? We do not know. Section 15A leaves them to regulations. Those regulations will be made by the Minister, and those regulations are made under section 46 of the Act, and with no parliamentary procedure at all, there is not even negative resolution. There is no affirmative resolution. There is absolutely nothing. And which Minister? The Act defines the Minister as the Minister with responsibility for legal affairs, not the Minister of Agriculture.

The most important decision for every farmer in this country: How much seed they may save, on what crops, on what conditions, on what payment, will be made by the Minister who is not responsible for agriculture in Regulations in this House that will never be debated.

The Bill does not say what happens between the day it comes into force and the day those regulations are being made. So, the assumption has to be that the Government clearly did not think that important. It does not mention small farmers not once. There is no definition of a small farmer, no threshold, no exemption from royalties, and no protection for a farmer already growing a variety before someone else registered.

The Minister spoke about the Moruga Hill Rice farmers, but of course, if we think of them kept alive by families for generations, we know of the Tobago blue dasheen. That knowledge, in many cases, has never been written in any registry. Clause 4 says a:

> "…breeder…"—is anyone—"who…bred, or discovered and developed a variety." Discovered.

Clause 26 says a variety sold here for up to four years can still be treated as new. Clause 21 takes away the cheap right to object. But those together, and tell me what protects the Moruga farmer or the Tobago blue dasheen farmer if someone takes the material from her field, develops it, and then registers it.

What we owe our farmers in law? Madam Deputy Speaker, this is another side of the ledger, and the Government has not mentioned it once. Trinidad and Tobago is bound by the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. We acceded; it has been in force since 2005. Article 9 of the treaty says that:

> "…the responsibility for realizing Farmers' Rights…rests with national governments."

It requires us to protect farmers' traditional knowledge, to give them a fair share of benefits when their plant resources are used, and to give them a voice in national decision making, and it says at Article 9 that:

> "Nothing in…"—it—"…limit any rights that farmers have to save, use, exchange and sell from farm-saved seed..."

We have been bound by this same international covenant on economic and social cultural rights, and that has been the case since 1978. Article 11 is the right to food. The United Nations Committee that interprets it says that: A state must not take measures to prevent existing access, and that any deliberate step backwards must be fully justified. This Bill takes away an existing freedom, and I ask my colleague, what is the justification?

We are also bound by the Convention on Biological Diversity, Article 8 (j), to respect the knowledge of local communities and encourage the fair sharing of benefits. In 2018, Trinidad and Tobago voted with the General Assembly at the

United Nations on the Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas, whose Article 19 recognizes the right to save, use, exchange, and sell farm-saved seeds. Our report to the Food and Agricultural Organisation recorded that no legislation had been developed to give effect to farmers' rights.

Twenty-nine years ago, this Parliament promised that the farmers' side of this law would be built. It was never done, and now the Government comes back to enlarge the breeder side for a second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member, you have one more minute of original speaking time.

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Yes. I have kindly asked for the—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: So, this Bill gives full effect to a treaty we are not bound by. It gives no effect, not one clause to the treaties we are bound by. That is not modernization, that is building one side of the bridge and calling it a crossing.

The United Nations told us and told us in time on the 16th of September, 2026, and as I said, that is just recently, their experts warn that laws penalizing farmers and systems threaten global food supply. Their report to the Human Rights Council recommended that states refrain, refrain, refrain from implementing the 1991 Act—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson:—and laws that restrict farmers' privilege to save, exchange, and sell protected varieties.

This is, of course, we know this is not binding law, and UPOV disagrees. I say so plainly, but a government asking Parliament to vote on this treaty 48 hours later had a duty to put both views before the Parliament, and, in my humble view and in that of the Opposition, they put only one view.

The Minister of Land and Legal Affairs told the Senate that this Bill was developed in consultation with the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute, and the World Intellectual Property Organization and UPOV. UPOV, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Government consulted UPOV on whether we should join UPOV. That is like asking the landlord whether you should sign your lease. I, of course, have no quarrel with those institutions. They have their expertise and their mandate, but they are not the people who live under this law or in this country. So, let me ask the Government plainly: Who else did the Government ask?

Were the farmers' organizations of Trinidad and Tobago consulted, and if so, which ones? Could the Government provide the dates of those consultations? Could the Government indicate whether there were any recommendations from the farmers? Did they suggest any changes? Did they consult the Tobago House of Assembly? Agriculture is one of the Assembly's responsibilities, if so, could the Government share with us what are the views of the Tobago House of Assembly? Because we know that Tobago, traditionally, as I said, the blue dasheen is one, but there are many others that we can speak about.

The hon. Minister spoke about the farmers, the Hill Rice farmers from Moruga. So let the Minister tell us whether they spoke with them. Let us find out whether you spoke with the same cocoa farmers from the Central Range. You mentioned several cocoa farmers and several areas. Tell us if you spoke to any of

them, and tell us what views. Tell us whether you spoke to the First Peoples. Tell us whether you spoke to the agro processors. This is a very important piece of legislation. Tell us where did you go? Did you go to Blanchisseuse? Did you go to Guayaguayare, Lopinot, Central? I mean, there are persons known for all sorts of different seeds and all sorts of development. This is an important area, and I am certain that if the hon. Minister spoke with the Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs, he would have gotten access to that information.

The Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, the hon. Ravi Ratiram, told the Senate that farmers were consulted. So, of course, we await the information, and we hope that will be provided to us shortly. We do not see consultation as a courtesy in this matter. We see consultation as something that is desirable. Article 9.2 of the Plant Treaty, which binds us, requires that farmers have:

"…the right to participate in making decisions, at the national level on…"—these very—"…matters…"

So, again, we, being a signatory to that treaty, we would like to hear what is the position of the Government and look at what consultation has been done elsewhere. Of course, I would not spend time, but there are several countries—Norway being one—the lack of consultation resulted in court proceedings—Colombia as well, and the government, of course, understood and recognized the rights of farmers.

So let me therefore ask the Government. Let me deal with what the Government will say in reply. They will say that "unprotected local varieties are not affected", and that is true and I say so. But the risk lies in what can now be claimed under—and I make reference to clauses 4 and 26—and in protected varieties distributed through the Government's own programme, which farmers

will now save under conditions they have never seen. They will say that "an old variety cannot be protected because protection requires novelty".

When we look at section 4, novelty is all about whether the breeder sold the variety, and not about whether the variety is old. Clause 26 deems a variety sold here for four years to be new. The only safeguard left is that the variety must be distinct from what is common knowledge. Whose knowledge, recorded where, we have no register of our farmers' varieties, and that is something that is suggested. That is why we ask for one. They will say that, "the High Court is a better forum for an objection", but better for whom? Better for whom? The persons from Moruga, the persons from Tobago, the persons from Blanchisseuse and the several places that were mentioned by the hon. Member.

What do we ask? As I indicated, we ask that this Bill, having regard to all that I spoke about, should be sent before a joint select committee that would allow for contributions by the farmers' organizations, by the Tobago House of Assembly, by the university, by the First Peoples, by the Moruga Hill Rice farmers. Second, if the Government will not do that, then there are certain amendments that we are going to recommend. Third, give this House undertakings on the record, a human rights and food security assessment before the Act is proclaimed.

The last matter that I want to deal with, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that the hon. Member, in his contribution, said that this Government allowed the cocoa industry to rot. Let me just say to the hon. Minister that I am sure that if the Minister capitalizes on the information that he would have in his Ministry, he will realize that almost every year Trinidad and Tobago wins some award as it relates to the cocoa industry. If I could just ask you to read this article—Cocoa Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago.

> "'In so many ways you can say Trinidad gave cocoa to the world…Most of the cocoa varieties grown around the world were distributed largely from Trinidad. That is why Trinidad is known internationally, wherever cocoa is produced, as the home of cocoa.'"

That same article says that:

> The "…Cocoa Research Centre (CRC) has championed the historic role local cocoa has made since the 18th century, from additions to Cadbury chocolates to the genetic materials that were exported to populate cocoa estates…"—in the—"…British Commonwealth."

The interesting thing is that in 2021, and this is not so long ago, Trinidad and Tobago winners were announced online. Winthrop Harewood of Tableland won that award—International Cocoa Excellence Award, and Annette Mills of Aripo winning Silver, and farmers from Four Roads, Tamana Cocoa Association receiving Bronze.

So, you know, I took note of the fact that the hon. Minister was doing very well, and made it very clear that it is a very technical piece of legislation. The only time that he deviated from his script was to criticize the PNM and claiming that we allowed the cocoa industry to rot, and that is so unfortunate.

5.45 p.m.

I want to say to the hon. Minister that the awards that Trinidad has been receiving for the Trinitario cocoa goes—I mean, I do not even want to say, but it continues almost year after year. As a matter of fact, I want to share a personal experience. I went to a meeting some years ago in Belgium. Belgium has a cocoa museum, and a lecture was being given on the benefits, the qualities of Trinidad and Tobago cocoa. That is how far we go. So, to persons like Annette Mills and

Harewood from Tabaquite and Heights of Aripo, we should celebrate persons like that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: I want to go further to say that on February 08, 2025, the Government of the Republic of Trinidad, through the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, distributed some $11.2 million to 116 farmers, and the Government provided $42 million in grant funding for 435 recipients, which included cocoa farmers. And, of course, delivering the feature address at the time was the hon. Stuart Young, Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister. The Minister highlighted the role of technology in modernizing agriculture of which cocoa was one.

I want to also refer to the fact that—and, again, this is a project from the IDB. How much more time do I have?

Madam Deputy Speaker: [*Inaudible*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: Okay. Right. They speak about technical cooperation in the sum of US $949,000, agriculture and rural development, and specifically, investors through a bundled investment package of cocoa, carbon, community, thus providing not only a financial return on investment, but also the environment and social returns. I am aware that there are several farmers involved in the cocoa industry that received grants by way of the agreement between the IDB and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, and that is because in recognition of the quality of cocoa that we produced, the IDB signed an agreement with the Government, and many farmers applied to the IDB to receive a grant to continue to develop cocoa.

So, you know, it is just unfortunate that the Minister cannot help it, that he

must find a way, as usual, to try and criticize the last Government—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson:—and give the impression that we have done nothing for agriculture. But I want to let him know that that is furthest from the truth and the evidence is there to support all the efforts.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Beckles-Robinson: So, Madam Deputy Speaker, in 1997, this Parliament made a choice; it chose to protect breeders and to give the farmers freedom to save their seeds. The Minister who explained that choice to this House at that time was the hon. Prime Minister.

Nothing has been shown to this House that makes it wrong now; no evidence of need, no assessment of cost, no consultation with the people whose seed this is, and no answer to the question I have asked for the entire afternoon: What more do we get from this 1991, and who pays? Who pays? The farmers pay; the country pays. The Opposition will not support a law that protects the breeder and the farmer both. We will not support a law that protects one by taking from the other. In its present form, we cannot support this Bill. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: 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. Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. Madam Deputy Speaker, when I listened to the Member for Arima, there is one quote that came to my head, and that is, "A rose by any other name is still a rose." Because when I listened to the

Member for Arima, it could only be that a "Rose" wrote that speech, because it was a copy and paste of what the exact contribution of Sen. Margaret Rose was in the other place—

Hon. Members: "Ohhh".

Hon. S. Hosein:—point for point. In my wind up, I would have debunked every single one of those ridiculous submissions being made by the Senator.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: The Member for Arima, who is aspiring to be Prime Minister of this country, "not everything somebody push in front yuh, yuh have to read, yuh know".

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: You must sit down, you must analyze it, you must digest it and determine whether or not it makes sense for you to repeat, because you have adopted that as your own words in this House.

Those submissions were bereft of any single legal logic whatsoever, Madam Deputy Speaker. It was bereft. I would encourage the Member, let us just read the title of the Bill, because they are frightening people, you know. They are frightening farmers. They are saying, "What about the people with the Moruga Hill rice? They will have to pay money" and "What about the existing cocoa farmers?" The name of the legislation is "Protection of New Plant Varieties"—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein:—and if the Member does not know what "new" means, you could Google it. The Cambridge Dictionary says "new" means:

> "recently created or having started to exist recently…"

These things have been existing decades ago, so they fall outside of the protection

of this piece of legislation, so stop the fearmongering. Stop it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Madam Deputy Speaker, they will support nothing. We brought an amendment here to save the lives of children, and they voted "no".

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Their behaviour a while ago, Madam Deputy Speaker, every single vote that the Government called recently, today, they voted—what?—"no". They will vote for nothing good for this country, Madam Deputy Speaker. We are here trying to protect innovators, creators, farmers, and the Member stand up and says, "No," because—what?—you got a script that somebody wrote for you that you did not even understand. The Member did not even understand. She did not understand. Then she says, "What is new?", that I indicated that the IP Office protected seven varieties of cocoa, and we have the certification mark, and this was already protected in the legislation. You see, the Member does not understand intellectual property law because it involves intellect.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it goes like this, a certification mark is much different from the protection being given under the new plant varieties law. Under this, this is like royalty. So, if somebody sings a song and the song is played on the airwaves, it is played in clubs, and so on, that person, the creator, and so on, the composer, they get money for that.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

In the similar situation here, if somebody has an innovation of a particular new plant variety or species, that person now can monetize that. So, for example—let us just give an example that somebody invents—I "doh" know—a pink banana, or something like that, that inventor, if anybody wants to use it, he

will in fact get that particular protection. But if the PNM gets their way, that person's work can be used in any sphere whatsoever without that person earning any revenue, and what is your argument with that? What is your argument with that particular point, Mr. Speaker?

You see, my friends opposite do not understand copyright law. They do not understand protection. They do not understand intellectual property. I want to take them to a *Guardian* article, and the article says this:

"US record label wants to sue PNM for using Prince Swanny song"

This is a 2026 article, 11th of January, 2026. They were in a campaign—Mr. Speaker, the PNM was in a campaign and using somebody else's song, breaching copyright, and the man had to write them and say, "Aye, stop using meh song, yuh know." They have no respect whatsoever for intellectual property. They have no respect whatsoever for it. And then you all want to have the moral authority to stand in this House and say we cannot protect creators, breeders, and so on—we cannot protect them, Mr. Speaker? We are here protecting every single species of plant.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: You see, the Member keeps asking this question, "What more do we get from 1991?" Well, let us look at the existing law. The existing law simply says this, that if you have plants, they must be protected, only those that are pursuant to an Order. So, there is a limited list. If we move towards 1991, there is no need for an Order anymore, everybody gets protected. When UNC wins, everybody wins.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: And that is an original song by the way.

Hon. S. Hosein: And that is an original song. "We eh thief nobody copyright for dat eh". You see, and they keep talking about that they do so much for agriculture. In their 10 years that they were here, "dey bring two yam seed from Ghana and calling dat dey going to boost the agricultural industry and up to now, we cyah get yam from it". We cannot get yam. So, Mr. Speaker, it is so difficult to understand the submissions being made by my friends opposite.

Then the Member said—but I want to get into that protection, because I see the hon. Prime Minister is with us now, who can take motherhood of this particular piece of legislation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Because as Minister of Legal Affairs, this was her law that she passed, and as Prime Minister, she is here to amend it to give further protection, Mr. Speaker; further protection.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: But when we departed office in that 2004 period, my friends opposite were in power, "dey eh protect no cocoa plants". They did not think about protecting any of the Moruga Hill rice, the pineapple, no. You know what they protected, Mr. Speaker? Legal Notice 138 signed by Danny Montano. They protected the heliconia. They protected the balisier. This is in black and white; an Order published on the 9th of July, 2004. They were protecting the balisier and nothing else, and then come here to talk about, "What new?" We are protecting every single plant species; every single one. That is what is new.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: And then, as a seasoned practitioner, the Member then makes an argument that there are no longer any objection procedures, and so on, under the

legislation. Now, that is totally false and misleading; totally false and misleading. If the Member bothered to depart from the prepared script and go to the Bill itself and look at clause 21, it has an entire area or part that deals with "invalidation". That "invalidation", it says that:

> "An interested person may apply to the Court for the invalidation of the grant of a plant breeder's right."

So, anybody can go to the High Court; you have an audience before the High Court in order to protect your rights, if you believe it is being infringed.

It goes further. The Member said, "Well, why not leave it at the IP Office?" You know why? When you deal with matters of copyright and trademark and intellectual property, you want something called "injunctive relief". You want somebody to stop breaching your trademark immediately. You want to maintain the status quo. The Controller of the IP Office has no jurisdiction to grant that. That is an inherent jurisdiction of the High Court of Trinidad and Tobago—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein:—and we are rightly placing your objections before a High Court judge, so that judge, he or she, can give injunctive relief, therefore protecting the person's intellectual property and rights. So, I do not understand how the Member for Arima could not understand that very simple, simple fundamental argument that is placed in this piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Member also talked about other things. I wish not to get to those matters.

6.00 p.m.

But, Mr. Speaker, this particular Bill, we consulted with the experts. My friends wanted to go to a JSC. I do not know what more they could tell us. What

more they could say to us. We have consulted with the experts on this matter.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein:—from UPOV, from WIPO, from the Intellectual Property Office. If the Member bothered to go on the website of the IP Office, she would see that there were public consultations being done virtually, and so on, with other jurisdictions. So, Mr. Speaker, this Bill is properly drafted. It is properly before this House. I want to thank, again, the hardworking members of the IP Office.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: I am here to continue the good work of, I dare say, the best Minister of Legal Affairs. I am now walking in the footsteps of the best Minister of Legal Affairs, the hon. Member for Siparia.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, I commend this piece of legislation for passage before this House. I beg to move. I thank you very much.

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 10 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 11.

Mr. Chairman: Yes. Port of Spain South.

Mr. Scotland SC: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, we on this side have submitted some amendments, which we say will strengthen the farmers' rights.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah. Before you start, Port of Spain South, let me just put it, and then you will propose your amendment.

Mr. Scotland SC: Yes, please.

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

Mr. Chairman: Port of Spain South.

Mr. Scotland SC: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, in keeping with the contribution by the hon. Member for Arima, we have made some suggested amendments that will try to ensure the strengthening of rights of the plant breeders and not weaken them. In that regard, we respectfully submit that, clause 11, we insert a new subsection after subsection 10(3), which will read as follows:

"'(4) The Office shall maintain an accessible public register of applications for, and grants of, plant breeders' rights, containing such particulars as may be prescribed, including…denomination of …variety, the identity of the applicant or holder, the date of the application and the status of the application or right.

(5) The Office shall publish notice of applications in a manner reasonably calculated to inform farmers, farmers' organisations and other interested persons of the proposed grant of a plant breeder's right.

(6) The notice shall specify the procedure and any applicable period within which information or observations may be submitted to the Office concerning the eligibility of the applicant or the fulfilment of the statutory requirements for protection.'"

Mr. Speaker, this will create some more transparency and will give interested parties at least some sort of notice as to what is taking place. We think it could only strengthen this Bill if it is that the raison d'être of the Bill is what the hon. Minister said that it is. We so recommend before your committee.

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Mr. Hosein: Mr. Chairman, I looked at the amendments to clause 11. The Government is in a position to reject this amendment. If my friend looks at the parent Act, in particular section 47, it already sets up a register of plant breeders' rights, which is already the law. What the amendment is attempting to do is create a register. So, it is already part of the law, Mr. Chairman. So, we are not entertaining this amendment.

Question put and negatived.

Clauses 11 and 12 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 13.

Question proposed: That clause 13 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Chairman: Port of Spain South.

Mr. Scotland SC: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman [*Inaudible*] ask—

Mr. de Nobriga: Your mic.

Mr. Scotland SC:—to consider this amendment. The rationale for this proposed amendment to section 15 is to establish clear safeguards against excessive exercise of plant breeders' rights over harvested material. In this regard, Mr. Chairman, we propose an amendment following the new subsections after subsection 15(4) in the following terms:

"'(5) In the application and enforcement of subsections (3) and (4), the holder of a plant breeder's right shall establish, by sufficient evidence, that the material concerned falls within the scope of the protected right and that the relevant statutory conditions for requiring authorisation have been satisfied.

(6) In determining the appropriate remedy for an infringement, the Court

shall take into account whether the farmer acted in good faith, whether the farmer knew or reasonably ought to have known that the alleged infringement, the nature and scale of the farming operation, and the proportionality of the remedy sought.

(7) Nothing in this section shall be construed as extending the rights of a plant breeder beyond the scope provided by this Act.'"

Mr. Chairman, this gives, I think, a wider scope of protection. I think the requirement of clear evidence here, by the breeder, will and can only strengthen the farmer's right. In that regard, we ask that this be considered as an amendment.

Further, we have recommendations for deleting 15A(2) and substituting that with the following subsection, a new 15A(2):

"'(2) The breeder's right shall not be deemed infringed by a farmer, who, within reasonable limits and subject to clearly defined and proportionate safeguards for the legitimate interests of the holder of the breeder's right, saves, uses, sows, resows, or replants, on the farmer's own holding, propagating material obtained from the harvest produced by planting a protected variety or a variety referred to in section 15(5)(a) or (b), in accordance with the prescribed conditions."'

New subsection (3):

"'(3) The exercise of this privilege shall be subject to transport and proportionate conditions that take into account the size and nature of the farming operation, the interests of small-scale and subsistence farmers, and the need to maintain sustainable agricultural practices and national food security."'

Mr. Speaker, that is in line with the contribution made by the hon. Member

for Arima. We say it gives the farmers a greater protection and it sort of insulates them from unnecessary and oppressive actions. We also propose, respectfully, deleting—

Mr. Chairman: Port of Spain South, can I just interject for one second? I think that these amendments have been widely circulated, on a timely basis as well. I know we all have different styles, right. Do you find it absolutely necessary to read the proposed amendments in detail, as you have, or do you just want to sum it up?

Mr. Scotland SC: Mr. Chairman, I take a cue when I get it. I will not read all that needs to be read.

Mr. Chairman: I would be very grateful. Because we could save some time.

Mr. Scotland SC: But I would let these just—

Mr. Chairman: If you could sum up the substance and encapsulate the pith of your argument—

Mr. Scotland SC:—yes.

Mr. Chairman:—in a few pithy sentences, as I know you are well capable of doing.

Mr. Scotland SC: We would propose, Mr. Chairman, this is your committee, but we want to do the work of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, including the farmers. We do.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Scotland SC: We propose an amendment to 15A(2) that:

> "'…breeder's rights shall not be infringed by a farmer who, within reasonable limits…"

—Mr. Speaker. Again, with reasonable cause, does something that would tend to create an offence, relative to the breeder. That amendment, again, insulates, in our

respectful view, small farmers. We have a lot of them in rural areas in Trinidad and Tobago. It will protect them against oppressive actions from breeders.

Mr. Chairman, again, section 15A(3), and for that I made a note. We would want to have 15A sort of expanded to provide an explicit exception for small-scale and subsistence farmers. Mr. Speaker, you would well appreciate that the agricultural sector in Trinidad and Tobago includes farmers who cultivate on small plots or sometimes small family holdings and community gardens. We think that this amendment will tend to insulate them. For many of these individuals, agriculture is just not a commercial investment. It may be a backyard garden that you have where, you know, Mr. Speaker, on Corpus Christi, it is tradition that a lot of people farm in their backyards. This may very well insulate them from unreasonable prosecution.

Mr. Chairman, the amendment to 15A(3) that we propose will substitute 15A(3) and create a new (3). I will only read the first recital of it:

> "'(3) The reasonable limits and means of safeguarding the legitimate interests of a holder of the breeder's right shall be prescribed in Regulations made under section 46."'

Mr. Chairman, the amendment goes on to say that before making the amendments and:

> "'(4) Before making the regulations…"'—that there ought to be consultation with the farmers—"'recognised farmers' organisations, agricultural cooperatives and representatives of small…"—farmers—"…and subsistence farmers."'

I heard the hon. Minister in his introductory contribution and in his attempt to rebut, a very well thought out and very well-reasoned contribution by you, to

tend to say that there was consultation via electronic means.

6.15 p.m.

Mr. Scotland SC: Mr. Chairman, I know that that is part of it, but that cannot be meaningful consultation. And particularly when you look at small-scale farmers, not at all knocking them, who may not have access to online and *X* and *TikTok* and all of that, I think meaningful consultation may very well mean going to see them, and in that regard, we propose all these amendments to clause 15.

And the last one that I want to put on record is the recommendations we make in 7 and 8. And 8 in particular:

> "The Regulations shall clearly specify the circumstances in which any fee or other obligation may be imposed on a farmer under this section."

This gives clarity, and it gives certainty.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Port of Spain South. I have read it.

Mr. Scotland SC: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: But can I remind you of page 72 of the Standing Orders and the committee time limits?

Mr. Scotland SC: Yes, please.

Mr. Chairman: It is five minutes.

Mr. Scotland SC: I will not infringe it. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: I think we have far exceeded that by now.

Mr. Scotland SC: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: And that is what I was alluding to when I suggested that you use that well-known skill of yours to sum up complex issues into a few pithy sentences.

Mr. Scotland SC: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. So, Minister, on the proposed amendment to clause 13.

Mr. Hosein: Mr. Chairman, I wish to be less than five minutes just to deal with that lengthy submission by my colleague. There are three points really. The amendment is raising an issue of enforcement. Mr. Chairman, it is already covered under the new clause 32, which will be found at clause 21 of the Bill, that has already been deliberated upon in the second reading of the Bill, so I do not want to go there. Where in terms of it will give an interested person the right to apply to the court for the invalidation of any breeder's rights.

Secondly, under section 37 of the parent Act, there is already a provision for a right to bring civil proceedings for injunctions, forfeiture, seizure, destruction and damages for pecuniary and non-pecuniary loss. And Mr. Chairman, the issue with the good faith that the amendment has, these remedies that are available through the substantive law are equitable remedies and therefore there is no need to have good faith inserted into the law.

And the last point on the regulations, if my colleague again looks at the parent legislation, you would see there is already a power to make regulations under section 46 of the parent Act. So at this point in time the Government is not in a position to accept any of these amendments.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and negatived.

Clause 13 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 14 to 20 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 21.

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

Mr. Chairman: Member for Port of Spain South. Just bear in mind the time limit in the Standing Orders.

Mr. Scotland SC: Mr. Chairman, under this clause, we are proposing the insertion of a new subclause 32(4). And that is because clause 32 provides for an interested party to:

"…apply to the court for invalidation"—of a licence granted.

However, farmers may face practical difficulties in identifying an application, understanding its implications, or challenging a right before the cost of a dispute becomes overwhelming. In this regard, Mr. Chairman, the proposed amendments contained in our circulated draft tend to soften and mitigate that harsh factor. And we commend it to your committee for consideration.

Mr. Hosein: Again, Mr. Chairman, with respect to this particular amendment at clause 21, somehow the drafting of this amendment is quite strange. I have never seen drafting like this before. But again—

Mr. Scotland SC: I understand and you are forgiven.

Mr. Hosein: Yes. But then again, Mr. Chairman, apart from that point, the court, we believe, is the right jurisdiction for dealing with these matters. I do not think the controller should be involved in the enforcement of this particular enforcement of rights. So therefore at this time again, we cannot accept this amendment. It is a policy decision in line with the UPOV guidelines.

Question put and negatived.

Clause 21 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 22 to 24 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 25.

Question proposed: That clause 25 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Port of Spain South.

Mr. Scotland SC: Your committee is asked to consider the education and the making of the farmers more aware of what is going on via the Minister who is responsible for agriculture. I heard, and this was covered again by the hon. Member for Arima in her contribution, but this is not about intellectual property, you know. Farming rights are about people who farm every day. And what we say, Mr. Chairman, particularly if you look at the amendment that we are proposing and inserting the following amendment of clause 25, to subclauses (2) and (3):

> "The Minister shall take reasonable steps to ensure that the programme is accessible to small-scale farmers, subsistence farmers, agricultural cooperatives and farming communities throughout Trinidad and Tobago."

This, Mr. Chairman, is in consonance with the public education programme concerning plants and breeders' rights and farmers' privileges under the Act. I cannot see how a sincere Minister concerned about farmers' rights and small farmers' rights can object to this proposed amendment. Because all it does is it strengthens education and awareness to the persons most affected by this piece of legislation.

The amendment suggested at 46B(1) also has a sort of audit of the efficacy of the actual implementation of the Bill and reporting to the Parliament at two-year intervals. Mr. Chairman, I do not know under which regime this could be objectionable, but this is the purpose of this suggested amendment and I await with bated breath the response for this very responsible amendment suggested. And again, I want to thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition for taking the time to debunk certain theories. So let me hear.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you, Chairman. Again, Mr. Chairman, I find the drafting very strange of this amendment. Very, very strange drafting. It is not what we are used to in Trinidad and Tobago, so I "doh" know where you borrow the language from. But what this really does, Mr. Chairman, is this, the amendment is two parts.

One, it creates some responsibility for the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries in terms of training. And secondly, it deals with a reporting mechanism under the law. Let me deal with the first one with respect to the training issue. There is a difference with policy and law and what you are outlining here is policy. We already have an MOU with Canada for technical cooperation. We already have the National Intellectual Property Training Centre, which is also providing training. We have the National Training Centre, at the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. We have several extension programmes that are running at the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. So there is no need to put it into the law.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hosein: The second point with respect to the annual report, Mr. Chairman, is this. I know my friend served a very short period of time as a Minister, so he may not have had the opportunity to provide an annual report of his Ministry to the Parliament. But if my friend looks at section 66D of the Constitution, it mandates every Government Ministry to provide an annual report to the Parliament on the operations. And this will form part of the operations of the Ministry of Land and Legal Affairs.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hosein: So we cannot accept that amendment, Mr. Chairman.

Question put and negatived.

Clause 25 ordered to stand part of the bill.

Clause 26 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.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Leader of the House.

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

(Hon. Barry Padarath): Thank you most kindly, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to a date to be fixed.

GREETINGS

(DIVALI)

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before putting the question on the Motion for the Adjournment, as you are all aware, on Sunday, November 08, 2026, the nation will celebrate Divali. I now invite Members to bring greetings on this special occasion of Divali. Hon. Prime Minister.

6.30 p.m.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Prime Minister (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC): Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. Thank you. Thank you, Members. On behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, and on my own behalf, I am very pleased to bring Divali greetings to this honourable House and to the people of our nation. This auspicious festival of lights speaks to a hope that lives in every human heart, that

injustice will be overcome, that goodness will prevail, and that after hardship and struggle, light will lead us toward better days.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: For those entrusted with the people's confidence, that message is indeed a message which is a call to duty. In the Holy Ramayana, the road home to Ayodhya passes through exile, sacrifice, and the struggle against evil. Lord Rama must confront the demon king, rescue his beloved wife Sita, and bring deliverance from a tyrant whose terror had driven even the sages to flee. His victory affirms that power, however formidable, must answer to righteousness. Ayodhya's lamps shine because goodness has found the courage to confront evil. After long years of separation, hope had come home. Every generation faces forces that threaten human dignity and freedom. Here in this Parliament, we confront them through the work we do. When our laws protect people from violence and exploitation, we give practical meaning to the triumph of good over evil.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: When we scrutinize public expenditure, we bring light where there must be accountability. Through education, we advance knowledge over ignorance. By removing barriers to opportunity, we help families overcome poverty. This is how Divali's universal message becomes part of a democratic government. The Holy Ramayana places duty at the heart of leadership. In our democracy, that duty is secured by the Constitution, exercised through the law, and owed equality to every citizen. Later today, in fact, there are some children who are waiting on us, Mr. Speaker, for a historic event when the first Divali light-up outside of this Parliament takes place later this evening.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Those young ones, those young hands, will help us kindle an ancient light at the doors of this institution, entrusted with shaping their future.

Again, I say the laws we pass, the resources we approve, and the standards we uphold will help determine the country that our children will inherit. The light we celebrate must therefore guide our decisions inside of this House as well. And I know that when we see those children, we would all remember our own childhoods and colonial Trinidad. For me, I realized recently—I was born before independence, so I did experience a childhood under colonial rule, and I knew Divali chiefly through Hindu homes and communities. That is the only places that you would see the deyas being lit, in the communities and in homes. Today, here we are at this very institution, you know, the pillar of our democracy at the Parliament.

Our elders preserve sacred traditions through hardship and sacrifice. And today, I have the honour of serving as Prime Minister and sharing that light with the children outside—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—to share that light with the children outside our national Parliament.

There is, Mr. Speaker, a very powerful story of belonging in that journey. In 1966, Divali was recognized as a public holiday. Sixty years later, we honour that milestone and the generations who helped secure its place in national life. Its embrace grew through ordinary acts of generosity. A family opening its doors, a neighbour sharing a meal, a child inviting a friend to come and light a deya. A sacred tradition became a shared national tradition and celebration because the message spoke to everyone. The longing for light, the courage to resist evil, the

hope that goodness will prevail and the darkness must never win.

The Hindu community preserved the flame and our nation collectively learned to share its light. That spirit is reflected on these Government Benches, where men and women of every race and creed—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—every religious background, we all serve together. That message is also woven into my own family. I was born into Hinduism. In fact, my father was a pundit, so in the heart of a Hindu home. And then, he took us and baptized us into the Spiritual Baptist faith and we remained there as Spiritual Baptists as well as Hindus. Then, I married a wonderful Christian man. My husband is a Presbyterian, and we welcomed into my home a Muslim daughter in law, so my home reflects—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—all the creeds and races. So, the harmony of different faiths is part of the life and love of my home, as it is in the many homes across our beloved nation. I believe our different paths lead us towards the same great God, whose love reaches beyond every boundary we draw. There is a very loving and kind Hindu bhajan, a Hindu hymn, and it tells us—I cannot do the Hindi too well, but I can tell you what it says. It says, *Ishwar Allah tere naam*. "It doesn't matter, dear God, what your name is, it is the one God that we all worship." So we have the different paths that lead us towards the same great God, whose love reaches beyond every boundary we draw. Our prayers rise in different worlds, but our service meets in the neighbour we help, in the stranger we welcome, and the vulnerable person we defend.

In serving one another, we honour God Almighty. As Prime Minister, I proudly and equally serve those who share my Hindu faith and those who worship

differently, my Government proudly represents everyone. A deya asks no one's religion before giving his light. The protection of our laws, the fairness of our institutions, and the opportunities created by government must reach every citizen with that same generosity.

Mr. Speaker, Lord Rama's pledge in the Ramayana expresses an enduring responsibility, and I quote those words today:

"Whoever comes to me even once and says, I am yours, I give him safety from

all beings. That is my vow."

This was a vow of Lord Rama, which I will repeat:

"Whoever comes to me even once and says, I am yours, I give him safety from

all beings. That is my vow."

Our people have entrusted their hopes to our hands as elected representatives here in this House. This Divali, may we answer with courage, uphold justice, and ensure that the most vulnerable find protection. Let the light outside this Parliament become justice within its laws, integrity within its work, and hope within every home.

In closing, I say again, on behalf of the Government, myself and my family, Mr. Speaker, I wish you and all Members of this honourable House, the staff of the Parliament, all your families, and every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago a happy, peaceful, and blessed Divali.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: May Mother Lakshmi's richest blessings bring peace, well-being, and prosperity. May light overcome darkness. The darkness must never win. May good triumph over evil, and may our service help make that

sacred promise a living reality for all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, and Shubh Divali to everyone.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Mrs. Penelope Beckles-Robinson (*Arima*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure and honour to bring greetings to the Hindu community, and by extension, the people of Trinidad and Tobago, on this occasion of Divali, the Festival of Lights. Divali is one of the most significant and widely celebrated religious festivals of Trinidad and Tobago, forming an integral part of our nation's rich cultural heritage.

Throughout this country, our Hindu brothers and sisters prepare for this sacred observance through fasting, cleaning, and preparing their homes. These preparations are not simply physical activities. They represent a deeper spiritual journey of renewal, reflection, and purification. This festival takes on particular significance because of the enduring lessons it holds for all of us across Trinidad and Tobago. Its message speaks to the triumph of light over darkness, knowledge over ignorance, and, ultimately, good over evil. These are powerful and timeless messages that transcend religious boundaries and speak to the very essence of our shared humanity.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that these messages are especially relevant to the people of Trinidad and Tobago at this time. Across our country, there are many citizens who may be experiencing difficulties, fears, and anxiety. To all of them, I say today, there is light at the end of the tunnel. Darkness does not last forever. And just as the light of a deya dispels the darkness of the night, so too will the light of hope dispel whatever darkness our people may be experiencing. For hope is one of the greatest strengths of the human spirit. It is also my hope that on this auspicious occasion, as parliamentarians, the light of accountability and

transparency can also shine, that we adhere to the principles of good governance, fairness, and equality, and that we remember our duty to serve all the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, as the weeks lead up to Divali, I always look forward to the many celebrations that take place across communities throughout Trinidad and Tobago. I also look forward to those national in scope, because Divali is not simply an individual event. It is also a family occasion. It is a community and national celebration. It brings people together. It strengthens relationships and reminds us of the importance of fellowship, generosity, and mutual respect. It becomes an expression of our shared national identity.

Divali also reminds us that we are truly and uniquely blessed to live in a multicultural, multi-religious, and multi-ethnic country such as Trinidad and Tobago. I sometimes wonder whether there is anywhere else in the world quite like our beloved nation Trinidad and Tobago. I can think of a few places where people of so many different religious and cultural backgrounds have learned to live together, celebrate together, and share in each other's traditions. Our diversity is not a weakness; it is one of our greatest strengths.

At a time when division, intolerance, and conflict continue to affect societies around the world, Trinidad and Tobago must remain as an example of what is possible when people choose mutual respect, understanding, and peaceful coexistence. Tolerance is one of our most important watchwords. It must guide us in our daily lives, our social interactions, and especially in our public duty to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

At this point in our nation's history as Leader of the Opposition and as Political Leader of the People's National Movement, I wish to make a special appeal to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, an appeal for unity and peace, and I

call for hope. Let us never allow our differences, whether political, religious, ethnic, or otherwise, to overshadow the fundamental values that unite us as a people.

Let us be shining examples of an enduring truth that inherent in our humanity is the goodness that can conquer everything else. As our Hindu brothers and sisters come together to celebrate Divali, I know that many will offer prayers for peace, prosperity, abundance, and enlightenment to the Goddess Mother Lakshmi. On this most auspicious occasion, I join them in praying that those blessings may also fall upon our beloved Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, that our country may experience the peace, prosperity, and hope for which so many of our citizens are searching.

Of significance to note is the fact that in 1966, Dr. Eric Williams, as Prime Minister, a PNM Prime Minister, saw it fit to give recognition of the importance of Divali by making it a public holiday. This was in recognition of the religious and cultural contribution of the Hindu community to the development of Trinidad and Tobago. This year marks 60 years since that significant milestone and is certainly something to celebrate. We on this side are proud to continue the legacy of tolerance and recognition that our national identity could never be complete without acknowledging the traditions, beliefs, and contributions of all the people who call this beautiful country home.

On behalf of the Opposition, the People's National Movement, on my own behalf, I wish the entire Hindu community, and indeed all the people of Trinidad and Tobago, staff, and of course all my colleagues on both sides of the House, Shubh Divali. May this festival of lights bring happiness to your homes, peace to your hearts, prosperity to your families, and renewed hope to our beloved nation, Trinidad and Tobago. May the light of Divali continue to illuminate the path

towards a brighter, more peaceful, and united Trinidad and Tobago. Thank you.

6.45 p.m.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I too should like to join in bringing Divali greetings to the national community. And can I say that it is both a profound pleasure and a joy to join you as we commemorate the celebration of Divali, the festival of lights. This is indeed a sacred occasion in the Hindu calendar. It invites us to reflect on the enduring values of faith, hope, compassion, and the triumph of the human spirit over what may, at the time, have seemed to be impossible odds and circumstances.

Imagine, if you can, leaving the laps of utmost and unmitigated luxury to walk alone with your wife and your brother into the uncertainty of Banwas, that forest, and to stay there for 14 years and then return to your kingdom. So, Banwas is not a physical place. Banwas is the metaphoric place for that struggle that every human being has to endure. It is a story of resilience. It is a story of hope. And most of all, it is a story of redemption. It is the story of the resurrection in a different setting, metaphorically.

Divali carries a message that extends beyond the mere lighting of deyas and the beauty of traditions. It reminds us that even in moments of uncertainty and difficulty, we must continue to have unwavering faith and belief in ourselves. The light that we celebrate is both symbolic and personal. It represents the wisdom to choose what is right, the courage to overcome adversity, and the compassion to recognize the dignity and worth of others.

As a celebrated Bengali poet, Nobel laureate and freedom fighter, Sir Rabindranath Tagore, captured in this beautiful and mellifluous line:

"Faith is the bird that feels the light and sings when the dawn is still dark."

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: These words remind us that hope does not depend on the absence of darkness. Rather, it is our faith that sustains us while we work towards a brighter future. In our families, our communities and our national life, we will inevitably encounter challenges. Yet, when we are guided by faith, mutual respect and a shared sense of purpose, we can face those challenges with confidence and resolve.

As we light our deyas this Divali, may we therefore consider not only the light we place in our homes, but the light we bring to the lives of others. Let us kindle the lamp of kindness through our actions, the lamp of understanding through our dialogue, and the lamp of unity through our willingness to respect our differences.

In Trinidad and Tobago, Divali holds a special place in our national life. It provides an opportunity to celebrate the rich and multi-textured Hindu heritage that has helped shape our society, and to reaffirm the principles of religious freedom, cultural understanding and peaceful coexistence. Our diversity is perhaps our singular source of strength, and occasions such as this remind us that we can honour our distinct traditions whilst remaining united in our common humanity.

May the spirit of Divali inspire us to replace prejudice with understanding, indifference with compassion, and despair with hope. May its light guide our decisions, strengthen our families, uplift our communities and encourage us to contribute meaningfully to our beloved nation. As you celebrate with your families and loved ones, I extend my sincere wishes for a Divali filled with peace, prosperity, spiritual renewal and happiness.

May the light of Divali shine brightly in every home, and may itsmessage of faith, hope and love remain with us throughout the year. To all of Trinidad and Tobago, and to all of you gathered here, Shubh Divali to you and your families. Thank you

very much.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 6.50 p.m.