

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 28, 2018

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS



[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PAPERS LAID

1. Notification of Her Excellency, the President in respect of the nomination of Ms. Bliss Seepersad, for appointment as a member of the Police Service Commission. [*The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis)*]
2. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Land Settlement Agency for the year ended September 30, 2010. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
3. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Land Settlement Agency for the year ended September 30, 2011. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]

Papers 2 and 3 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.

**JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORTS
(Presentation)**

**Local Authorities, Service Commissions and Statutory Authorities
Chaguaramas Development Authority**

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Education (Hon. Dr. Lovell Francis):

Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present the following report:

Ninth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Local Authorities, Service Commissions and Statutory Authorities (including the THA), Third Session (2017/2018), Eleventh Parliament on an Inquiry into Certain Aspects of the Chaguaramas Development Authority.

The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have the honour to present the following reports:

Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Bill, 2016

Interim Report of the Joint Select Committee on the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Bill, 2016.

Cybercrime Bill, 2017

Interim Report of the Joint Select Committee on the Cybercrime Bill, 2017.

**SPECIAL SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT
(Presentation)**

Notifications Pursuant to Section 123 of the Constitution

The Minister in the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present the following report:

Interim Report of the Special Select Committee established to consider and report on the process followed in relation to the Notifications Pursuant to Section 123 of the Constitution.

URGENT QUESTIONS

**Fire on Water Taxi
(Medical Attention for Passengers)**

Mr. Barry Padarath (Princes Town): Madam Speaker, thank you. To the hon.

Minister of Works and Transport: In light of the fire that caused the water taxi to shut down on the high seas to Tobago yesterday, could the Minister indicate if any of the passengers on board had to be taken for immediate medical attention?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, the substantive Minister of Works and Transport is out of the jurisdiction at this time. The Acting Minister had to leave the Cabinet this morning for some urgent attention, so I am standing in on very short notice. Madam Speaker, we are not aware that any person had suffered any injury in this incident and required being taken to any medical institution. That is information we have at this time.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. Madam, to the hon. Prime Minister: In light of the substantive Minister's response to the incident that it was a "little mishap", does Government stand by this statement?

Madam Speaker: I will not allow that as a supplemental question based on the question that was asked. Supplemental, Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Could the hon. Prime Minister indicate whether there were any wheelchair users on board the water taxi last night and what procedures were used to evacuate them?

Madam Speaker: I will not allow that as a supplemental question either.

Cabo Star

(Passengers seeking Medical Attention)

Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (Caroni East): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the hon. Minister of Health: Could the Minister indicate the state of health of the six persons from the *Cabo Star* who reportedly had to seek medical attention in Tobago, and the nature of the contributing factors during transportation which led

to their illness?

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the question. Madam Speaker, I could confirm that six passengers from the *Cabo Star* did in fact seek medical attention. They were triaged immediately. They were sent to the Casualty Department. All six were deemed to have very minor complaints. All six were treated and subsequently discharged. None of the six had any serious complaints that needed them to be warded at the Scarborough General Hospital, and all six, as I have indicated, have been discharged. As to the contributory factors, in the short time that I had to research this, 10 minutes, that could not be determined, but again that might be issues—I do not know if they had pre-existing conditions and I cannot divulge private, privileged patient information. But there is a good outcome—all six were treated for minor conditions and discharged.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Thank you for the answer, hon. Minister. Could you indicate whether any or all of these six persons were transfers from the water taxi *Trini Flash* to the *Cabo Star* if you can?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, as Minister of Health I am responsible for the health response. The health response: we had six patients to deal with and the health response was excellent. All six were treated for minor conditions. I do not know about transferring from one mode of transport to another. I cannot comment on that with the 10 minutes I had to research this, again.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

**Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs
(Details Re Claim Settlement)**

Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*): To the absent Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs: In light of recent media reports surrounding the payment of \$150,000 for a claim brought against the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs under a non-disclosure agreement, could the Minister indicate what is the Ministry's policy regarding settlement of claims using taxpayers' money?

Madam Speaker: Member for Princes Town, does it mean that that you do not want an answer if you are addressing it to an absent Member? [*Laughter*]

Mr. Padarath: Well, Madam, that is not for the Government to determine, not for me to determine.

Madam Speaker: Excuse me?

Mr. Padarath: Madam, that is for the Government to determine, not for me to determine.

Madam Speaker: All right. Well then, you just ask the question, please.

The Minister in the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The answer to question No. 3 is first of all the claim was brought against the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs and the CPO. As they should know, all claims brought against public servants that are of an employment nature are brought against the Chief Personnel Officer, the CPO. That is what was done in this case. And then, for the settlement of any case under this Government, it goes for legal advice; and we are then guided by legal advice which is the policy and the procedure that was utilized here, and it was settled on the basis of clear

legal advice and I believe in this occasion may be as much as two legal opinions.

[Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. To the hon. Minister: Could the hon. Minister indicate with respect to the legal advice that was provided, why was a non-disclosure agreement included in the settlement?

Hon. S. Young: Madam Speaker, any lawyer who has practised in the area of litigation would know that when you are settling a matter there are two documents that you always try to have executed, a release and discharge and a non-disclosure agreement. There is absolutely nothing that is untoward in those circumstances.

[Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. To the hon. Minister: Does the Government agree that using non-disclosure agreements in matters of this nature can be seen as protecting the identity of sexual predators in the Ministry?

Madam Speaker: I will not allow that as a supplemental question.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Hon. Minister, could you indicate who or what office within the Ministry sought the legal opinion of the two counsels? And could you make—

Madam Speaker: One question please, Member. Minister.

Hon. S. Young: Madam Speaker, I do not have that particular information here, but having regard to the officers who were sued I would expect that the opinion would have been sought on behalf of the Chief Personnel Officer, the CPO.

**Rank of Ministry Official
(Claim Settlement)**

UNREVISED

Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*): Thank you, Madam. Madam, question No. 4 to the Minister of Sport of Youth Affairs: Could the Minister indicate the rank of the Ministry official against whom a claim was brought which resulted in the settlement of \$150,000 of taxpayers' money under trade of dispute?

The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): On behalf of the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, this matter is the subject of a release and discharge agreement which includes a confidentiality matter. This is standard where there is no admission of liability. It is in those circumstances where there is no admission of liability that this matter is therefore the subject of the agreement that binds the parties with the court's approval, and in those circumstances that is the simple answer.

Mr. Padarath: Madam, to the hon. Minister: In light of the public interest in this matter, could the Minister confirm or deny, yes or no, that the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs is not the official who the claim was brought against/

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: I can absolutely confirm that the claim was brought against the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs and the Chief Personnel Officer concerning a matter of improper procedure on termination prior to termination, and that is the matter that the court had to consider. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Padarath: Madam, could the Attorney General indicate that the substantive Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs is in no way named in this matter?

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, having explained to my learned friend what a release and discharge is, it is imperative to perhaps go a little bit further. A release and discharge which is accepted in the circumstances that it is accepted under the

supervision of the court where there is no admission of liability, where the matter is brought against the Chief Personnel Officer concerning a procedure of termination being the subject of the release and discharge on confidentiality, we can go no further than that. Any attempt to scandalize this matter by introducing terminology of the type that my learned friend seeks to do now is nothing more than scandal.

**Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago
(Discussion with Minister Dillon's Lawyers)**

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. To the Attorney General: Did the Attorney General speak to lawyers representing the interest of fraud accused and Minister Edmund Ernest Dillon in a property dispute case in his capacity as Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago?

The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): I thank the hon. Member for the question. Madam Speaker, on the 9th of September, 2015, the hon. Prime Minister by his instruction saw that I was appointed as Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs of Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, as Attorney General I speak with any and everyone who is capable of distinguishing fact from fiction. For instance, there being a civil suit against the hon. Minister of National Security does not equate to the allegations put by my learned friend in the body of this question. I therefore confirm that I certainly did speak to establish the position of facts and clarity because as we all know, there are often many versions of events, and it is imperative, therefore, that we understand what is before us at any point in time as it relates to facts. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Is the Attorney General therefore saying

that the Attorney General disagrees with the *Express* editorial of March 24, 2018, which stated that the Attorney General has no business in the private affairs of citizens of Trinidad and Tobago? [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, there is a fundamental right in our Constitution of the freedom of the press. I dare not take any position against that right. As Attorney General I am bound to respect the law and I make no complaint to any citizen's view on any aspect of what I do. This is a free and fair democracy. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Could I ask the Attorney General, do you consider your meddling in this business to have compromised and prejudiced the position of the Government in relation to a private matter of a citizen? [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, under section 76 of the Constitution, the capacity of the Attorney General is pellucidly clear. As the officeholder for the time being, I am certain that it is my obligation to establish facts including facts which may tend to dispel fiction and malicious prosecution, in particular by Members of the Opposition who choose to twist scenarios to suit purpose and, therefore, I am quite confident that there could be no scorn poured to the responsibility exercised in establishing factual positions, and importantly to have discovered that there is a civil matter; secondly, it is in the course of resolution before the courts of another jurisdiction; thirdly, that that is expected to come to an end quite shortly; and fourthly, that that matter is one in which there are two sides of a story which obviously impacts upon how one ought to appreciate any

statements made in relation one way or the other.

**Spiritual Baptist Holiday
(Details of State Funding)**

Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*): Thank you, Madam. To the hon. Minister of Community, Development, Culture and the Arts: Could the Minister indicate which organizations will receive state funding for the Spiritual Baptist holiday and the sums if any?

The Minister in the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): In the absence of my colleague, the answer is as follows: the foundation for Academic Advancement of Spiritual Baptist Youth will receive \$15,000; the Holy Nazareth Spiritual Baptist Church will receive \$15,000; the West Indian United Baptist Sacred Order will receive \$5,000; the Spiritual Baptist Sanctuary will receive \$5,000; Quammie Rentals will receive \$5,000; the Council of Elders of Spiritual Shouter Baptist Faith of Trinidad and Tobago will receive \$40,000—that is Barbara Gray-Burke who I am sure you are all very familiar with, \$40,000 for her—the Turune Shouter Baptist Inc. will receive \$5,000; the Judah Healing Temple will receive \$4,000; the Holy Faith Tabernacle will receive \$35,000; and the St. Ann's Church of Spiritual Metaphysics Inc. will receive \$20,000.

**Water Taxi Vessels
(Suitability to Operate Sea Bridge)**

Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh (*Oropouche West*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of Works and Transport: Can the Minister indicate whether the vessels in the water taxi service from Port of Spain to San Fernando

are suitable and safe to operate the sea bridge between Tobago and Trinidad?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, while the vessels that are utilized in the water taxi service can from time to time be used to service the Tobago leg, they are not ideal, but they are suitable and useful especially in emergencies and also depending on the sea state.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Hon. Prime Minister, could you indicate whether under the terms and conditions of the marine insurance, does it cover the territorial waters of Tobago for these water taxis to operate?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, consequent upon the condition within which I have been answering this question, I do not have that information at this time, but I am sure that if the Member pursues it with a question of notice that the appropriate Minister will answer.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, I am to advise that the time for Urgent Questions is now spent.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, there are eight oral questions, we would be answering all eight. There are 11 written questions, we will be answering 10 and we are kindly asking for question No. 173 to be deferred for two weeks.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Maintenance Works re Flood Mitigation (Expected date)

144. Ms. Ramona Ramdial (*Couva North*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and

Transport:

Could the Minister inform this House of the expected date(s) for maintenance works to clean, dredge and desilt rivers, ravines and natural watercourses throughout the country in order to mitigate against flooding during the upcoming rainy season?

**Staff and Students Absenteeism Rate
(Ash Wednesday)**

155. Dr. Lackram Bodoë (*Fyzabad*) asked the hon. Minister of Education:

Could the Minister provide the absenteeism rate for the past ten (10) years on Ash Wednesday for staff and students at each school in Trinidad and Tobago?

**Deliveries and Maternal Deaths
(Details of)**

158. Dr. Lackram Bodoë (*Fyzabad*) asked the hon. Minister of Health:

Could the Minister provide the annual number of deliveries and maternal deaths at each hospital for the period 2008 to 2017?

**Perinatal and Neonatal Deaths
(Details of)**

159. Dr. Lackram Bodoë (*Fyzabad*) asked the hon. Minister of Health: Could the Minister provide:

- (a) the annual number of perinatal and neonatal deaths by cause for all births at each public hospital for the period 2008 to 2010 and the year 2017; and

- (b) the annual number of perinatal and neonatal deaths by cause for all births at each private hospital for the period 2011 to 2017?

**Job Description and Employment Terms and Conditions
(Director of Women's Health)**

- 160. Dr. Lackram Bodoë** (*Fyzabad*) asked the hon. Minister of Health:

Could the Minister provide this House with the job description and terms and conditions of employment for the Director of Women's Health?

**Recipients of Grants for Carnival 2018
(Details of)**

- 170. Mr. David Lee** (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) asked the hon. Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts:

Could the Minister provide a list of the names and the total value of the grants received by each non-governmental organization, stakeholder group/individual who received grants to assist with activities related to Carnival 2018?

**NLCB Sponsorship and Grants for Carnival 2018
(Details of)**

- 171. Mr. David Lee** (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

With regard to sponsorship and grants provided by the National Lotteries Control Board (NLCB) to assist with activities related to Carnival 2018, could the Minister provide:

- (a) the total amount spent by the NLCB for sponsorship and grants related to Carnival 2018; and

- (b) the list of the names of all entities (inclusive of non-governmental organizations, groups, individuals and schools) which received NLCB funding related to Carnival 2018?

**National Carnival Commission Board
(Details of Remuneration)**

172. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) asked the hon. Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts:

Could the Minister state:

- (a) the names and the total value of the remuneration package of each member of the National Carnival Commission (NCC) Board; and
(b) whether the Chairman of NCC is an executive position?

**Grant Funding Facility
(Details of)**

174. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) asked the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry:

Could the Minister state:

- (a) the criteria for a manufacturing firm to qualify for the Grant Funding Facility (GFF); and
(b) the number and names of manufacturing firms that have utilized this facility to date?

**Watercourses Desilted in Fyzabad
(List of)**

179. Dr. Lackram Bodoë (*Fyzabad*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

Could the Minister provide a list of the watercourses that were desilted within the constituency of Fyzabad for the fiscal year 2018 to date?

Vide end of sitting for written answers.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Tourist Arrivals (Details of)

169. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) asked the hon. Minister of Tourism:

Could the Minister state the number of tourist arrivals to Trinidad and Tobago for the periods:

- (a) January 1, 2016 to February 28, 2016;
- (b) January 1, 2017 to February 28, 2017; and
- (c) January 1, 2018 to February 28, 2018?

The Minister of Tourism (Hon. Shamfa Cudjoe): Thank you Madam Speaker. The answers are: for part (a): 82,114 persons; part (b): 78,672 persons; and part (c): 74,191 persons.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Minister, through you, Madam Speaker: Could the Minister explain, what is the cause for this drop in tourist arrivals?

Hon. S. Cudjoe: For the same period—Madam Speaker, might I add this is January and February of the years 2016, 2017 and 2018. For the same period over the years, and that would pretty much be the Carnival period, we have been experiencing decreases for the past over seven years. For 2011 to 2012 there was a decrease; 2012 to 2013, a decrease; 2013 to 2014 a decrease; and 2016, 2017, 2018 decreases also.

So, Madam Speaker, there are a number of issues as it relates to Carnival, the competitiveness of our Carnival. Different matters that may contribute to tourism arrivals, immigration issues. A host of issues that may contribute to tourist arrivals. So the same for 2011, '12, '13, '14, '16, '17, '18. Thank you.

**Water-sport Activities
(Safety Rules/Regulations/laws)**

175. Dr. Lackram Bodoë (*Fyzabad*) asked the hon. Attorney General:

Could the Minister state whether there are safety rules/regulations/laws in place to protect citizens who participate in jet skiing, parasailing and other water-sport activities?

The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the hon. Member for this important question. At present there are no safety rules, regulations, laws in place to protect citizens who participate in jet skiing, parasailing or other water-sports activities. It should be noted, however, that the Ministry of Tourism is currently developing policy with regard to the establishment of the Trinidad and Tobago Tourism Regulatory and Licensing Authority, a body which will create and enforce regulations to govern tourism sector operators for the first time. The proposed corporate body will treat with matters such as inspecting, licensing, monitoring, tourism operator registration, classification, and visitor safety, again, for the first time in the history of our country.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Attorney General. In view of the recent death of the Tobago schoolboy, could you indicate what sort of time frame we are looking at before these activities are regulated?

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you. I thank the hon. Member for the supplemental. The Trinidad and Tobago Tourism Regulatory and Licensing Authority is a matter of urgent consideration for the Government. That is moving ahead in quick succession. To answer your question I could not say with specificity in a matter of weeks or otherwise, but suffice it to say in the meanwhile we are looking at the regulations independent from the creation of the body so that it can be promulgated upon establishment.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Attorney General, and I note the emphasis on with relations to tourism, but I also want to indicate that sometimes these activities—

Madam Speaker: Question.

Dr. Bodoë:—take place outside of the tourism sector—

Madam Speaker: Question.

Dr. Bodoë:—are there any considerations that will be given to activities in that respect?

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: My learned colleague is perfectly correct. This is a matter which can happen anywhere. We are after all two islands, as one state, surrounded by 360 degrees of water in both islands. This is a matter of really careful coordination at the Ministry of Legal Affairs end of the Attorney General's Office. We are on an exercise for registration which will come very shortly for all non-profit organizations, all entities, all manner of positions. The Ministry of National Security, through its supervision of lifeguarding services, also has a role to play and that multisectoral approach is hoped to be harmonized so that we are not taking it in the piecemeal approach which has existed since independence.

**Parvati Girls and Shiva Boys Colleges
(Recommencement of Construction Work)**

152. Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*) asked the hon. Minister of Education:

Could the Minister state the expected date for the recommencement of construction work at the Parvati Girls College and Shiva Boys College?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The Parvati Girls College and the Shiva Boys College are approximately 72 per cent and 74 per cent completed, respectively. Works on the two facilities have been suspended by the respective contractors due to non-payment of invoices. The Ministry of Education is actively seeking to identify funds to meet outstanding payments and the cost of completion of the facilities. In the circumstances, Madam Speaker, I am not now in a position to provide the proposed recommencement date of the works on these facilities. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. Madam, in light of the answer provided by the hon. Minister of Education, is the hon. Minister of Education telling us that in two and half years no funds have been identified to continue the work at Shiva Boys and Parvati Girls College?

Hon. A. Garcia: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, we have found ourselves in a position where we had to closely look at the construction cost of these two schools. In the case of the Shiva Boys Hindu College, the astounding figure of \$181,507,281 was the sum that was contracted. So far, the Ministry of Education paid \$111,714,663 towards the construction of the Shiva Boys. [*Crosstalk*] Yes! In terms of the Parvati Girls Hindu College, the

contracted sum was \$141,128,105, and so far the contractor was paid \$85,000,272.

[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker, you will understand the position of this Ministry and the position of this Government when there is rampant corruption associated with this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Minister, are you aware that under previous PNM administrations the cost of secondary schools was close to \$200 million? [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member, is that a question?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yes.

Hon. A. Garcia: Madam Speaker, I am not aware of the figments of his imagination. [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

Mr. Padarath: Madam, in light of the answer provided by the hon. Minister of Education as it—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr. Padarath:—relates to funds not being available to complete the schools, on a previous occasion the Member for Arouca/Maloney gave us a contradictory answer with respect to this issue.

Madam Speaker: Member, ask a question. You have 15 seconds to ask a question.

Mr. Padarath: Could the hon. Minister indicate whether it is really the issue of funds or as identified by the Member for Arouca/Maloney the issue is related to the lands, which one is it?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I said that?

Mr. Padarath: Yes.

Hon. A. Garcia: Madam Speaker, the fundamental issue is the inflated cost of these projects and, therefore, it concerns funding. The funding that we are being asked to provide, it must be properly evaluated. The cost must be properly evaluated to ensure that we get value for money. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

2.00 p.m.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Minister, are you aware that your colleague, the Leader of Government Business, indicated that the cessation of construction was due to lack of planning approvals? And is that in contradistinction—

Madam Speaker: Member, 15 seconds.

Dr. Gopeesingh:—to your statement which you just made?

Madam Speaker: Member, one question.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Sure.

Madam Speaker: The first question, please, Minister of Education.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Are you aware that your colleague, the Leader of Government—

Madam Speaker: I have recognized the Minister of Education, the first question.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Answer the question, the first question.

Hon. A. Garcia: Madam Speaker, thank you very much again. I have said it over and over again, the problem is the exorbitant cost of these projects. Of course, there are other related concerns of ours, but the main issue is the outrageous— [*Desk thumping*—cost of these projects.

**National Commission for Self Help Limited
(Details of Grants Disbursed)**

153. Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*) asked the hon. Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts:

Could the Minister provide the number of National Commission for Self Help Limited grants disbursed since September 2017 for each region?

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, 134 grants were disbursed since September 2017. A breakdown of the grants disbursed by the National Commission for Self Help Limited are as follows: Arima, three; Barataria/San Juan, five; Caroni Central, one; Couva South, one; Couva North, one; Cumuto/Manzanilla, one; D'Abadie/O'Meara, nine; Diego Martin Central, eight; Diego Martin East, five; Diego Martin West, six; Fyzabad, 10; La Brea, five; Laventille East, three; Laventille West, seven; Mayaro, four; Moruga/Tableland, 10; Naparima, three; Point Fortin, four; Princes Town, one; Pointe-a-Pierre, one; Port of Spain South, nine; San Fernando East, three; San Fernando West, two; San Juan, four; Siparia, five; St. Ann's East, eight; St. Augustine, one; Tabaquite, two; Toco/Sangre Grande, seven; Tunapuna, two; Tobago East, one; Tobago West, two.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. To the hon. Minister, I am not sure if the Minister has the information in her possession, but if she can provide it. If not, could the hon. Minister indicate from September 2017, what is the total amount of applications to the National Self Help Commission, please?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I do not

have that information before me.

Mr. Padarath: Madam, is the Minister willing to give us the assurance to provide the information?

Madam Speaker: Member, I think you will have to ask the question at some other time.

**Stollmeyer's Castle
(For Use as Prime Minister's Office)**

154. Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*) asked the hon. Prime Minister:

Could the Prime Minister indicate whether Stollmeyer's Castle is earmarked to be used as the Office of the Prime Minister? **The Minister in the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young):** Madam Speaker, the answer is: This is yet another example where there appears to be an attempt to mislead the public. This Government has never had any intention whatsoever to use Stollmeyer's Castle for the Office of the Prime Minister. So one wonders, once again, where this came from.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. To the hon. Minister, in light of the answer you have provided, could you indicate to us then what will this building be utilized for?

Hon. S. Young: Madam Speaker, the Stollmeyer's Castle, Cabinet has taken a decision to use it as an arts and cultural centre, and it has been placed under the purview of the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts to be managed by the same board that manages NAPA, and it will be used—there will

be historical guided tours, exhibitions related to art, other exhibitions provided on a fee basis, via approved criteria. It can also be used as a venue for small events, with a limited number of persons being allowed to preserve the premises, and fees will be determined by the management committee of NAPA.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. To the hon. Minister, could the hon. Minister indicate to us what is the total amount that has been spent to restore Stollmeyer's Castle?

Madam Speaker: I am not going to allow that as a supplemental question.

**Couva Children and Adult Hospital
(Collapse of Water Tower)**

176. Dr. Lackram Bodoie (*Fyzabad*) asked the hon. Minister of Health:

Could the Minister state whether the investigation into the collapse of the water tower at the Couva Children and Adult Hospital has been completed?

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Many thanks, Madam Speaker. The Urban Development Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago (UDeCOTT), has completed a preliminary report, based on the observation and investigation of the failed water storage tanks at the Couva Hospital. The contractor, along with its designers, are compiling a more comprehensive report, analyzing the design and construction method, with a view of determining the root cause of the failure.

This report is expected to be submitted during the month of April 2018, which is not too long from now. Full responsibility for the replacement of suitable water storage tank rests with the contractor and the replacement tanks are

scheduled to be in place by the end of June 2018.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental question, Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you. Given that the collapse of the water tower may be due, in part, to poor maintenance, what is being done to maintain the expensive MRI and CT scan equipment, which I am informed is rotting away at the said hospital?

[*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: I would not allow that as a supplemental question.

Increase in Lifeguards (Details of)

177. Dr. Lackram Bodoë (*Fyzabad*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Could the Minister state whether the Ministry has plans to increase the number of lifeguards in order to adequately patrol beaches throughout Trinidad and Tobago?

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, lifeguard patrols are currently in effect at the following beaches: Vessigny, Manzanilla, Quinam, Las Cuevas, Maracas/Tyrico, Salybia, Los Iros, Mayaro and Toco. All the aforementioned beaches, with the exception of Blanchisseuse, are manned during the hours of 10.00 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. inclusive of weekends and public holidays.

With respect to Blanchisseuse, however, lifeguards are only stationed over the period a public holiday comes immediately before or after the weekend. The lifeguard services are also able to provide ambulance services to Maracas Bay,

Manzanilla Beach and Salybia Beach during operation hours.

The number of lifeguards assigned to a particular beach varies depending on the size of the beach, the size of the crowd and the time of the year. The maximum number of lifeguards assigned to a particular beach is 30, while the minimum number assigned is seven. In the event that officers are absent from duty or where there is a need for heightened patrols during peak periods, weekends and public holidays, a call-out becomes necessary.

In the circumstances, the Ministry of National Security is currently engaged in discussion with the Chief Personnel Officer and the National Union of Government and Federated Workers on the issue of renegotiating the terms and conditions of employment specific to lifeguards.

At the conclusion of these negotiations, a rationalization exercise will be done to determine the adequate number of lifeguards required to patrol the beaches, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental question, Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Does the Minister consider the hours of 10.00 to 5.00 to be sufficient lifeguard cover for these beaches?

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Madam Speaker, yes it is adequate. We give the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago enough time to enjoy the beaches under the protection and the supervision of the lifeguards.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, the reason I asked that question is there was a recent drowning at Maracas Bay where the person drowned

just before 10 o'clock. I am just thinking that maybe you may want to reconsider in those circumstances.

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Madam Speaker, the notices are well known as to the time during which the lifeguards are available and I suggest that people bathe or utilize the beaches during that time, to be under protection and supervision of the lifeguards.

**St. John Trace, Avocat
(Repair of Sluice Gates)**

178. Dr. Lackram Bodoë (*Fyzabad*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

Could the Minister indicate the expected date for the commencement of repair works on the four (4) non-functional sluice gates which contributed to the recent flooding in St. John Trace, Avocat?

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):
Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Works and Transport, flooding of the St. John Trace, Avocat area was not as a result of non-functioning sluice gates. This area is part of the Oropouche Lagoon watershed and is a natural retention pond for surface water. The flooding was due to excessive high-intensity rainfall, coupled with spring tide, which hindered the discharge of water.

With regard to the non-functioning gates, the gates at St. John Trace were rehabilitated in 2003, by the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, as it then was. They are designed to be operated manually, and in 2007, in order to improve their efficiency and effectiveness, the drainage division

installed a remote transmitting unit to operate them automatically. After 10 years, the system has become obsolete and replacement parts are no longer available. It has therefore become necessary to upgrade the system.

In that regard, the Cabinet has been approached for approval of an extensive programme of works to upgrade all existing drainage pumps and gates. The project is to be executed and completed in two phases. Phase one, which is programmed to be undertaken in fiscal 2017 to 2018, includes the installation of gates. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you for the answer. Could you indicate whether the St. John Trace sluice gates would be included in phase one?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, I do not have that information with me at this time.

**DEFINITE URGENT MATTER
(LEAVE)**

**Collapsed Sea Bridge
(Government's Failure to Address)**

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 17(3), I hereby seek your leave to move the adjournment of the House at today's sitting of the House of Representatives for the purpose of discussing a definite matter or urgent public importance, namely the failure of the Government to effectively address the collapsed sea bridge between Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, the matter is definite because it relates to the latest incident in a

number of failed attempts by the Government to support the broken sea bridge between both islands, that is the rescue of some 63 persons travelling yesterday on the *Trini Flash* water taxi vessel.

The matter is urgent because the Government is now totally bereft of any plan to address the collapsed sea bridge, after numerous failures in attempting to address this situation. The matter is of public importance because the dependency upon the sea bridge affects the lives and livelihood of all who work, visit and live in Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I am not satisfied that this matter qualifies under this Standing Order. I advise that the Member pursue this matter under Standing Order 16.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTER

Whistle-blowing Allegations Re: Cambridge Analytica, AggregateIQ and the Strategic Communication Laboratories

The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I have been authorized by the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago to make the following statement on rapidly developing critical enquiries and investigations before, inter alia, the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee of the House of Commons of the Parliament of the United Kingdom and the United States of America Senate Judiciary Committee, as well as the launching of investigation by the bipartisan coalition of 37 state and territory Attorneys General from the United States and the granting of warrants by the High Court in the United Kingdom, relating to devastatingly sinister link to the alleged illegal

interference in the rights of millions of citizens in the United Kingdom and the United States of America, all stemming from the activities of several companies including Cambridge Analytica, AggregateIQ, and the Strategic Communication Laboratories Group and their affiliate companies, which allegedly began out of allegedly illegal data and communication mining activities in Trinidad and Tobago in 2013.

Madam Speaker, Cambridge Analytica is a British political consulting firm which combines data mining, data brokerage, and data analysis with strategic communication for the electoral process. It was started in 2013, as an offshoot of the SCL Group. The company engages in activities including the micro targeting of voters. Micro targeting refers to the process of analyzing data and communications to predict the behaviour, interests, and opinions held by specific groups of people and then serving them the messages that they are most likely to respond to or to be influenced by, specifically in the context of election campaigning. This data and communication collection is alleged to have been undertaken illegally and without the consent of the people from whom it was obtained.

Earlier in March 2018, multiple media houses around the globe broke news of Cambridge Analytica's business practices. The *New York Times* and the *London Observer* reported on the Facebook and Cambridge Analytica data breach, in which the company used for political purposes, personal information acquired about Facebook users, by an external researcher who claimed to be collecting it for academic purposes.

Shortly afterwards, Channel 4 News in the United Kingdom aired undercover investigative videos showing Cambridge Analytica's CEO, Alexander Nix, boasting about using prostitutes, bribery sting operations, and honey traps to discredit politicians on whom it conducted opposition research.

In response to the media reports, the Information Commissioner of the United Kingdom pursued a warrant to search the company's servers. Facebook banned Cambridge Analytica from advertising on its platform, saying that it had been deceived. On March 23, 2018, the British High Court granted the Information Commissioner's Office a warrant to search Cambridge Analytica's London offices, which were subsequently raided that day.

Madam Speaker, these events may seem far removed from our shores. However, whistle-blower testimony from Cambridge Analytica's Christopher Wylie, who is the company's former Director of Research and who helped set up Cambridge Analytica, has pinpointed Trinidad and Tobago as the site of a data and communication mining test project allegedly conducted in 2013, under the Kamla Persad-Bissessar government.

According to Wylie, the Trinidad and Tobago 2013 project formed the basis for the company's subsequent activities in the United Kingdom and in the United States, in particular. Wylie is quoted as saying: "It is something I regret. People should know what this company does. What this is. Throughout history you have examples of grossly unethical experiments. You are playing with the psychology of an entire country without their consent or awareness. You are playing with an entire nation in the context of the democratic process."

In Wylie's whistle-blowing interviews to the media and in his live testimony to the Committee of the House of Commons yesterday, Tuesday, March 27, 2018, he revealed and I quote: "It was done through Trinidad and Tobago's National Security Ministry". He further disclosed, and I quote: "The standard SCL/Cambridge Analytica method is that you get a government contract from the ruling party. And this pays for the political work. So, it is often some project that is just a cover for getting the Minister re-elected. But in this case, our government contacts were with Trinidad's National Security Council."

Wylie further stated, and I quote again: "It's incorrect to call Cambridge Analytica a purely data science company or algorithm company. It's a full service propaganda machine." Wylie went on to state, and I quote again: "If you can control all of the streams of information around your opponents, you can influence how they perceive that battle space. And you can then influence how they will behave and react."

Madam Speaker, evidence before the UK House of Commons Committee, on March 27, 2018, detailed the projects carried out by the AIQ as the affiliate company of Cambridge Analytica. Contractual documentation and emails from AIQ's project in Trinidad and Tobago, with the then Kamla Persad-Bissessar Government, were referenced and provided to the Committee of the House of Commons. The whistle-blower admitted in his testimony to the Committee of the House of Commons that he understands that the data acquisition in Trinidad and Tobago is and was illegal and that there was, and I quote "total disregard for the law".

Bloomberg Online News, in an article entitled “Cambridge Analytica’s History of Dubious Election Tricks”, published on March 20, 2018, also reports other activities tied to the UNC Government and Cambridge Analytica.

In the article, it is stated that, and I quote:

“In sales documents given to prospective clients, SCL”—the British affiliate to Cambridge Analytica—“said it helped a candidate in Trinidad by emblazoning graffiti slogans around the island that ostensibly was posted by young Trinidadians. ‘The client was then able to “adopt” related policies and claim credit for listening to a “united youth”,’ the SCL document said.

Nix acknowledged advocating the use of ‘street media’ such as graffiti and fly posters and says it’s ‘normal election practice in many of the Caribbean islands.’ The work was for the United National Congress, which didn’t respond to requests for comment.”

Madam Speaker, the testimony of Christopher Wylie before a House of Commons Committee imputing illegal actions against the UNC Kamla Persad-Bissessar Government must be taken seriously. It has been noted, that in response to enquiries, the then Prime Minister and now Opposition Leader Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar of Senior Counsel, is quoted by LoopTT in an article dated March 22, 2018, as saying that Cambridge Analytica was “not familiar” to her.

Further, in a recent public meeting held by the Opposition on Monday, March 26, 2018, the Opposition Leader dismissed the allegations related to Cambridge Analytica as “fake news”.

Madam Speaker, legal action relating to Cambridge Analytica, AIQ, and the

SCL Group, and their affiliate companies has already commenced in the United Kingdom. The House of Commons of the British Parliament, through its Committees, has begun hearings in these matters. According to an article from Oregon Department of Justice, dated March 26, 2018—

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 24(3), please, 24(3).

Madam Speaker: Please continue.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I will continue. Legal action relating to Cambridge Analytica, AIQ—

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 24(3). The Attorney General started at 2.12, 10 minutes, 2.22.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, I overrule. Please continue.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I continue.

Dr. Moonilal: Did we waive the Standing Orders?

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Listen to the truth. Legal action relating to Cambridge Analytica, AIQ—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Please continue, hon. Attorney General.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Legal action relating to Cambridge Analytica, AIQ—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Charles: Standing Order 24(4).

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member. Attorney General, please continue.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):
Madam Speaker, we beg to move that the Attorney General be allowed to finish

this statement, especially given the fact that the Members have stood and interrupted the completion of this statement.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, if you could move the Motion and then I would put it to a vote.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, I beg to move that the Standing Orders be suspended to allow the Attorney General to complete this statement in its entirety.

Madam Speaker: Members, I now put this to the House, and the question is whether the Standing Orders be waived to allow an extension of time—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Charles: No.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I believe we do things in a particular way—for an extension of time for the Attorney General to complete his statement?

Question put.

Hon. Members: Division.

The House divided

Ayes 20

Noes 15

AYES

Robinson-Regis, Hon. C.

Dr. Rowley: Most certainly.

Al-Rawi, Hon. F.

Mr. Young: Yes, I want to hear the truth.

Deyalsingh, Hon. T.

Mr. Hinds: Yes to the truth.

Mitchell, Hon. R.

Cudjoe, Hon. C.

Mr. Garcia: The truth must be told. Yes.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members. [*Crosstalk*] Member for Caroni East, I am on my legs, please. Hon. Members, could you just limit your response to yes or no?

Crichlow-Cockburn, Hon. C.

Forde, E.

Dillon, Hon. Maj. Gen. E.

Gadsby-Dolly, Hon. Dr. N.

Mc Donald, Hon. M.

Francis, Hon. Dr. L.

Jennings-Smith, Mrs. G.

Olivierre, Ms. N. Antoine, Hon. Brig. Gen. A.

Leonce, A.

Smith, Hon. D.

NOES

Mr. Lee: No, abuse of the Standing Orders.

Madam Speaker: One minute, please. Member, I have just asked that all Members limit their answers to yea or nay. [*Crosstalk*] Member for Naparima.

Charles, R.

Rambachan, Dr. S.

Karim, F.

Tewarie, Dr. B.

Moonilal, Dr. R.

Statements by Minister

2018.03.28

Newallo-Hosein, Mrs. C.

Dr. Gopeesingh: No to Wiley Wiley.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East, I am sure you mean no disrespect.

Dr. Gopeesingh: No.

Gayadeen-Gopeesingh, Mrs. V.

Mr. Ramadhar: You know you have the votes. No thanks.

Khan, Dr. F.

Padarath, B.

Bodoe, Dr. L.

Paray, A.

Mr. G. Singh: Yes, for 10 minutes. No, for beyond 10 minutes.

Madam Speaker: Member, you know better than that. Thank you. Hon. Members, the result of the division 20 Members for, 15 Members against.

Question agreed to.

Madam Speaker: The Motion is carried. Continue, Attorney General.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Whistle-blowing Allegations

Re: Cambridge Analytica, AggregateIQ and the Strategic Communication Laboratories

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you Madam President. Evidence before the UK House of Commons Committee on March 27, 2018, detailed the project carried out by AIQ as the affiliate company of Cambridge Analytica. Contractual documentation and emails from AIQ's project in Trinidad and Tobago, with the then Kamla Persad-Bissessar Government were referenced and provided to the Committee of

the House of Commons. The whistle-blower admitted in his testimony to the Committee of the House of Commons that he understands that the data acquisition in Trinidad and Tobago is and was illegal and that there was, “total disregard for the law”.

2.30 p.m.

Bloomberg Online News in an article entitled “Cambridge Analytica’s History of Dubious Election Tricks” published on March 20, 2018, also reports other activities tied to the UNC Government and Cambridge Analytica. In the article it is stated that and I quote:

“In sales documents given to prospective clients, SCL”—the British affiliate to Cambridge Analytica—“said it helped a candidate in Trinidad by emblazoning graffiti slogans around the island that ostensibly was posted by young Trinidadians. ‘The client was then able to ‘adopt’ related policies and claim credit for listening to a ‘united youth,’” the SCL document said.

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Madam Speaker, the testimony of Christopher Wylie before a House of Commons Committee imputing illegal actions against the UNC Kamla Persad-Bissessar Government must be taken seriously. It has been noted that in response to enquiries, the then Prime Minister and now Opposition Leader, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar of Senior Counsel is quoted by LoopTT in an article dated March

22, 2018, as saying that Cambridge Analytica was “not familiar” to her. Further, in a recent public meeting held by the Opposition on Monday March 26, 2018, the Opposition Leader dismissed the allegations relating to Cambridge Analytica as ‘fake news’.

Legal action relating to Cambridge Analytica, AIQ, and the SCL Group, and their affiliate companies has already commenced in the United Kingdom. The House of Commons of the British Parliament through its Committee has begun hearings into these matters. According to an Article from the Oregon Department of Justice dated March 26, 2018, a bipartisan coalition of 37 State and Territory Attorneys General from the United States sent a letter dated March 26, 2018, to Facebook CEO, Mark Zuckerberg demanding answers about the company’s business practices and privacy protections. The legislature of the United States of America has intervened. The U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee said on Monday it had invited the chief executive officers of Facebook Inc., Alphabet Inc. (Google) and Twitter Inc. to testify at an April 10, 2018 hearing on data privacy. According to an article by Reuters dated March 27, 2018 the US Federal Trade Commission took the unusual step of announcing that it had opened an investigation into Facebook which it generally only does in cases of great public interest – citing media reports that raise what it called “substantial concerns about the privacy practices of Facebook”.

Madam Speaker, the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago enshrines as a protected, fundamental right, the right to private life. [*Laughter*]

Madam Speaker: Order! Order! [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Let me repeat that, as my friends jest about it, Madam Speaker; the rest of the world being serious. Let me repeat this. The Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago enshrines as a protected, fundamental right, the right to private life. The Interception of Communications Act, Chap. 15:08 at section 6, strictly prohibits the interception of communication in the manner alleged by the whistle-blower in testimony given before The Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee of Commons of the British Parliament. The Computer Misuse Act, Chap. 11:17, at section 3, prohibits the unauthorized access to data. The alleged acts committed by Cambridge Analytica and its affiliates/alter egos potentially constitute breaches of the laws of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, in the election campaign of 2015 citizens will recall there were wide scale receipts of unsolicited personalized political messaging from entities promoting the United National Congress.

It is therefore incumbent upon the Office of the Attorney General in discharging duties under the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago, to cause an audit of all Government Ministries, Statutory Authorities, State Enterprises and the National Security Council to ascertain whether any contracts were established, whether any payments were made and whether any services were rendered by the named companies, Cambridge Analytica, AggregateIQ, and the Strategic Communication Laboratories Group, and/or any of their affiliate/alter ego companies/entities. I shall ensure that this audit includes the application of a keen eye for any masked transactions through nominated or trustee entities to hide the true identity and nature of any services provided.

Further, Madam Speaker, as the Central Authority for Trinidad and Tobago, the Office of the Attorney General shall take avail of the lawful provisions available by way of the Mutual Legal Assistance and pursue the co-operation of international investigative agencies that are conducting parallel investigations into these matters addressed in this statement. We shall reach out to authorities in the United Kingdom and the United States of America to secure information and evidence relating to this most serious matter of alleged illegal conduct and activity.

Accordingly, Madam Speaker, I am to inform this honourable House that yesterday I instructed the State's Attorneys in the United Kingdom to take immediate steps to secure the evidence and materials provided by persons, including the whistle-blower Christopher Wylie.

It is also reasonable to expect that the Committee of this Parliament with responsibility for matters of National Security will take due notice of this troubling affair and engage in suitable enquiry and interrogation of all relevant witnesses including whistle-blowers here and abroad as is actively ongoing in the committees operating in the legislatures of the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

Madam Speaker, this Government will do all in its power to investigate this very important matter to unearth whether the rights of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago have been infringed and to hold all such persons responsible for breaches of the laws of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago properly accountable.

I thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: Standing Order 24(4).

Madam Speaker: You wish to ask a question?

Dr. Moonilal: Just a question for you on just a procedure. Bearing in mind the Attorney General—

Madam Speaker: That will not be under Standing Order (24)4. If you have a Standing Order you wish to raise with respect to this, please.

Dr. Moonilal: 24(4). Bearing in mind that the Attorney General has made statements today worse than the email gate allegations—[*Laughter*—could the Attorney General indicate—

Madam Speaker: One minute. Member, you are allowed to ask a question 15 minutes for elucidation on the statement—15 seconds, sorry. Fifteen seconds on the statement made for elucidation. I will ask you to withdraw what you started as your intro. Ask your question, 15 seconds.

Dr. Moonilal: I withdraw, Madam Speaker. To the Attorney General. Mr. Attorney General, could you for purposes of elucidation indicate whether in two and a half years in office, you have found one iota of evidence to suggest that the former administration of the People's Partnership paid Cambridge Analytica or any other related entities before coming to Parliament and making such scandalous allegations? [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, I genuinely thank the hon. Member for the question. It is no small, laughing or piddling matter that the legislatures of the United Kingdom, the United States of America, the High Court of the courts in the United Kingdom, a branch of the Supreme Court have taken note of whistling-blowing testimony in live evidence [*Crosstalk*] indicating—

Madam Speaker: Order! Order!

Hon. F. Al-Rawi:—by way of evidence now globally transmitted, the direct involvement of the Kamla Persad-Bissessar government in transactions concerning breaches of the laws—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Order!

Hon. F. Al-Rawi:—of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago from witness testimony, Madam Speaker, including—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Continue, Attorney General.

Hon F. Al-Rawi: Including, Madam Speaker, in the live testimony before the House of Commons Committee the provision of documentation and email trails and linkages between the entities and members of the previous government. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Naparima, please be reminded where you are.

SPECIAL SELECT COMMITTEE

(Extension of Time)

Notifications Pursuant to Section 123 of the Constitution

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very kindly. Madam Speaker, having regard to the Interim Report of the Special Select Committee established to consider and report on the process followed in relation to the notifications pursuant to section 123 of the Constitution, I beg to move that the Committee be allowed an extension of four weeks in order to complete its work and submit a final report by April 27, 2018.

Question put and agreed to.

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEES
(Extension of Time)

Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Bill, 2016

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very kindly. Madam Speaker, having regard to the Interim Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to consider and report on the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Bill, 2016, I beg to move that the committee be allowed an extension of three months in order to complete its work and submit a final report by June 29, 2018.

Question put and agreed to.

Cybercrime Bill, 2017

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you. Madam Speaker, having regard to the Interim Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to consider and report on the Cybercrime Bill, 2017, I beg to move that the Committee be allowed an extension of three months in order to complete its work and submit a final report by June 29, 2018.

Question put and agreed to.

2.45 p.m.

POLICE SERVICE COMMISSION
(NOMINATION OF MS. BLISS SEEPERSAD)

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

Whereas section 122(3) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Chap. 1:01 (“the Act”) provides that the President shall, after consultation with the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition nominate persons, who are qualified and experienced in the disciplines of law, finance, sociology or management, to be appointed as members of the Police Service Commission;

And whereas section 122(4) of the Act provides that the President shall issue a Notification in respect of each person nominated for appointment under subsection (3) and the Notification shall be subject to affirmative resolution of the House of Representatives;

And whereas the President has nominated Ms. Bliss Seepersad to be appointed as a member of the Police Service Commission;

And whereas the President has on the 26th day of March, 2018 made a Notification in respect of the nomination;

And whereas it is expedient to approve the Notification:

Be it resolved that the Notification of the nomination of Ms. Bliss Seepersad as a member of the Police Service Commission be approved.

Madam Speaker, we had not initially intended to be here today for a sitting of this honourable House, but given certain exigencies of the situation and legal requirements, we were virtually duty-bound to be here today. Let me explain, Madam Speaker, through your indulgence, and maybe I should back up a little bit, since I am the mover of this Motion, because recently a young lady making a comment in the public domain about matters in the country, referred to the fact that

the Government, and namely, the Prime Minister, had not been able to appoint a Commissioner of Police. And, I looked at that comment in wonder, because here I was relying on the newspapers for any information relating to the process of the appointment of a Commissioner of Police, because given the arrangements that are in place, maybe the one person in Trinidad and Tobago who is not involved or who knows nothing about what is happening with the appointment of a Commissioner of Police is the Prime Minister.

Interested as I am in the matter and urgent as the matter is—and of great concern to the public—the arrangements for that appointment require me to get my information from the newspaper, and it is against that background that I did see in the newspapers that the current Acting Commissioner of Police was in the post by virtue of a short appointment given by the Police Service Commission, and that appointment holds until the 31st of March, which is in a few days' time with the intervening long Easter weekend involved.

At about the same time, Madam Speaker, the term of office of the last Chairman of the Police Service Commission came to an end just about the time prior to the ending of the term of office of the outgoing President. In short, Madam Speaker, what happened was that there was no person in the post of Chairman of the Police Service Commission at the changeover of the Presidency.

So, on coming into office, Her Excellency would have met a situation where there was a need to have an appointment made to the position of Chairman of the Police Service Commission so as to impact upon appointments of leadership of the police service, meaning, to appoint an Acting Commissioner of Police and the

deputies, and if we fail to do that by the 31st of March, it would mean that on the 1st of April, there would be no leadership of the police service.

Her Excellency, with dispatch, proceeded to find persons who are fitting the bill as described in the Motion—persons experienced in law and the various other disciplines outlined—and not only experienced, but willing to serve on these commissions. Because, Madam Speaker, as you know, fewer and fewer persons in our national community are prepared to provide public service to these and similar commissions for good reasons, in many instances, and in other instances for reasons best known to them.

Madam Speaker, as you would know, Her Excellency was installed in the post on the 19th of March and, therefore, what had to be done, subsequent to the 19th of March, was for this search to be done to find persons who would be willing to serve, get their agreement, and then the law, the constitutional arrangements require that there be consultation between the Office of the President, the Office of the Prime Minister and the Office of the Opposition Leader, and only after that has been done, the sourcing of the persons and the consultation and the responses to the Office of the President, could the President then proceed to select an individual or individuals to serve on the Police Service Commission.

Madam Speaker, in the few days available, this torturous route has been traversed and the recommendation to this House has come from the Office of the President. It is after the consultation had been completed. It is that recommendation through the notification which says as follows, Madam Speaker, a notification dated 26th day of March, 2018:

Under the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

And I quote, Madam Speaker:

It is hereby notified that I, Paula Mae-Weekes, President, after consultation with the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, in accordance with section 122(3) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, nominate Bliss Seepersad, a person who is qualified and experienced in the discipline of finance to be appointed as a member of the Police Service Commission.

/s/ Her Excellency the President.

Madam Speaker, so process-wise, we have gone through all that is required. It is now for this honourable House to receive this notification and to give its approval to concur with the intention of Her Excellency to appoint this citizen to the position as described.

Madam Speaker, some of us may know, and most people will not know, who Bliss Seepersad is, but if we do vote in the affirmative today, this lady will become a member of the Police Service Commission and Her Excellency will proceed to appoint a chairman and that chairman will proceed to call the relevant meeting, and take the steps to appoint the leadership to the police service if only in acting capacities.

Ms. Seepersad is experienced in financial services, and she is an administration professional who brings 27 years of banking and financial planning knowledge having worked with large reputable organizations and with professional individuals in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, with respect to her areas of expertise, this lady is very well qualified to be considered as she has been by Her Excellency. She has expertise in financial and investment management, in strategic planning and development, in compliance management and she is a facilitator and trainer. She also has training in disaster preparedness plans. She has been involved in a number of conference planning and management issues accordingly, and she has worked extensively in client development and networking.

Madam Speaker, with respect to her professional training, she is a licensed insurance broker, specializing in international health insurance. She is also an expert in time management and, I dare say, Madam Speaker, if she ever finds herself anywhere near the police service, this will be a very welcomed skill. Madam Speaker, she also will be extremely useful bringing the skills of developing performance standards, because heaven knows, Madam Speaker, we need to work on improving on certain standards in the police service

She also has training and experience from her days at the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago in matters of security and safety. As a manager, she is skilled in managing in a changing environment, and with respect to financial management, she has expertise in anti-money laundering training, and with global trends in international finance.

Madam Speaker, her education is quite impressive, dating back to her qualification where she obtained a Bachelor of Art and Honours Degree in Geography and History in 1980. She went on in 1981/1982 to read for her Master of Arts Degree in Urban Geography and Planning from Michigan State University.

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She also, Madam Speaker, in the period '84 to '87, completed eight level-two passes papers in Chartered Association of Certified Accountants qualification and, Madam Speaker, she has a Post-Graduate Certificate course in Global Trends in Financial Markets.

She is very active in matters of management, and she is currently the Wealth Manager at Guardian Asset Management and Investment Services Limited, and has been practising management and financial consultant work for the past 16 years locally and regionally. She has worked with Guardian Life of the Caribbean as an Asset Manager, and at Intercommercial Bank Limited, assisting in providing financial services for them.

Madam Speaker, with respect to her involvements in other business outside the workplace, she holds currently a directorship on the Chaguaramas Development Authority, and she is also the Vice-President of the Trinidad Building and Loan Association and, previously, Madam Speaker, she worked with the Trinidad and Tobago Transparency Institute, among others, along with Asa Wright, as part of her public service to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. She functioned as Company Secretary in a number of private sector organizations, and currently holds membership in the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce, the Art Society of Trinidad and Tobago, the Queen's Park Cricket Club and the Trinidad and Tobago Transparency Institute.

Madam Speaker, citizen Bliss Seepersad is very well qualified to be considered for the position of member on the Police Service Commission, and having been so selected and recommended and we being so notified, it is with

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pleasure and privilege that I ask my colleagues in this House, to accept from Her Excellency the notification and act in support in the appointment of Bliss Seepersad to a membership on the Police Service Commission.

Madam Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): Thank you. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to join this debate and to speak today on behalf of Members on this side on a matter that the Prime Minister, quite rightly, spoke to earlier and suggests that there is some urgency to conduct this piece of business as we are doing today. Today as well, Madam Speaker, I suspect that this is the only piece of business we are conducting, and it speaks to the importance of the timeline that we are operating with.

Madam Speaker, the Motion before us on the Order Paper calls upon the House—the Motion in the name of the Leader of the House—to affirm the notification for the nomination of Ms. Bliss Seepersad as a member of the Police Service Commission and to approve such a notification.

Madam Speaker, just to state that this process we are engaged in in the Parliament, is in a historical context relatively new. It was only about 10 years ago or so, a decade ago, that our entire arrangements for the appointment of such commissioners, our arrangement was changed to ensure greater transparency, greater sharing of information, so that persons nominated to serve on the Police Service Commission and, indeed, other commissioners and other high officeholders, would be subjected to parliamentary scrutiny. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, that process was undertaken by an agreement between the then People's National Movement Government of Mr. Patrick Manning and the United National Congress in Opposition led by the former Member for Couva North.

So, Madam Speaker, it has been a journey and I remember that debate because I believe I also spoke in that debate, and it was a welcomed step because of the need for transparency, accountability and information on key officeholders. And many persons in the national community were looking to the model of the United States Congress, where persons in high office for their appointment, they will go to a congressional subcommittee and be grilled, be interviewed, examined and cross-examined so that the American people can have a sense of who are these people, who are those high officeholders who will exert so much power and carry so great a burden of responsibility in the conduct of American life. And while we did not quite reach the point of having members before a committee for that purpose, it was felt that this was a good start, and maybe as we go along, we may want to consider other such avenues so that persons who exercise power and authority could be placed before the public.

As Ministers and as Members of Parliament, we are before the public all the time, but there are still officers of the State, in high office, who for some reason or another may not be before the public to explain their actions or omissions in the national interest.

Madam Speaker, just for the timeline, I just want to indicate that the Opposition understands and respects the urgency of this process [*Desk thumping*] and pursuant to that commitment, a letter dated last Thursday was received by the

Opposition Leader on Friday, and by Monday the Opposition Leader signed and returned a letter confirming her non-objection to the candidacy of Bliss Seepersad. [*Desk thumping*] So that the United National Congress acted, in this sense, with great urgency and diligence and commitment [*Desk thumping*] to our constitutional responsibility, and the Member for Siparia wasted no time in responding to this urgent matter before the Parliament today.

Madam Speaker, we also must take this opportunity to congratulate those persons, including Ms. Bliss Seepersad—she is before us today—to congratulate her for offering herself for high public office. [*Desk thumping*] This is still a country, where if you would have heard the Attorney General earlier, is still a country where those in high office are the subject of scandalous allegations, the subject of unbelievable “mauvais langue” and comess and bacchanal, and that was evident today. [*Desk thumping*] We must, therefore, congratulate Ms. Seepersad for taking this step and offering herself for national service, because very few people may have the heart. We have a saying, you know, it is not for the fainthearted, this business, because once you occupy high office, Member for Point Fortin, you can expect the criticism, reasonable or not, that will come your way as you conduct the business of the State. So that Ms. Seepersad must be congratulated. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the Police Service Commission operates pursuant to section 122 of the Constitution, and such persons as Ms. Seepersad, I must say and others, they also carry that extra burden of not only offering themselves, but exposing all their business to the Integrity in Public Life Act, and the Integrity

Commission, which many do—regrettably there are some Ministers who have not done that—but many will be asked to expose all their financial business, their property dealings, their interests, assets, liabilities and so on.

So that public service today is not as it was, and for good reason, 30, 40 years ago. Today, when you are in public life, you have to account to the legal authority, you have to account to the public and if you make a mistake anywhere along the line there, there are serious repercussions that you would face, and Members of the Government would know that only too well.

Madam Speaker, the Police Service Commission finds its creation in the Constitution, section 122, and the Prime Minister earlier read section 122(3) which we are dealing with today—I would not read that—but I wanted just to focus on another aspect of the setup of the Police Service Commission, and to indicate for the record and for the public listening today as well:

“The Police Service Commission”—according to section 123—“shall have the power to—

- (a) appoint persons to hold or act in the office of Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of Police;
- (b) make appointments on promotion and to confirm appointments;
- (c) remove from office and exercise disciplinary control over persons holding or acting in the offices specified in paragraph (a);”

Meaning Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner. The Police Service Commission would have the power to:

- “(d) monitor the efficiency and effectiveness of the discharge of their

functions;

- (e) prepare an annual performance appraisal report in such form as may be prescribed by the Police Service Commission respecting and for the information of the Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner of Police; and
- (f) hear and determine appeals from decisions of the Commissioner of Police, or of any person to whom the powers of the Commissioner of Police have been delegated—in relation to the appointment on promotion—“as a result of disciplinary proceedings brought against a police officer appointed by the Commissioner of Police.”

Madam Speaker, the Police Service Commission also nominates persons for appointment to the offices specified and I believe that function is a function that is upon us now, given the March 31st deadline, and it is for that reason—and not that reason alone—that this appointment has to be made with a sense of urgency.
Madam Speaker:

“The Police Service Commission shall submit to the President a list of the names of the persons nominated for appointment...”

And so on, but I do not want to get into that, because it is the subject of a special select committee whose work, as is now public knowledge, continues—and just today we have asked for an extension. But for better or for worse, the national community is now seeing firsthand processes that are being used by commissions for key appointments in the country. I believe that is also in the public interest that persons understand how things are done, and that particular commission, you

know, have been before the television cameras and before a committee of Parliament explaining themselves so to speak. This is another burden that public officeholders carry in that you can become TV stars or TV villains, depending on the matters before the national community, and this is why it is so important to welcome and thank persons for their service to Trinidad and Tobago in this respect.

Madam Speaker, over the years, the Police Service Commission, under a previous Chairman—I believe it was Prof. Ramesh Deosaran—had taken a much more proactive approach in interfacing with the national community, and it is not uncommon for the Police Service Commission to be engaging the national community in dialogue on the state of crime, on the state of the management of the police service and on their critical functions as I just outlined.

So someone with this skill level—and I have the resume in my hand which I shall refer to as a document we were furnished with—while Ms. Seepersad clearly is not a national figure that is well known to the national community, clearly, Ms. Seepersad has great expertise and accomplishments in several areas. It was interesting that there is a root discipline: a first degree in History, I believe it was and Geography if I am not mistaken, Madam Speaker. I saw the movement from that social science background to finance, to management, to wealth management and certain very narrow specializations. So that Ms. Seepersad will complement the other members of this commission with this unique set of skill sets.

But, Madam Speaker, there is a matter that I would just like to raise on the candidate. As I said before, the Opposition Leader indicated her non-objection and

is very clear, we are not in any way or any form or fashion objecting to the candidacy of Ms. Seepersad. But there is a matter that struck us a bit, Madam Speaker, and I just want to raise it. If the CV that we have been furnished with is up-to-date, it suggests as well that the candidate for this appointment is also a member of the Chaguaramas Development Authority.

Madam Speaker, just to reflect on that, the Chaguaramas Development Authority is appointed pursuant to a Cabinet decision. So that, in a sense, is indeed a political appointment. The candidate, I am told, was appointed in December 2015, appointed under the administration led by the Member for Diego Martin West. So this person before us today has offered herself to serve before, and the Cabinet considered that appointment, and in their wisdom made an appointment to the Chaguaramas Development Authority. It says in the resume that the person, the candidate before us, that position is current.

I would just like to raise an issue as to whether or not that position is not an untenable position for someone to be in, that they are working on behalf of the Government appointed by the Cabinet, by the Executive. And the Executive is, of course, managed in our system of Government, by a political party that wins an election or that has been selected to lead a country. But, Madam Speaker, this person has been a political appointee, and with good reason, there is no doubt about the qualifications, but when the person goes now to the Police Service Commission, that person is required to act completely independently and to appear to act completely independently and impartially of the Executive, because the Executive plays no business in the work of the Police Service Commission, and

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they ought to play no role in the Police Service Commission. [*Desk thumping*]
There is a separation there. I do not know if that could be called a Great Wall of China as well, maybe it is a “Little Wall of China”, but there is a separation.

I would suggest that this candidate, as strong as the candidate may be—and we have no objection—would reconsider her position as to whether or not she should continue to serve as a political appointee on a state board, because there are lot of issues that will arise. There are issues of apparent bias, there are issues of apparent prejudice and so on, because that person is in receipt of a stipend, as small as it may be, but that person is in receipt of taxpayers’ money in that position that they are required to follow the mandate of the Government. When you are on a Board of Director of the CDA, Petrotrin, wherever, you follow the policy mandate of the Government.

3.15 p.m.

So that person is required to follow the policy mandate of the Cabinet with one hat on and then put on a next hat and say, I ignore you, I do not follow you, you have no business in the Police Service Commission. I believe and I will say it in a soft way, that is an untenable position to be in, and the candidate ought to reconsider that position. And the Government ought to give that some thought as well, because, you know, there is a point at which there could be a conflict. It is not a conflict of police, you know, is the CDA, while they have an estate police, I think—it is not a matter of policing and Commissioner of Police, it is because you are in a position of a political appointee, and then you are in the position of an impartial independent commissioner under the Police Service Commission. I hope

I made that point clear but in a gentle way, because we cast no aspersions on the candidate.

Madam Speaker, all Members have been furnished with the CV but not the national community, so I will just reflect on a view items: areas of expertise, financial investment management; accomplishments include—and, in fact, I was taken aback by an accomplishment here, to read the person was involved in reducing the delinquency in the mortgage portfolio from 95 per cent to 20 per cent to ensure viability of the Worker's Bank (1989) Limited, and that would be quite a feat; successfully increase market share of the mortgage market at Scotiabank between 1995 and 1998; mobilized financial resources to allow persons to travel, and so on, and a wealth of professional training and education. It is Geography and History, the first degree, followed by a Master of Arts in Urban Geography and Planning, suggesting now there is a planner, and Association of Chartered Certified Accountants, completed eight level-two papers; postgraduate Diploma in Business Administration, global trends in financial markets, and so on. So there is a sort of ascendancy from social sciences to planning, urban planning, and then to business and then finance, and that is fine.

Experiences include the Home Mortgage Bank, the Seecharan Scott Chambers, 101 Art Gallery, Guardian Life of the Caribbean Limited, Guardian Asset Management Limited, Inter-commercial Bank, the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, and, of course, several individual consultancies over the working life of the candidate. The candidate is also, apart from the CDA, currently serving, according to this, on the Trinidad Building and Loan Association as

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Vice-President, COMCAP Investments Limited, Family Planning Association of Trinidad and Tobago, Caribbean Foundation Aids and Sustainable Health as an advisor, and had worked before, or served in some way, the Trinidad and Tobago Transparency Institute, Battoo Travel Service Limited, Asa Wright Nature Centre, and a couple others. There is no problem of course with that, and there might be a more well-rounded personality as we look at membership of the Trinidad and Tobago Transparency Institute, the Queen's Park Cricket Club—Caroni East—Art Society of Trinidad and Tobago, the Powerful Ladies of Trinidad and Tobago, and the Chamber of Industry and Commerce.

So, well qualified, and that qualification comes to us at a time when, clearly, the major problem facing this nation is crime and insecurity. And with the problems that we face, it is not the responsibility alone of the police, it is not the responsibility alone of the Government or the Parliament, but also institutions like the Police Service Commission that has this critical role in calling to account the hierarchy of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. And if that function is abandoned, if that function is depleted, then we are in a bigger crisis than we believe to be in. So that there is a lot of work to be done. We know of the ongoing matter involving the appointment of the Commissioner, and I will not speak to that, that is before of a committee, but there are other work that the commission has to be involved in, apart from appointment, and that would be the monitoring, the constitutional remit of the monitoring of the performance of those specified offices. [*Desk thumping*] If that is not done properly that speaks to a very difficult position where the police service at the very top would be adrift, lost at sea,

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without being rooted in any particular key and core performance, related audits, and so on.

So, Madam Speaker, those are the few words we would like to share. Also, this is of course under the remit of Her Excellency the President—unless I am mistaken, this is the first appointment of Her Excellency the President, and by itself it may speak, if not full volumes, but speak significantly to other appointments to come. We also believe that there is still, unless I am mistaken, a vacancy in the Police Service Commission, one more, and we look forward to that person coming to us very soon for a similar engagement of scrutiny. Madam Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister. [*Desk thumping*]

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I want to thank my colleague from Oropouche East for contributing to the Motion's expedition. But, Madam Speaker, I want to make one point very clear, because my colleague spoke about people offering themselves for service in two instances here, one, in noting that Ms. Seepersad is a member of the Chaguaramas Development Authority, and today as a person who is up for consideration for the Police Service Commission. I do not think that Ms. Seepersad offered herself for service, it is the other way around. It is the administration of the country, in the case of the Chaguaramas Development Authority, the Minister or the Ministry of Planning and Development would have required certain skills, and in looking for these skills, I am sure my colleagues on the other side understand how difficult it is to get professional people to fill the number of spots in the state architecture,

particularly skills such as accounting.

There are many statutory requirements for quite a number of boards where you have to put board members with respect to certain skills, whether engineer, architect, lawyer, and so on, and then, as a Government, whether it is this Government or that Government, you have to find those skills. And I do not think people come—well, not very often, people come running and offering themselves for the positions. It is the Government that goes and asks the requisite skill holders whether they would be minded to serve on these boards. And, Madam Speaker, take my word for it, if you trust—I am sure you do—that in most instances professional persons who are approached and asked to serve on public bodies decline the offer, and, as I said earlier on, for good reason. So it is very difficult to get people to serve, and I was a little disappointed to hear my colleague raising the matter that because Ms. Seepersad is on the CDA board appointed by this Government that she somehow has some issue of conflict because she was appointed by this Government, and he is recommending that she withdraw from there because she serves this Government. Let me put a different reflection on that, a different interpretation, she and other persons who are on these boards appointed with tremendous gratitude, they are not there to serve the Government or the PNM or the Prime Minister, they are there to serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And the fact that they agreed to serve when approached by a particular Government should not be interpreted that they are lackeys of that Government.

And having raised it in that way, Madam Speaker, with the recommendation

that she withdraws, you are not only saying it, you now making it an issue, because as she goes, as my colleague quite properly said, today we pass this, and I hope we do, tomorrow or tonight she is appointed chairman of the Service Commission, immediately she comes under public scrutiny, and then the gentle comments in here could turn into barbs because issues will arise and her actions or inactions can similarly be interpreted in an unkind way, that it is because she was a PNM person, appointed by, as if being a PNM person is not a badge of honour in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, if it is that an issue arises because she has agreed to serve the public under the administration of the PNM in 2015 or 2016, or so, well then she ought not today to be considered for the Service Commission, because here I am, head of the PNM, head of the Government, and I am the one recommending her here. So if she was PNM then on the appointment to the CDA, what is she going to be today when I stand in the Parliament and recommend her to you? I am doing the same thing, recommending her for public service, not to serve me or the PNM, and I am disappointed that that was raised, and having raised it in that way he now puts up a flag to come back to later on—I hope not—that, you see, she was a PNM lackey. She was on the CDA board and she come here as wolf in sheep clothing. I understand that and it is quite unfortunate.

We ought to encourage citizens to volunteer in this country, and those to whom this country has been good should be good to the country and give back, and not be identified—[*Desk thumping*—]—not be identified by any political or other persuasions, either in the face of race, colour, geography, or whatever. We have a

lot of people in this country who will not come anywhere near public service because of this. Madam Speaker, today—as a matter of fact, Madam Speaker, if the truth be told, when the name appeared to me, and incidentally Her Excellency sent a correspondence to me during the night and by daybreak I was giving my approval, so I did not have to compare how fast I did it with the Opposition Leader. But the bottom line is, Madam Speaker, that when the name came to me my first question was, who is that? And I consulted with my colleagues who reminded me that it was a person who is on the CDA board, because I had no memory and recollection of that appointment. So to hear today that she was on the board and she was must get off because she was appointed by a Government which I head, because she has a conflict, Madam Speaker, is so unnecessary.

Madam Speaker, I think as an accountant of her calibre who is available and willing to serve on two locations, serves as an accountant in the public service to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and it is not an either/or. [*Desk thumping*] It is not an either/or.

Dr. Moonilal: Could I ask a question, just for clarity? A few moments ago the Prime Minister referred to the candidate as the chairman, but today we are appointing her as a member of the Police Service Commission. It may have been a mistake that you have put on the record.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: When we put a member on the board, any member of the Service Commission, now that the person is on the board and there is a group in place, it falls to Her Excellency the President, to choose one of them as chairman. But the bottom line is that in the absence of a chairman those who were there could

not have functioned to proceed to put leadership in the police service. There has to be a chairman in place to call a meeting, and a quorum to that meeting, and then what we want done is the appointment of police leadership, acting Commissioner and deputies.

But to get back to the point, Madam Speaker, public service in this country is not easy. The minute you put yourself up for public service in this country, you automatically put yourself up for ridicule. It matters not how well you do your job, but that is par for the course, and I am grateful that there are still many citizens who are prepared to offer themselves, to leave the comfort of their zones where they enjoy a good life and come into this area of the hurly-burly and the ridicule of the public service, because without the public service this country would be a far worse place than we think it is.

So, today, I expect that my colleagues on the other side would accept this notification, and would not call on Ms. Seepersad to remove herself from the CDA. If she has the time—if she has the time and the inclination to serve at both locations, it is our view that it ought to be allowed. We make no such request.

Madam Speaker, we need not prolong this debate, a candidate of high quality has been found by Her Excellency. The candidate has agreed to serve, we are asked to vote in support of or in rejection of. Madam Speaker, I think we should support this nomination, and having said that, Madam Speaker, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

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That the notification of the nomination of Ms. Bliss Seepersad as a member of the Police Service Commission be approved.

ADJOURNMENT

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House.

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):

Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to a date to be fixed.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, before I put the question of the adjournment to the House, I will now invite Members to bring greetings on the commemoration of Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day, 2018, and also Easter greetings. We will take it in the order of Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day and then Easter. Member for Moruga/Tableland. [*Desk thumping*]

Greetings (Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day)

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Education (Hon. Dr. Lovell Francis):

Madam Speaker, good afternoon. Good afternoon to all Members. It is my pleasure to stand again for the third year running to bring greetings on behalf of the Government on the occasion of Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day. Madam Speaker, the last two years I have done this I have spoken briefly about the history of the Baptist faith, and the fact that it was born in Moruga, and that the Spiritual Baptists faced a difficult time because of the passing of the Shouter Baptist Ordinance. Madam Speaker, in lieu of repeating the same thing for the third year running, I want to add a little context in terms of the history of this thing to perhaps

broaden the argument on it.

In 1834, 1838, pick a date, you had something called Emancipation whereby persons of African origin were freed in this country. And if one assumed that that was the ending of a story where the hero and heroine ride off into the sunset, it was not the case, because there was a colonial ethos which suggested that if one were not of European ancestry or heritage that one's freedom should be very much circumscribed.

Madam Speaker, the attack on the Shouter Baptist community of this country forms part of a larger paradigm which was a colonial intent to frustrate, to restrict, to purposely try its best to prevent the development of any cultural ethos, any religious persuasion, any religious expression that was not decidedly Eurocentric in nature. So whereas the ordinance would have said that the Baptists were a public nuisance, they made noise, they were loud, they disrupted the normal functioning of society, it was really an intent to prevent a cultural outpouring or a cultural showing that was very different from what the colonial ethos and the colonial hierarchy expected or wished to allow to develop. That is why, Madam Speaker, a right that all of us take today for granted, which is the right to worship in the way that we feel or worship in the way that we believe, you could have had your head busted, you could have had your blood being spilt, you could have been brought before the courts to answer for something that we consider to be absolutely natural today.

Madam Speaker, the Spiritual Baptist community uses a word to describe difficulties, they say, tribulations. This tribulation, this period of tribulation lasted 34 years until it was repealed in 1951. During that tribulation the Spiritual Baptists could have been cowed, they could have abandoned their faith, they could have

moved to more socially prescribed, at the time, versions of their faith or other Christian faiths, they did not. They stood resolute, they hid, they built churches way in the bush, and they continued to worship in the way that they saw fit, and there is a lesson within that for them, but a lesson within that for all of us.

Madam Speaker, I really want to wish the Spiritual Baptist community, Shouter Baptist community, a very happy commemoration of their special day. It is important to them, they have endured and they will continue to endure, but the larger lesson lies for us. The Spiritual Baptist/Shouter Baptist community endured 34 years of tribulation where a constitutional right that we take often for granted today was denied them because of an Afrocentric form of worship. Madam Speaker, if they could survive 34 years of tribulation, we could survive a few years of economic difficulty. We too have to survive, have to endure. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. This Friday, March 30th, marks the celebration of Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day, and we on this side are honoured, and I am pleased as one who has grown up in the Baptist faith to join the national community in celebrating Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day, which commemorates the repeal of the Shouters Prohibition Ordinance of 1917. This law banned and made illegal such essential Shouter Baptist practices as soul-searching music, loud singing, bell ringing, the deeply pensive and spiritually enduring practices of mourning and animated worship. Shouter Baptists represent a truly indigenous religion with roots in Africa and spiritual sustenance from Europe. It speaks to the survival of cultural practices despite decades of oppression. It is corporeal manifestation of the essential

spirituality of a people who can provide Trinidad and Tobago with many lessons as we face these challenging times.

Their faith, inner strength, and belief in the righteousness of their beliefs, despite scorn and ridicule, are qualities that we can all as a people aspire to emulate. The struggles of our forefathers and the horrors that they overcame as a sect of our society tell us that truth, righteousness and light will ultimately prevail over oppression and darkness. In 1996, during a previous UNC administration, the struggles of the Spiritual Shouter Baptists were recognized and brought annually to the national attention through the grant of a national holiday. [*Desk thumping*] So on March 30th every year, the entire country focuses on the Shouter Baptist faith and the lessons we can draw from their largely successful mission of cultural retention. Under a UNC administration the Fifth Company Baptist School was fully refurbished even as the price of oil was less than \$17 per barrel. The UNC built the St. Barbara's Shouter Baptist School in Maloney. In addition, two Early Childhood Centres were constructed. As we face the trials and tribulations of escalating crime, persistent poverty, et cetera—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. R. Charles:—we can find solace in the successful struggles of our fellow Baptist citizens.

We call on the younger generation of Shouter Baptists to continue the struggle and advocacy for truth, peace, equity and justice, which are inherent parts of their DNA. Trinidad and Tobago needs you on our street corners and on our highways and byways with your bells, candles and flowers, singing loud praises to your Lord while speaking truth to power and being a conscience of our nation beckoning us to a brighter future. I call on the Spiritual Shouter Baptists to take

the lead in fostering unity among the various strands of the Baptist faith. This way, and with a larger following you will impact more frontally the challenges we face and illuminate our country's vision and place in the region and in the world. We on this side will continue with words and, more so, with action to support the philosophy, principles, practices and institutions of the Shouter Baptist community as it seeks to be a full partner in every aspect of the growth and development of our country. We wish you every success in your future endeavours. May your struggles and successes be an inspiration to all of us. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I too take this opportunity to join in extending best wishes to the Spiritual Shouter Baptist community of our twin island republic. We have indeed come a long way since the passing of the 1917 Shouter Prohibition Ordinance to an enshrined right of the freedom of conscience and religious belief and observance under our Republican Constitution. This is indeed victorious for us as a nation and for the Baptist faith who have struggled for recognition and the right to worship in this land. Historians have acclaimed that the tenets of this faith are indigenous to Trinidad and Tobago and that it is a unique religion. The faith has fortified many with the conviction to fight for enlightenment, righteousness, equity, equality and justice. And I cast my memory to the labour movement and to the fight of Tubal Uriah Butler, and also to the countless and faceless women who by the doctrines of the faith in our communities have come to be known as teacher and mother.

On behalf of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago and on my own behalf, I take this opportunity to wish the members of the Spiritual Shouter Baptist faith, to you other members, and to all of Trinidad and Tobago, a happy and reflective Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day. [*Desk thumping*]

(Easter)

Madam Speaker: Easter greetings, the Minister of Education. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure on behalf of the Christian community to bring Easter greetings to all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. We live in a society that respects the rights of religious practice, and because of this Easter is generally celebrated and observed by all in Trinidad and Tobago. However, for the Christian community, Easter is regarded as the most important event in the Christian calendar, because it signifies the resurrection of Christ after having suffered the crucifixion on Good Friday. To us Christians, Easter is a very important occasion. In fact, for all of us it is an occasion where we celebrate with a feeling of joy and accomplishments. We view Christ as our God, and in so doing the fact that he was able to rise from the dead and meet with his disciples tells us that there is life after death.

Madam Speaker, to all of us of the Christian community, Easter also is a time of celebration. Apart from celebrating the victory of life over death, we celebrate with friends and relatives so that there is that feeling of community among us. We meet, we greet and we eat, and we serve each other with things that would always be remembered as coming from us who believe in the Christian faith.

Madam Speaker, Easter is a time also where the national community of Trinidad and Tobago usually takes some time off to relax and to spend time with friends and family. And I am sure during this Easter time we all will be with our friends and our loved ones so that we will not only be commemorating the victory of Christ but we will be thinking a lot about family and friendship. And it is therefore with great pleasure that today, on behalf of the Christian community, I bring greetings on this very important and solemn occasion of Easter. Thank you

very much, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I rise this evening during this most reverend week which is often referred to as the Holy Week by the Christian community, to offer warm and sincere Easter greetings to our Christian brothers and sisters of Trinidad and Tobago, as well as all our nation's citizens on behalf of the Opposition. Madam Speaker, within one day's time the Christian community will begin three of the most solemn days within their religious calendar as they commemorate the holiest of events which has defined and moulded Christianity, which is the celebration of Easter. Easter is the most important day on the Christian's calendar as it represents the fulfilment of God's promises to mankind. Madam Speaker, to Christians the meaning of Easter is Jesus Christ's victory over death.

3.45p.m.

His resurrection symbolizes the eternal life that is granted to all who believe in him, but more importantly, his resurrection marks the triumph of good over evil, sin and death.

However, Madam Speaker, the heart of Easter lies in the words of Jesus when he proclaimed the new covenant between God and his people, according to the Gospel of Luke during the last supper with his disciples. Jesus took a cup of wine and said:

This cup is the new covenant between God and his people. An agreement confirmed with my blood which is poured out as a sacrifice for you.

So, Madam Speaker, Easter represents a time of renewal, not only for Christians,

but it offers the message of renewed hope and belief which all our citizens can be inspired.

As we look at the national events plaguing our nation, mothers losing their lives through violence, breadwinners losing jobs and youths being abused, it is clear that darkness has engulfed our nation. It appears that with each passing day and with each passing incident of horror within our national framework, our citizens are losing hope. Therefore, it is key that we resurrect hope and belief within our nation.

On the day of resurrection the disciples went to the grave, but found the stone covering the tomb where Christ was buried removed. It can therefore be said that Easter is about removing the stone in our personal lives and the society where we live. We must use this Easter to remove the stone of violence against women and girls, as we resurrect a society which protects, appreciates and assists the women of our nation. This process involves each and every citizen playing their part to become our sisters' keepers once more.

Madam Speaker, another stone which must be removed from the grave this Easter is the stone of absence of hope and opportunity for our youths. We must work to resurrect a society where every youth of this nation can reach their true potential, regardless of their social background, race or religion. We must ensure our youths are given opportunities to be part of the national decision-making process.

Only on Sunday, during his Palm Sunday message, Pope Francis rallied young people to keep speaking out against injustice, even as elders sit idly by. Pope Francis went on to say the temptation to silence young people has always existed. There are many ways to sedate them, to keep them from getting involved,

to make their dreams flat and dreary, petty and plaintive. Therefore, Madam Speaker, I urge our nation to use this Easter to be transformed into a nation that stands up and supports its young people to become part of the solution to our nation's problems.

Madam Speaker, as I close, I urge all citizens to be like the lady with the alabaster jar of perfume. The *Bible* says an unnamed woman known only as a sinner in the city where she lived, went to Jesus with an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, and did what no one ever thought of doing. She anointed his feet and sought forgiveness as those surrounding loudly jeered her. Jesus responded by accepting her repentance and forgiving her for her sins.

Therefore, there are two things as citizens which we must note. Firstly, we are all sinners, but once we approach God with pure hearts we can live a changed life. Secondly, regardless what society thinks of you, each citizen like the woman with the alabaster box has the power to change our nation and contribute to the development of Trinidad and Tobago.

Let us this Easter resurrect a nation which gives hope to all, resurrect a nation which gives opportunity to all, and most importantly, resurrect a nation which provides a safe country for all.

Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Opposition leader, the Member of Parliament for Siparia and my colleagues on this side, we wish you and your family, I also wish my colleagues on the Government side and all citizens of this blessed country, a holy Easter season.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, as a member of the Christian community of Trinidad and Tobago, and in particular the Roman Catholic faith, I embrace the opportunity to join with Members in extending to the Christian community happy

Easter 2018.

In the Christian calendar, Easter is the greatest feast, as on Easter Sunday Christians celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ its saviour and redeemer. For Christians, Easter Sunday culminates the 40 days of prayer and fasting known as Lent. During the period of Lent, that period of self-denial and immersion in our spiritual development, we have prepared ourselves to die spiritually with Christ on Good Friday, the day of his crucifixion, so that we can rise again with him in new life on Easter Sunday. Let this time be the focus of revival during which we reach and search deep within, and we become emboldened to make the right choices and prudent decisions that would lead to the betterment of our nation.

On behalf of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago and on my own behalf, I take this opportunity to wish you all and all of Trinidad and Tobago a very happy, holy and safe Easter.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 3.51p.m.