

Parliament debates SoE extension today

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OPPOSITION Leader Kamla Persad-Bissessar will today be leading off the debate from the Opposition bench on the motion to extend the state of emergency (SoE) for three months.

This was confirmed yesterday by Opposition Chief Whip David Lee.

Two SoE motions are listed on the Parliament's Order Paper.

The first, Prime Minister Dr Keith Rowley will move a motion that the House take note of the statement by the President under section 9(1) of the Constitution setting out the specific grounds on which the decision to declare the existence of a state of public emergency was based.

Secondly, the Prime Minister is expected to move a motion that the proclamation made by the President on December 20, 2024, declaring that a state of public emergency exists in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago be extended for a further period of three months. Following the declaration of the SoE on December 30, a news conference was held by then-acting Attorney General Stuart Young and National Security Minister Fitzgerald Hinds. The decision to declare an SoE was taken to quell gang reprisal murders and to deal with high-powered weapons.

It followed two incidents. The first was the murder of a man outside the Besson Street Police Station. This led to a reprisal killing of five people at Prizgar Lands, Laventille, a day later.

Young said information provided by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service warned of imminent additional gang-related reprisal attacks involving the use of high-calibre weapons and a threat to public safety.

'In a nutshell, what we were faced with was a decision by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service that there would be heightened criminal activity...with high-velocity assault weapons with reprisal attacks between gangs,' he said.

Young said innocent people would have been affected and, as a result, the decision to declare an SoE was taken.

Coat of Arms legislation

The Parliament is also carded to debate legislation with respect to the Coat of Arms.

In August 2024 Rowley sparked heated national debate when he said his Government was working to replace the ships on the Coat of Arms with the steelpan.

'You see them three Columbus ships in the emblem? They will go. Since we have enough votes in Parliament to do it, I could announce now that as soon as the legislative adjustment is made-and that adjustment should be made before the 24th of September-we then over a six-month period will replace Columbus' three ships, the *Santa Maria*, the *Pinta*, and the *Niña*, with the steelpan,' Rowley said.

'And for logistical purposes, that will take place over a six-month period, allowing us to consume the stationery and other things we have in place and be replaced by our new intention and that should signal that we are on our way to removing the colonial vestiges that we have in our Constitution and I hope that we start with that and we end up getting up and no longer being squatters on the steps of the Privy Council,' he said.

The National Emblems of Trinidad and Tobago (Regulation) (Amendment) Bill, 2025 is listed on the Parliament's Supplemental Order Paper.

According to the Bill's explanatory note, the Bill provides for the use of the new Coat of Arms and it comes into operation on such date as is fixed by the President.

It states: The Schedule to the Act is amended in Part I, by deleting the words 'Arms: Per chevron enhanced sable and gules a chevrenel enhanced argent between a chief two Hummingbirds respectant gold and in base three ships of the period of Christopher Columbus also gold the sails set proper' and substituting the words 'Arms: Per chevron enhanced sable and gules a chevrenel enhanced argent between a chief two Hummingbirds respectant gold and in base a gold steelpan and its iconic two pan sticks, also gold.'

The Bill further speaks to a licence being granted: 'A licence granted under section 5 of the Act, which Savings and is valid immediately preceding the commencement of this Act, continues to be valid after the commencement of this Act to the extent that it would have been valid had this Act not come into operation.'

The Bill states that, subject to the provisions of the Act, the former Coat of Arms may be used until January 1, 2026 or such later date as the minister may, by Order, prescribe.