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Debates of the House of Representatives

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**OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)**

THE HONOURABLE BRIDGID ANNISSETTE-GEORGE
SPEAKER

THE HONOURABLE ESMOND FORDE
DEPUTY SPEAKER

Monday 25th April, 2016

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Monday, April 25, 2016*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from the following Members: Hon. Stuart Young, MP, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West has requested leave of absence from sittings of the House during the period April 25, 2016 to April 27, 2016; Dr. Fuad Khan, MP, Member for Barataria/San Juan and Mr. Rushton Paray, MP, Member for Mayaro, have requested leave of absence from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

PAPERS LAID

1. Second Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the National Carnival Commission of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended July 31, 1998. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]
2. Second Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the National Carnival Commission of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended July 31, 1999. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
3. Second Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the National Carnival Commission of Trinidad and Tobago for the fourteen months ended September 30, 2000. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
4. Second Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the National Carnival Commission of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended September 30, 2001. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
5. Third Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the National Carnival Commission of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended September 30, 2002. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
6. Third Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the National Carnival Commission of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended September 30, 2003. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

7. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the National Carnival Commission of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended September 30, 2004.

Papers 1 to 7 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.

8. Annual Audited Financial Statements of National Flour Mills Limited for the financial year ended December 31, 2012. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
9. Annual Audited Financial Statements of National Flour Mills Limited for the financial year ended December 31, 2013. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
10. Annual Audited Financial Statements of National Flour Mills Limited for the financial year ended December 31, 2014.
11. Audited Financial Statements of Evolving Tecknologies and Enterprise Development Company Limited for the year ended September 30, 2011. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
12. Audited Financial Statements of Evolving Tecknologies and Enterprise Development Company Limited for the year ended September 30, 2012.

Papers 8 to 12 to be referred to the Public Accounts [Enterprises] Committee.

13. Twenty-Eighth Annual Report of the Integrity Commission for the year 2015. [*The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Esmond Forde)*]

**MOTOR VEHICLES AND ROAD TRAFFIC
(AMDT.) (NO 2) ORDER, 2016
(CONFIRMATION OF)**

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam Speaker, I beg to move Motion No. 1 standing in my name, and in moving this Motion I seek the leave of the House to debate, along with this matter, Motion No. 2 on the Order Paper which relates to the same subject.

Madam Speaker: Is this the wish of the House?

Assent indicated

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name.

Whereas it is provided by section 14(5) of the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, Chap. 48:50 that the President may by Order amend the Fourth Schedule of the said Act:

And whereas it is provided by subsection (6) of the said section that every Order made under subsection (5) shall have effect from the date of publication of such Order in the *Gazette* and shall, after four days and within twenty-one

days from the date of such publication, be submitted to Parliament and Parliament may by resolution confirm, amend or revoke the Order:

And whereas the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic (Amendment) (No. 2) Order, 2016 was made under section 14(5) of the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act and published in the *Gazette* as Legal Notice No. 47 on the 8th day of April, 2016.

And whereas it is expedient to confirm the said Order:

Be it resolved that the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic (Amendment) (No. 2) Order, 2016, the contents of which are set out below, be confirmed:

- LN No. 47 of 2016
1. Part 1 of Appendix A to the Fourth Schedule to the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act is amended in Item (1) by deleting paragraphs (d) to (g) and substituting the following paragraphs:
 - “(d) Engine size exceeding 1999 cc but not exceeding 2499 cc 37.50 per cc
 - (e) Engine size exceeding 2499 cc but not exceeding 2999 cc 45.00 per cc
 - (f) Engine size exceeding 2999 cc but not exceeding 3499 cc 52.50 per cc
 - (g) Engine size exceeding 3499 cc ... 75.00 per cc”.

Madam Speaker, the second Motion is quite similar and, in effect, what we are seeking to do is to increase the taxes—the duty and motor vehicle tax—on cars with an engine size exceeding 1999 cc by 50 per cent, and the purposes for this are multifold. The first purpose is to spread the burden of adjustment equitably across the society. [*Desk thumping*] We have asked people to bear with the Government and understand the financial situation that we are in, and we have introduced a number of measures which have had the effect of creating some discomfort for persons in the lower-income groups, and this measure, as I said, is intended to spread the burden of adjustment across the society.

The second purpose—and I am not going to be very long today, Madam Speaker. The second purpose is that larger engines consume more fuel and have more significant emissions. Now, this is a general rule. It is not an exact relationship; it is not a linear relationship. It has a lot to do with the weight of the vehicle, the technology used in the engine, the sophistication of the engine and the efficiency in terms of the burning of fuel. But all things being equal, a larger engine will burn more fuel than a smaller engine, and therefore, in the context of

the fuel subsidy and in the context of this Government's commitment to the environment—and let me just say, last week I got a query as to whether Trinidad and Tobago would be signing the Paris Agreement with respect to climate change, because there was a rumour going around that over 150 countries—in fact, it is over 170—would be present at the United Nations to sign the Paris Agreement to cut carbon emissions, and that for some reason, certain groups were spreading a rumour that Trinidad and Tobago would not be present. And I am very happy and proud to report—

Dr. Moonilal: What this has to do with the engine size?

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, could you speak to the Members opposite?

Madam Speaker: Members, could we please observe the Standing Orders with respect to silence when a Member is on his legs? Please, proceed, Minister.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am reading from the *Guardian*, the British *Guardian*:

“World governments vow to end fossil fuel era at UN climate signing ceremony.

And it is dated Friday, April 22nd, which was just a couple days ago. And it states that:

“Representatives of more than 170 countries endorse Paris agreement to cut carbon emissions, with France's President saying: ‘There is no turning back’.

The outpouring of support - the largest ever single-day turn-out for a signing ceremony”—at the United Nations—“underscored strong international commitment to deliver on the promises made in Paris last December to avoid a climate catastrophe...”

And we in Trinidad and Tobago have committed to do our part, whatever we can, to cut fossil fuel emissions, to reduce Trinidad and Tobago's carbon footprint and to encourage our population to move towards the use of renewable energy—energy such as solar and wind and also to use clean fuels, such as compressed natural gas, also known as CNG; to move towards the use of hybrid vehicles, electric vehicles and CNG-powered vehicles. And I will be returning to this Parliament—barring unforeseen circumstances—next month, in May, to finalize the necessary legislative arrangements to allow a waiver of taxes on vehicles that use CNG, electric power or a combination of gasoline, diesel, electric power, and so on—so-called hybrid vehicles. [*Desk thumping*]

There have been moves made by the past administration with respect to incentives but these incentives did not catch on, Madam Speaker. And when one

looks at the number of hybrid vehicles imported into Trinidad and Tobago, the numbers are very small, and there are reasons for that. One of the reasons was the engine size, and the other reason was the tax regime was still not sufficiently competitive to allow the price of a hybrid vehicle or an electric vehicle to land in Trinidad and Tobago and compete with your traditional combustion engine-powered vehicle.

So we built on what had been done before and we have now decided to remove the customs duty. Previously, the value added tax and the motor vehicle tax were subject to some form of concession, but this Government—pushing the population, or encouraging the population to use electric vehicles, hybrid, CNG-powered and so on—will now be removing all taxes on these types of vehicles with respect to certain specifications. [*Desk thumping*]

1.45 p.m.

That is all part of our commitment, as I said, I was proud and happy to be aware that the hon. Dennis Moses represented the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, and the people of Trinidad and Tobago, in signing the Paris Agreement at the United Nations on Friday, April 22, [*Desk thumping*] notwithstanding the rumours being spread by some mischievous persons that Trinidad and Tobago would not be there. I am told that Sen. Moses appeared on television, speaking about this historic participation by Trinidad and Tobago on signing an agreement to end the fossil-fuel era.

But coming now to the whole question of fuel consumption, I have done some research, and I have a document from the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, and they have looked at the average fuel consumption for private cars by type of fuel engine capacity, cc, et cetera, and for the vehicles between 1501 cc and 1600 cc, the average fuel consumption for private cars is 6 litres per kilometre. They have produced a table, the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland—[*Interruption*]—6 litres per hundred kilometres, thank you for the correction; 6 litres per hundred kilometres. As you go up the table from 1600—1700, 1800, 1900 and so on, Madam Speaker, you see a progressive increase as you get to 1800 cc, the fuel consumption is 7 litres per 100 kilometres. Thank you again, for that correction. As you move along, and you get up to a vehicle that has 2600 cc engine, the fuel consumption is 8.7 litres per 100 kilometres.

So they have done some research, and as I said, it all depends on the sophistication of the engine, whether it is a carburetted engine or a fuel injection engine, whether is diesel, whether is gasoline, whether the car is heavy, whether it is light, but all things being equal, there is a significant increase in fuel

consumption as the engine size goes up. And, of course, anecdotally all of us know this. All of us who have had small-engine cars and large-engine cars, we know this.

So we are trying to conserve fuel by making these larger-engine vehicles more expensive, and encouraging people to bring smaller vehicles on to the road, and also to move towards hybrid vehicles and vehicles that would not consume gasoline at all. When one looks at the situation also, Madam Speaker, in other Caribbean countries, I did some research. I looked at Barbados. I looked at Jamaica and I have looked at Grenada. The taxes on a car in Grenada are somewhere in the vicinity of 80 per cent of the landed cost for a brand-new car, and as you apply the taxes to foreign used, it can get as high as 157 per cent, because Grenada applies a philosophy that the older the vehicle, the more damage there is to the environment, and that is why I am stressing the environment in this debate.

So in Grenada if your car is as old as five years, you can pay as much 157 per cent in taxes, but you start off at a base of 80 per cent in taxes, Madam Speaker. In Jamaica, Jamaica is very similar, their base again is 80 per cent and Barbados again the base is of the region of 80 per cent. We in Trinidad and Tobago for many, many years, have enjoyed relatively low levels of taxation on motor cars whereas the other islands have for many years now, imposed very, very high taxes on motor cars, and there is reason for it. You are trying to reduce the number of cars on the road. You are trying to reduce emissions, you are trying to conserve fuel and so on, Madam Speaker. So we are not alone in this move. This is something that the rest of Caribbean has done for many, many, many years. Well, because we are an oil-based economy and things were going good, this country did not choose to move in this direction that we are moving in today.

I also want to clear up an issue with respect to the application of the increased duties and taxes, Madam Speaker. The way the Orders have been worded, if one looks at the actual Orders that have been published, if I look at the Legal Notice No. 47, it speaks to Part I of Appendix A to the Fourth Schedule, it is amending item one, in paragraphs (d) to (g). The other Order has a similar intent. This measure is intended to exclude certain classes of vehicles. It targets passenger cars.

So for persons who might have been worried that you had a pickup or truck or something like that, you know, something that deals with public transportation, a maxi-taxi, for example—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Farmers, farmers.

Hon. C. Imbert:—yes, dealing with people who provide public transportation, farmers who have pickups and so on, trucks and so on. The measure excludes classes of vehicles such as taxis, maxi-taxis, goods vehicles, private school buses, and vehicles used for public purposes. It is specifically targeted just to private passenger motor vehicles. Similarly, the customs measure deals with matters relating to vehicles designed for the transport of persons, such as station wagons, and sedans and so on, Madam Speaker.

So, the intention is, as I said, to target or to spread the burden of adjustment equitably across the society, without unnecessarily affecting taxis, maxi-taxis, agricultural vehicles and so on, that might have an engine capacity exceeding 1999 cc. The Orders are worded in this way to make it clear that they exclude goods vehicles, maxi-taxis, trucks and so on.

Now, let us see what the effect of all of this would be. I have—my Ministry has done a calculation for me on a favourite vehicle of the former administration. *[Laughter]* Before the Member for Oropouche—is that East or West?

Hon. Member: East.

Hon. C. Imbert: East? The Housing one? Who is it?

Hon. Member: East.

Hon. C. Imbert: East? Before the Member for Oropouche East gets jumpy, I am not talking about a Mercedes Benz or a Range Rover.

Hon. Member: That was not their favourite. *[Laughter]*

Hon. C. Imbert: I am talking about a Prado.

Dr. Gopeesingh: What you have now, Colm?

Hon. Member: “Ah Porsche!”

Hon. Member: It has to be a Porsche.

Hon. C. Imbert: And—*[Interruption]* Madam Speaker, the—*[Interruption]* Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, while I note your complaint about the crosstalk, you yourself have encouraged some of it, *[Laughter]* but be that as it may, *[Desk thumping]* Members, I would like to hear the contribution of the hon. Minister. Please proceed. *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Crosstalk is never warranted.

So, let us look at a Toyota Land Cruiser, Prado ZX 2755 cc, and under the old rates, the landed cost of that vehicle was \$409,302, the customs duty, \$163,721. It brings a showroom price of \$573,023, to which motor vehicle tax of \$82,650 would have been added and VAT of \$82,092, bringing with all the other fees, like registration and so on, a total price on the road for the Toyota Prado, \$739,000. With the new taxes, the showroom price will remain the same, and the duty will go up from \$163,000 to \$245,000. The motor vehicle tax will go up from \$82,650 to \$123,975, and there would be a commensurate increase in VAT from \$82,092 to \$97,490. So that the Toyota Prado will now cost \$877,583, Madam Speaker. So that the increase in price is from \$739,000 which in itself was a very high price. I mean, I am not sure who can afford a vehicle for \$739,000—is now \$877,000. So that is an actual example of the actual prices.

Madam Speaker, I will also like to share with Members some information on cars. I am advised that the total number of passenger cars registered by the licensing office in 2014, 29,365 and in 2015, 30,423. So you are looking at about 30,000 vehicles per year. The authorities do not keep the data in the manner that we would all like. In fact, we really have a problem with statistical data in this country, because I posed the question to the licensing office, of these 30,000 vehicles—and to Customs as well, of these 30,000 vehicles that were registered in 2014 and 2015, how many of them had an engine size in excess 1999 cc? The data is simply not available, Madam Speaker. It is simply because we do not collect data, and we do not keep data, and we do not manipulate data in this country in real time.

What I have done is, I have spoken to one of the dealers—*[Interruption]* no, not that one. I have spoken to one of the dealers, and what they told me is that they brought in 243 SUVs that have an engine capacity of about 2.2 litres to 2.4 litres, and they said that is the primary vehicle that they sell. It is an SUV that has an engine size exceeding 2000 cc, and they sell about 240, 250 of them. In terms of the other high-end vehicles, these are sold in relatively small numbers, the BMW, the Mercedes Benz and so on, Madam Speaker.

But the fact is that the large SUVs will be affected by this measure, that is going to be one of the more significant effects of this measure, but we do feel that all things considered, it is something that we have to do. And as I said, we need to push people towards driving smaller-engine vehicles. We need to encourage people to use fuel-efficient vehicles, and vehicles with different types of fuel, and we need to try and conserve and we need to try and reduce environmental pollution and our carbon footprint.

So those are the primary reasons why we have brought this measure to this Parliament, and I would ask that Members support it. I see no reason why anybody on the other side would not support this measure.

I beg to move [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie (*Caroni Central*): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, would you permit me before you begin? Just let me put the question for debate.

Question proposed.

2.00 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I am to remind this Honourable House that leave has been granted for the debate on the two Motions to be taken together. However, the question on each Motion will be put separately to satisfy the procedural requirements. I now call on the Member for Caroni Central.

Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie (*Caroni Central*): Thank you very much, hon. Speaker; thank you very much colleagues. The Minister of Finance was very straightforward in his presentation, simply outlining the measures before this House, referring to Legal Notice No. 47, which was filed on April 8th, the same day that he brought to this House the budget review and presented to this House. He outlined what was required both in terms of what was being addressed in terms of the engine size as well as what was being required of the Customs arrangements, the taxes.

Now, I think it is important to go beyond the measures here though, and see how it fits into the scheme of things, so to speak, Madam Speaker, what you might call the bigger picture. Now, this Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act has been law in this country since 1934, and this is the 96th time that this Act will be amended. It has not always been amended for tax purposes, but what we are amending here today is Part I of the Appendix A of the Fourth Schedule, which addresses the issue of taxes, based on the size of engine of automobile vehicles.

The Minister spent some time explaining why he gave what he called multi-fold purposes to spread the adjustment equitably. He talked about the fact that large engines consume more fuel and he was interested in fuel conservation; that he was also interested in environmental-related issues, and he talked about CNG, hybrid and electric cars as being preferable. He talked about taxes in the other islands to show that the taxes here are not going to be exorbitant, and he cleared up the issue on the private cars, only taxes—taxes only on private cars. But the

end result of this is that taxes on an engine size between 1900 and 2499 cc will go up; the taxes on 2499 cc to 2999 cc will also go up, taxes on 2999 to 3499 cc will also go up and taxes on all engine sizes above 3499 will also go up. What it means, therefore, is a new car will cost a consumer or a taxpayer more money.

For the 1999 to 2499, based on a rough calculation, the increase in cost is going to be about \$30,000 at the highest level; for the second group, 2499 to 2999, you are going to have an increase at the highest level of about \$45,000; for the 2999 to 3499, you are going to have an increase of about \$48,000 and for the 3499 and over, you are going to have an increase of about \$90,000. The Minister used the example of the SUV which is a little more than that.

Now, what is the purpose of the tax? I was a little amused that the Minister did not mention the issue of revenue generation at all [*Desk thumping*] because he mentioned everything else, but he did not mention the issue of revenue generation at all, and I found that very strange. I did not quite understand it. I do not know if he wanted to leave it. I did not know if he wanted to leave it alone at the beginning. I do not know if he did not want us to engage it. I was not sure whether he was coming to address the revenue side in his conclusion, in his winding-up, but the question is: what then is the fundamental question? Because I mean a tax measure is a revenue-generating measure. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, how much revenue, Minister of Finance, through you Madam Speaker, do you expect to generate out of this measure? [*Desk thumping*] I think that you should give us a rough calculation. I have done my own rough calculation. I will not venture it here, but needless to say it is small and, therefore, I would be very curious to hear what, from your point of view, based on the calculations done by your technical people, you are likely to raise. This is exacerbated by the fact that the Minister indicated that the taxes will only apply to private vehicles, agricultural vehicles are exempt, commercial or T vehicles will also be exempt.

There is a reduction of taxes on maxi-taxis and taxis and he did not mention this—I do not know if he will mention it in his winding-up—but he is quoted in the newspaper as saying that all vehicles en route to Trinidad and Tobago since April 8th will get, what we call, a bligh, that is to say, there will be no increased taxes. So I guess we will get some elaboration of that today. If this happens, when will revenue be generated by this measure, in fact? I think that is another important question. So two questions: how much revenue? When will this revenue be generated? Now, this has to do with the ones that are in train.

Let us assume that cars en route for private sale, a part of sales until May 30th—today is April 25th—how much revenue will we generate before the end of

fiscal 2016, let us say, between June and September? I think that would be a useful question if we are to make sense of what is essentially a taxation measure. What is likely to be the revenue generated in the next fiscal year 2016/2017? He gave us some broad numbers for the number of cars imported over a certain cc. What is likely to be the revenue generated in 2016/2017 from October to September; that is to say, October 2016 to September 2017? Now, so that is the third revenue question. How much revenue? When will we generate it this year? How much are we likely to generate, given all the things that you have said? How much are we likely to generate in a full year? Let us look, therefore, beyond revenue.

Now, I do not now, but when I looked at the Customs side of it and I looked at the numbers, 8703.23.40 which is mentioned on the Order Paper here, I could not find that. So I do not know if there was a little error. So I would ask the Minister if he could check because things like that could affect the actual taxation measure. So, just check it. I saw the one for 8703.24.90 and I saw the one for 8703.33.90 but, again, I did not see the 8703.32.50. So I do not know if it was a mistake, an error or whatever it is, but for the sake of good order and in order to collect your taxes, I think that should be double-checked just to make sure. I am admitting immediately that I may have made an error myself, but I did not see those two numbers in there, and these two things, of course, are tied in because that is how you get your taxes.

Now, what about the motor cars that we are talking about? What are the vehicles affected by these proposed changes? The Minister mentioned the SUVs. He mentioned it first in terms of the Prado and then he mentioned SUVs generally, but there are other cars that are involved. From Massy Motors, the Hyundai Sonata. They bring in about 24 a year; Santa Fe SUV, they bring in about 36 a year; the Nissan Altima 2.5 cc, they bring in about 20 per year; the Nissan Altima 3.5, they bring in about five per year; the Nissan Murano SUV, about 15 per year; Nissan Pathfinder SUV, about 12 per year.

Southern Sales: Mazda 6 Sedan, 15 to 20 a year; Kia Sorento SUV, the diesel version 120, the gas version 144 a year; the Audi, the number is small. I could not get an exact figure.

Classic Motors: you have some of these relatively small figures there too. The reason I am asking is the revenue question which is: will Government really realize significant revenue out of this?

So, I mean, you ask the question: what is the point in a way, you know? This is what, for instance, Jerome Borde of Classic Motors had to say. He is President

of the Automotive Dealers Association and in *Newsday*, April 19, 2016, after saying that he did not expect such a steep increase, 50 per cent, he continued, and I am quoting from the *Newsday* who is quoting him:

“I’m not sure if the Government’s approach was to create revenue for the state but I’m not sure if that will work because we would get less sales and therefore pay less taxes.”

He added:

“If the strategy is to reduce the number of vehicles on the road, that would also not work because the (luxury) segment is relatively small.”

And we saw that from the numbers that I quoted. All right. [*Crosstalk*] Well, he is President of the Automobile Dealers Association. I assume that he knows what he is talking about. He is selling cars every day. That is how he makes a living, you know. He says: “the (luxury) segment is relatively small...Consultation might have been the better approach.”

So, basically, the Minister of Finance, in spite of all his talk about consultations, really imposed this measure as he is wont to do without discussing the matter with anybody. He then indicated—that is to say, Borde, Jerome Borde—based on this *Newsday* article that given Government’s CNG and hybrid policy, the Automotive Dealers Association will have to take another look at those options. That is to say, importing hybrid vehicles, importing CNG vehicles, importing electric vehicles.

The automotive dealers do not seem to know what to make, in my view, of Government’s policy. They cannot understand why the amount of taxes. They cannot understand how the taxes would work. They do not think it will have the effect that is intended, but they will look to see what they will do with electric vehicles, hybrid and CNG. Now, let us see. Clearly, Mr. Borde of the automotive dealers does not know, but let us see if the Minister of Finance knows what to make of his policy.

2.15 p.m.

Now *Newsday*, April 22nd, I am quoting now from the article:

“Two Fridays ago, Imbert announced a 50 per cent increase in Customs duty and motor vehicle taxes on luxury cars with an engine size exceeding 1999cc, effective immediately.”

I am quoting again:

“The minister yesterday said he has received a number of inquiries from car dealers and individuals affected by...change in policy.

He said that he has agreed to a moratorium in principle but the details are to be announced next week.

Matters to be deliberated on”—and this is the article continuing—“include whether the new tax is to apply to vehicles in transit, and whether they will apply to items here in TT”—already—“but are yet to be cleared by Customs and Excise.”

The period of...moratorium is also to be announced.”

This was *Newsday* April 22nd, and it continues:

“The House of Representatives meets on Monday...”

That is today.

“...to approve changes to the tax regime and the Senate meets Thursday in order to meet a deadline of April 29.”

Now, up to now the Minister has not announced how he intends to proceed on these. I saw a statement in one of the newspapers this morning indicating that he will do so today and I suspect that he may do this either in his winding-up or after he leaves the House. But I would guess that this is an important matter that you want to settle and that the House of Representatives would be a place, if you are coming to seek support for this, that you would want to make this crystal clear. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, I have had the occasion, Madam Speaker, to say that the problem I have with the Minister of Finance—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: One of them.

Dr. B. Tewarie:—and this Government—the main problem really in things such as these when they come to the House on policy issues—is the thinking itself, all right, what is contemplated, what is conceptualized. And so I ask the question, I mean, taxation measures are revenue measures: How much revenue are you going to generate from this? I think it is important to tell us.

But more than that, I have also said that the problem is with the thinking-through. And I think in the thinking-through of the thing we are seeing here with the toing and froing, the back and forth, whether you are going to tax the vehicles already here, whether you are going to tax those on the sea, whether you are going to tax those in Customs, et cetera, we are seeing a kind of utter hopelessness and indecision in this particular sphere.

The Minister of Finance, sometimes the Prime Minister, I find the thinking and I find the thinking-through of things to be really problematic. [*Desk thumping*] I think that what happens is that they get a “vaps”, they announce things and then they wonder about what the consequences might be and they begin to vacillate about a number of things. [*Desk thumping*]

So how can I illustrate this better than to say that they announced the rapid rail and carried it in the campaign? “We tell them it was a bad idea. The IDB tell them now is a bad idea, so the rapid rail gone.”

The revenue measures in the October budget, we told them it was unattainable. The Minister of Finance came himself in April and said that it was unattainable in the first half by about \$3 billion. So that turned out to be something not properly thought through. The oil and gas price in the October budget, unrealistic, not properly thought through; not so much the oil price, which could be excused, but the gas price especially, which was pitched at \$2.75.

The \$63 billion budget in October, it made absolutely no sense. We told them so but they brought it anyway. [*Desk thumping*] The budget cut that he said he effected in April in the mid-year review of \$4 billion, when you look at it really it is a sham because there was already a suppression of a \$7 billion savings; a suppression of expenditure to enlist savings for the first six months of the year.

The 50 per cent tax on motor vehicles, the waffling, the creation of uncertainty, I do not see how anybody can seriously think that the Government knows what it is doing in this taxation measure. [*Desk thumping*] You have not yet decided. You are coming here to pass the thing. You have not decided who will pay, when. All right? The policy objectives are uncertain. The revenue objective was not even mentioned and you cannot tell me, Minister of Finance, that part of the rationale for the taxation was not revenue. What is the point? What are you doing? What do you really want to do?

Now, in addition to this, I want to say something. These deal with new cars. And I want to say that bawling in the wings unattended to is the question of the used-car dealers in the country. There are about 300 of them who belong to the Automobile Dealers Association and approximately 200 more who are non-members. At the very minimum, these are 300—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: Two hundred?

Dr. B. Tewarie: That is what I am told. I have to go by the numbers that are given to me. That is to say they did not belong to the Automobile Association. They might be 200 entrepreneurs who buy five cars or whatever it is. I do not

know what it is. But let us take the smaller number. Let us take the small number, which is 300. They have a national quota of 13,500 cars per year. That is what they have. Each of these dealers, the ones in the association, are permitted to import between 15 and 250 vehicles per year, based on licensing arrangements.

Now, based on these new taxes, 10 or 15 per cent of their imports are going to be affected by the new import duty. The dealers also claim that the fact that they can no longer import six-year-old vehicles and they now have to import four-year vehicles it means that they are stifled in terms of their ability to import because four-year-old vehicles are very hard to secure from their original sources, as they have been doing in the past. And now they have the additional situation in which the new car dealers, some of them, want to get into the importation of what is known as, what do you call them pre-used, pre-owned vehicles, second-hand vehicles. Okay?

So, [*Interruption*] well, whatever you want to call it, Minister of Finance. I am not quibbling over the words here. I am really raising the question of in a society in which you have different players doing different things, whether or not these people are going to be allowed to import CNG vehicles, hybrid and electric vehicles that are used vehicles.

And secondly, whether or not, with these taxes and so on that you are doing, there is also a policy on the part of the Government to basically squeeze these used-car dealers out of business and give an additional source of business to the existing bigger players in the new car businesses. I think that is a legitimate issue to raise, because it is an issue of how the pie, so to speak, in terms of the industry, the automobile industry, is shared and I want to say that I was Minister of Industry in the 1990s. And this issue of wanting to eliminate the used-car dealers of the country was an issue even then. So having said that, I want an unequivocal position from the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: I do not work for you. Which is—[*Interruption*]

Dr. B. Tewarie: You work for me because I am a taxpayer. [*Desk thumping*] I want to tell you that. You work for me because I am a citizen. [*Desk thumping*] You work for me because I am here in this House as a representative of the people. [*Desk thumping*] And neither as a citizen, as a Member of this House, nor as a person seeking information will I tolerate that terrible arrogance. [*Desk thumping*] So I would like an unequivocal answer as to how the used-car dealers fit into this process and I would also like the answers to the other questions that I posed, with regard to revenue.

Now I have taken the opportunity, Madam Speaker, to say in the past that a budget is not about accounting primarily; although no one would underestimate the importance of crunching the numbers and managing them and making them an essential part of the budget. I have also taken the opportunity to say that a budget is about political economy more than anything else, and a budget often consists of an annual list of selected fiscal measures to make development happen and I stress the issue of development, because that is what it is. If you have a five-year plan for a country, five budgets are what are going to get you there.

So too are taxes, you know. Taxes are not only about revenue. It is part of the polity matrix in any country. So when you do taxes you have to ask yourself: who am I taxing? Why am I taxing them? What is being taxed, why? What are you taxing them for and what is the revenue to be used for? [*Desk thumping*] These are very important things. Up to now, based on everything that we have heard in this Parliament, except for projects identified, this Government has not identified one priority for Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] They get parliamentary approval to borrow \$50 billion, not one priority identified. They want to take US \$1.5 billion out of the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, no priorities identified. They are taxing left, right and centre to raise revenue, no priorities for spending.

Well let me tell you something, Madam Speaker, through you, to the hon. Minister of Finance, something that is rather fundamental, which is that the purpose of taxation measures is to finance development priorities. And what this means is that you have to know what your priorities are before you allocate the finance that you are collecting.

2.30 p.m.

We know what ours was for five years: it was crime reduction; food security; health and hospitals; human development; diversification, competitiveness and innovation—those were the five. I would like to ask, what is the priority for which these taxation measures are so much a part of your revenue strategy and your national policy? What do you want to achieve? Where are you taking the country? What is your plan of action? When are you going to start to do something that the country can understand—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Caroni Central, your 30 minutes have expired, you are entitled to 15 more minutes. Are you going to avail yourself of those 15 minutes?

Dr. B. Tewarie: I would like to, Madam Speaker, with your permission.

Madam Speaker: You may proceed. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. B. Tewarie: But this is a Motion on taxes; in fact, two Motions on taxes that we are debating together, and I was talking about taxation policy and taxation policy in the context of wider development policy, beginning with the assumption that taxation is not only to raise revenue to meet expenditure, because the first law of enlightened expenditure strategy is what are your priorities, and, secondly, how does that fit in your development plan?

What I am saying therefore is that it is important to rationalize expenditure in order to design a rationale for revenue. You have to deal with the expenditure first. We have said this before, we said this in the budget review, we said this in the budget debate, but bad taxation policy—with bad taxation policy you could run out investment, you could kill business, you could frustrate entrepreneurship, you could pauperize the middle class, you could violate the poor, and you could brutalize the vulnerable. [*Desk thumping*] I want to say to this population, the citizens of this country, if we in this Opposition do not restrain this Government that is where you are likely to see this blessed country ending up, and ordinary people will bawl. I want to say this insistence on looking at the expenditure, curtailing the expenditure, redesigning the expenditure pattern in relation to priorities, and then aligning revenues for development strategy in relation to that is something that we are going to hold you to in this Parliament because we want to see it.

Now, I want to say something about taxes in this country because this is a taxation measure and it is important to say it. The first thing that I want to say about taxes is that corporations in this country are not paying their fair share of taxes, and, therefore, the burden of raising revenue is shifted to salaried workers and wage earners who can be captured by the PAYE system and the poor who must pay VAT [*Desk thumping*] on almost everything they consume. So if you want to deal with the question of equity, which you said was a primary consideration in your taxation strategy, then you must take that into account. The middle class, the workers, the poor, the vulnerable, they are the ones put under pressure when corporations do not pay their fair share.

The second thing that I would like to say about taxes is that not enough businesses pay their taxes, because the taxes can be avoided without penalty, and, secondly, the Board of Inland Revenue and the taxation system in this country is not citizen-friendly and it does not provide a supportive environment to facilitate an enhanced cooperation. So that is something that you need to deal with. Now, the third thing I would like to say about taxes in this country is that it is not right to use VAT, which impacts disproportionately on working people on the low income, to make up for the deficiencies in a taxation system which is

dysfunctional. [*Desk thumping*] The fourth issue is that unless you have a business-friendly environment and a climate of business and consumer confidence then all talk about taxes, no matter what they are and where they hit, are going to get people furious.

So taxation is not only about revenue, it is also about fairness, about equity and sustainable development, and that also includes the issue of distribution, not just equity but distribution. Now, distribution—I do not want people to take me wrong—does not mean taking from the rich to give to the poor, it means designing a system where the rich pay their fair share and the poor can have a sustainable life, so that the gap between rich and poor can narrow rather than widen. [*Desk thumping*]

According to Alex Cobham of the Oxford Council on Good Governance, in an article entitled, “Taxation Policy and Development”, he argues, the most important role of taxes is revenue, and he emphasizes for short-term, for medium-term, for long-term purposes. So it is not just revenue—these are my words—it is sustainable revenue, sustainable income for the country, and in our situation where our most stainable source of income so far, oil energy, is now gone in a way. We have to be concerned about how we do this, not just for the short term. The second important role is redistribution; these are Cobham’s words:

To facilitate human development on as wide a scale as possible.

This is an important consideration because the taxation measures must cause to happen an inclusive strategy for human development. It must not be one that singles out for oppression, part of the society.

The third reason is representation. Remember the phrase from the United States, “no taxation without representation”; implicit in that, and this goes back even to the Magna Carta days, is that if you pay taxes it must be because you are included as a citizen. So that there is an element of that in the taxation. This is not my argument, this is Cobham’s argument. So, it is important that the net be inclusive, or as wide as possible.

The fourth is the repricing of economic alternatives, a tool to influence behaviour of individual or corporate citizens, such as encouraging savings, or penalizing polluters, for instance, who damage the environment.

So the question here is, will this particular tax address revenue in a serious way? The answer is, no. Will this tax facilitate redistribution in a constructive

way? The answer is, no. Will this tax make people feel that because they are represented the tax is justified? The answer is, no. Will this tax force people to choose an alternative? Well, it might. They might, but it is difficult to say and too soon to say, and the tax alone will not do it, it depends on other things.

Therefore, this gets me to the question of the CNG, the environment, the sustainable development arguments made by the hon. Minister. I want so say to you that with regard to CNG, we passed—in the budget of 2010—into law, new incentives [*Desk thumping*] such as the removal of motor vehicle tax and VAT on new CNG vehicles and on CNG kits; we did that in 2010. We gave tax credits for individuals who converted vehicles in 2010; we did that in 2010.

We opened the first new CNG station in 20 years, [*Desk thumping*] Brentwood Unipet, Medford, and Peak in Tacarigua. Ramco Trincity station, I think that is now open as well today. There is St. Christopher's on Wrightson Road—I do not know if that is completed and ready now. The conversion of 10 per cent of PTSC buses, many operational since two years ago; we did that. City Gate has a CNG station for buses; we put it there. NGC has 200 CNG cars; we made that happen—we facilitated the process.

NGC owns a private CNG station. Petrotrin has done some conversion to CNG. NGC CNG formed and signed an MOU with maxi-taxi and Unipet, and NPC for CNG conversion; we did that. Perhaps it was not effected to the extent that we would have liked, but we set that into motion. The Bureau of Standards has set up new CNG standards. We did that. The NEC training for CNG technicians; we did that. Conversion of licence for Neal & Massy Automotive, ANSA McAL and Dunmore in Tunapuna Road so that they can do the conversions to CNG.

Ten sites, recently publicly announced by the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, were decided on and initiated on in our time, and we commend the Minister for Energy and Energy Industries for following through on it because it is good for the country. So we support the conversion, we started it, we implemented it, we helped to facilitate it, and we will support you to do it because it is good for the country. It is good for energy consumption, it is good for conversion, it is good for the atmosphere, the air, and we want to do that. We have no problem with that.

But I want to say that with the rapid rail gone, what it means now is that you still have a public policy issue with regard to transportation, and I want to share with you some of the solutions that we had for transportation in this country: transit hubs to be constructed in Chaguanas, Arima, and St. Augustine, properly rationalized dedicated school bus transportation to be instituted, CNG buses,

dedicated bus service for industrial estate workers, dedicated predictable bus rapid transit systems from north to south and east to west will be established, several considerations have been taken into account, namely, rationalization of what exists, management of traffic, capacity for effectiveness, cost effectiveness, and sustainability.

We have a number of identified sites for park-and-ride facilities, and a number of dedicated issues related to the transportation system, all not just to conversion to get cars off the road, linked to decentralization, that is why we were building the Ministry of Tertiary Education in the centre of the country. [*Desk thumping*] That is why we had an LED project in Point Fortin. That is why we had five growth poles across the country. The whole idea was that decentralization, and the transformation of a fossil fuel economy, and the reduction of cars on the road through public transportation [*Desk thumping*] measures would have gone hand in hand. So I want to say to you that when I talk about the thinking and the thinking-through, it is these things that we are concerned about, that you come up with these measures and you put one instalment of the process without knowing how it will fit into anything else, and we have been accused of not knowing what we were doing. You can see visibly the result of what we did, but I want to tell you that everything that we thought about, we thought through what the consequences were. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I will wind up on this minute. The problem, Madam Speaker, is not just the tax but taxation policy, and taxation policy in the context of development strategy. That is the challenge, and I think this Government has a big challenge with regard to that. In this regard, these taxation measures before us, while we will approve them together with the Government, represent a complete and utter failure as a revenue measure. Hon. Speaker, the Minister of Finance just called me an idiot, [*Crosstalk*] and I want to say—[*Interruption and crosstalk*]

2.45 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Members, could we have some order, please.

Dr. B. Tewarie: For that description of myself, all I would say he is—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Madam Speaker, the Member is imputing improper motives. [*Interruption*] I was not talking about him.

Hon. Members: You said it!

Madam Speaker: Members, please. Member for Caroni Central, I will give you a little injury time, but I just want to say this: talk filters up, and I did hear the

comment of “idiot”, Member for Diego Martin North/East. [*Desk thumping*] Although you may say that the comment was not directed to anybody in particular, I would want to say that that is not language to be tolerated in this House. [*Desk thumping*]

Member for Caroni Central, you have one minute left to wind up.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Madam Speaker, I was going to return the insult, but I will not do it. I will not do it. All I would say is that the taxation measures of the Minister of Finance are simply to provoke vexation in this economy. [*Desk thumping*] It has become a major nuisance in the lives of people, without any strategic purpose related to policy or development. With that, Madam Speaker, I close my case.

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I have sat in the Parliament for several months since this new Parliament was inaugurated, and time after time the Member for Caroni Central participates in these debates. In several of the debates that we have had here the Member for Caroni Central has participated. I would like to say, on nearly every occasion the Member for Caroni Central has not been completely honest in his assessment of what is taking place in Trinidad and Tobago, as it relates to the economy and as it relates to—[*Interruption*] [*Dr. Gopeesingh rises*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Insinuating improper motives.

Madam Speaker: I will not say it is insinuating. I would just ask you Member to be a little more temperate in your language.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, I thank you for that caution.

It has reached the point where the Member for Caroni Central on each occasion tries to give the impression that the Government is not working in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. If I may be so bold as to say that has never been the case with any People’s National Movement Government. [*Desk thumping*] If truth be told, one of the only governments that work assiduously for all the people of Trinidad and Tobago, whether as a party in opposition or as a party in government, it is the People’s National Movement. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I would be very honest with you, as I have been with my colleague, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. I did indicate that there would be only two speakers on this side and I was not one of the two. But having heard what the

Member for Caroni Central continues to foist on the people of Trinidad and Tobago, I felt it important to make a contribution on this occasion.

Madam Speaker, at no time did the Minister of Finance indicate that the policy as it relates to motor vehicles, which is the Motion that is before us today, was a taxation policy of the Government that was covering taxation for all means. At no time did the Minister indicate that. The Minister was very, very upfront. The Minister stated categorically that, one, the burden of adjustment must be spread amongst all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

The Member for Caroni Central has said that we are only taxing, I think he said, the poor people of Trinidad and Tobago. But, Madam Speaker, if we are honest, we are the ones who reduced VAT from 15 per cent to 12.5 per cent. [*Desk thumping*] If we are honest, the persons who have not passed on that 12.5 per cent—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Order, please! Order, please!

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: The persons who have not passed on that 12.5 per cent is not the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, but we did what we were supposed to do which was to reduce the VAT. What has to be done is for the VAT to be actually reduced and for it to be passed on to people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I would also like to make the point where those on the other side in government indicated that they would zero-rate certain items, what were the items that were zero-rated? A number of items that only the rich had access to, so it did not affect the normal basket of goods of the normal man in the street. So that zero rating did not assist anyone, because the items that had been zero-rated all the time: milk, flour, those kinds of items, were always zero-rated. So when they come here—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Tewarie: Will you give way?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: No I will not.

Dr. Tewarie: Could I then ask on a point of order?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: What is the point of order?

Dr. Tewarie: I will ask the Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member, you have a point of order? Could you kindly quote the Standing Order, please?

Dr. Tewarie: Sorry, I do not have my Standing Orders.

Madam Speaker: Continue, please.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker, we have sat here session after session and the Member for Caroni Central continues to indicate that we have no plan, we have no policy. But I would like to remind the Member for Caroni Central, and he is the one who brought the issue of the CNG stations. First of all I would like to correct the record and say that the first CNG stations were opened by Patrick Manning as Minister of Energy and Natural Resources; so they were not the first. Secondly, I would like to correct the record again and indicate that the CNG stations that were opened under the last administration cannot and do not function fully, because the UNC administration—*[Interruption]* Do you want me to repeat? You want me to repeat? Okay.

Madam Speaker: If an interruption is going to be made, I would strictly ask that people comply with Standing Order 47.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: The CNG stations cannot and did not function fully because the UNC administration did not procure the necessary compressors to give customers the benefit of the new technology. In fact, as is their custom, they bungled the entire procurement process as it relates to CNG stations. So we are now in the process of fixing what they tried to do. In fact, the CNG stations do not operate fully and we do not have a benefit, as the Member for Caroni Central tried to imply.

Madam Speaker, let me also indicate, as it relates to the issue of getting things done and diversification and using the private sector in this country, one of the issues that has consistently been a challenge for members of the private sector, particularly as it relates to construction, is the issue of the Town and Country Planning and the EMA. When I entered the Ministry of Planning and Development, there were over 177 appeals on town and country issues that were languishing in the Ministry of Planning and Development, and that stymied development for the private sector. *[Interruption]* You talked about getting things done. You said we had no policy, and one of the things that we have to do is rectify that issue that was left languishing by the Member for Caroni Central, in his capacity as Minister of Planning and Development.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni Central, please, as I said if you wish to make an interruption and you comply with Standing Order 47, you will be given an opportunity. Otherwise please contain yourself. Member, please continue.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much. Madam Speaker, 177 matters that were languishing there from 2011 that the Minister just left.

Hon. Member: How much?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: 177 development projects left by the Member for Caroni Central, the then Minister of Planning and Development—

Hon. Members: Oh, Oh, Oh!

Madam Speaker: Order! Order!

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:—that had gone through the appeals process and were never signed off by the Minister, who comes here nearly every Friday to pontificate and tell us on this side what we should do. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Tewarie: Madam Speaker, 47(1)(a).

Madam Speaker: Can I ask what is the matter under 47(1)(a)?

Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie: She is misleading the House.

Hon. Member: She is the cat's mother.

Madam Speaker: Members; Member for Laventille West. As I have said to Members, everything is heard by the Chair, please contain yourself. Member for Caroni Central.

Dr. Tewarie: The Member for Arouca/Maloney is misleading the House on three counts.

Madam Speaker: Member, you said you are raising an objection under 47(1)(a), might I ask what is the complaint under 47(1)(a), because that is the Standing Order you sought to invoke?

3.00 p.m.

Dr. Tewarie: She is misleading the House on three counts. She is misleading the House on the grounds that I said that we did the first station in 20 years and she said—I said we did the work; the first station. [*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: But, Member, you may wish to correct something that is being said, but your turn has gone. So that I cannot direct you how to proceed. But this is a debate, other Members would be allowed an opportunity on your side. Member for Arouca/Maloney, please continue.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Again, there is the existing situation where the Member for Caroni Central continues to say that we are trying to develop policy by using taxation. In fact, taxation has

been one of the last resorts of this administration. In fact what we have been attempting to do is to encourage the private sector, to incentivize the private sector. And as a matter of record we have been in discussions with the Inter-American Development Bank with regard to its new IIC policy as it relates to incentivizing the private sector, something that seemed to be of no interest to those on the other side when they occupied the halls of Government. They were very limited in whom they decided to assist in the private sector. What our policy is and we are very clear on is that we will give incentives to the private sector as a whole and whomsoever is desirous of accessing the incentives would be very willing to accept the incentives that we have introduced.

And, Madam Speaker, let me indicate that as it relates to the IDB, there will be a mission here later this month to talk to the private sector specifically about the issue of diversification. We heard a lot from the other side during their term of office of the issue of diversification, but we saw nothing coming forward. What we on this side are doing, we are speaking about it and we are actioning what we have spoken about. [*Desk thumping*] So, this week the IDB will have a mission in Trinidad and Tobago to talk to the private sector about what can be done through the private sector window of the IDB in order to incentivize the private sector in Trinidad and Tobago. That is how you diversify the economy. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, it does not end there. In fact, in our agricultural sector we have also been working closely with farmers, large and small, to ensure that they also move in that direction. We have stated very, very clearly that the food import bill is much too high and from the time the Minister of Finance spoke in the budget debate he talked about ensuring that local farmers produce to the extent that we can, in fact, see a reduction in the food import bill, and the indications are that we are moving inexorably in that direction. Madam Speaker, it does not end there.

We have been working with the creative industry sector to ensure that there is a stimulation of the creative industries, to not only—[*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: That is nothing new.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:—I never said it was new, but I am saying that we are working with them. I do not think you all did anything with the creative industries sector. Not one thing. All they did—[*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: Fire people, fire good people.

Madam Speaker: Member, please, direct your comments this way.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Certainly. All you did was talk, talk and more talk and only a small number of people benefited when the other side was in office, only a small number of people, and they benefited to a very large extent. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, another area that we have been working assiduously on is stimulating the growth in the energy services sector by identifying and exploiting opportunities for the provision of these services, not only within our borders, but outside of Trinidad and Tobago. You would recall that when in 2010 there were a series of discussions and we were on the verge of working with a number of the African nations with regard to their energy sector, but that was put completely on hold by the last administration. We are in the process of reviving those relationships and we will see a major thrust in that department.

So, Madam Speaker, I want to state categorically that unlike what the Member for Caroni Central continues to peddle, we on this side know exactly what direction we are taking. We know exactly the direction in which we are going and ours is the opportunity as we have formed this Government to involve all the people of Trinidad and Tobago, all the stakeholders and we will continue to speak with them through the National Tripartite Advisory Council and through the other avenues that we have set up in order to ensure that all citizens, that all citizens find their way through this challenging time. Let me also indicate that a lot of the challenges in which we find ourselves had their genesis in the maladministration of the last Government. [*Desk thumping*]

I rise to support the two Motions that are before this House and I trust that the people of Trinidad and Tobago will understand the issues before us and the fact that, in many instances, what we are trying to do is for all the people to eventually come out of this as unscathed as possible. Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Tewarie: 44(8). Sorry.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni Central, it is to clear up something that was said, offer an explanation. You are entitled to two minutes at maximum. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Tewarie: I will be less than two minutes, Madam Speaker. The Minister of Planning and Development in trying to paint me as someone who was misrepresenting, misrepresented a lot of information.

The first thing is that, she said that I said we did the first CNG station. And I said no such thing. I said it was the first one in 20 years. I acknowledged the work

done by the hon. Patrick Manning, Prime Minister of this country. She said that I left 147 files unsigned—177 or whatever it is— unsigned on my desk. Every day I used to sign 25 files. What it means is that in the heat of the election I did not sign the files for a week. [*Crosstalk*] It means that I did not sign the files for a week. I want to say, when I came—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Members, order. Member, is that offered because there was a misrepresentation? Is that offered because there was a misrepresentation?

Dr. Tewarie: Yes. Because she did not give the context. [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

Madam Speaker: Members, please. May we have some order, please? Member, I will permit you, under this Standing Order, to just deal with matters that were dealt with by misrepresentation. Okay? Not context.

Mr. Hinds: Madam Speaker, even before you proceed, before my colleague proceeds, I raise Standing Order 48(5).

Madam Speaker: I just ask that all Members in speaking, in observing the decorum of this House, to specifically pay regard to this rule, hon. Member, or Member for whichever constituency or by the portfolio of the Member. Please, be guided.

Dr. Tewarie: I said Minister of Finance. Simply to continue, Madam Speaker, I want to say when I came into the Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development there had, in fact, been 4,000 files that had not been addressed. [*Desk thumping*] On the issue of diversification, I wish to say that evidence of diversification, I will just offer a few, would be the work in Chaguaramas which the Minister is now benefiting from.

Madam Speaker: There was no misrepresentation.

Dr. Tewarie: She said there was nothing done.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member said—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Tewarie: The hon. Member said that nothing was done by way of diversification. The back office work of the financial sector involving the Bank of Nova Scotia, involving RBC, involving the insurance companies—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Yes, Member, your two minutes are up. But I just want to advise Members with respect to this particular Standing Order which was invoked, this is a very narrow Standing Order. There are other ways that matters. That is what a debate is about. Other Members can deal with things that have come up in the debate. So this is a very narrow Standing Order. Okay?

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and it is an honour to join in this debate on the both Motions before us today. It is my intention to raise a few matters alluded to by the hon. Minister of Finance in his introduction earlier this afternoon.

But before I get to that, I was really taken aback somewhat that the last speaker opposite, when the Member rose, the Member indicated that it was not the Member's time. The Member was not carded to speak, and the Member therefore, chose to speak because somehow the Member for Caroni Central aroused or titillated or excited the Member to get on her feet and respond with a cameo appearance for 20-odd minutes or so. And that 20 minutes, Madam Speaker—I took my notes here—dealt with taxation measures, VAT, CNG stations, UNC's lack of proper administration, diversification, incentivizing the private sector, the IDB role in assisting the Government to work with the private sector, the food import bill, the creative industries sector and the maladministration, as the Member said, of the last Government. That was done in 20 minutes.

Now, I am very curious to know who is the next speaker that was prepared to speak today?—that those minutes were more valuable than the preparation of the next speaker on the Government Benches, [*Desk thumping*] who would have spent time preparing, reading the Motions and preparing a good argument to come before us, and in a cameo appearance of 20 minutes went through, ploughed through all that material. And I agreed with the Member, the Member really was not carded to speak. [*Desk thumping*] And when the batting order changed, that cameo appearance gave us no runs, and the batsman left as the batsman entered, with the score at the same point.

3.15 p.m.

Madam Speaker, such “extempoing” might be good elsewhere, but in a debate like this, one would have hoped that persons would be prepared and relating to the issue. But, the Member for Caroni Central, I imagine, can excite persons to respond; to his credit he can do that. [*Laughter*] Madam Speaker, I will respond to some of those matters raised by the Member for Arouca/Maloney later, but first to get back to the substantive issue of the Motion before us. The Minister of Finance came to the House today, and drew us out on a Monday, and demanded that we come here on a Monday because the time is upon him, and he would just have checked his calendar to realize that he was running out of days, and therefore, the House must meet on Monday to deal with this matter, and the Member made his case somewhat for support to both Motions.

Madam Speaker, like the Member for Caroni Central, I was taken aback. The Member told us that he has here today a twin objective to make the burden equitable. And, secondly, to save the environment and the earth. So, the twin objectives; one, environment; and one, socializing the burden almost, to use his argument, but could not tell us exactly how much revenue you can raise. Madam Speaker, in my constituency, on Debe junction, when a doubles man goes out in the morning he knows how much doubles he has; he knows by 12 o'clock if he sells X amount he would get Y income. He knows at the end of the day if he sells Y he gets X. He will know for the entire day what is his revenue coming to him depending on how much "bara", and "chana", and "doubles" he sells.

I want to put it to you, Madam Speaker, that a doubles man could run this country better than the Member for Diego Martin North/East. [*Desk thumping*] Because the Member for Diego Martin North/East cannot tell us what revenue— [*Interruption*—and, you see the cameo appearance wants to continue. [*Laughter*] You had 45 minutes to talk you could not take it. "I talking now, you want to talk while I talking." Madam Speaker, a nuts man goes out in the morning and he knows I have a bag of nuts here, I will check to see how much I sell by 12 o'clock, three o'clock, six o'clock, nine o'clock, and he is very clear on how much money he will make. The Minister of Finance comes to the House, increases tax, but cannot tell us how much money he is expecting to make. The nuts man would make a better Minister of Finance than the Member for Diego Martin North/East. [*Desk thumping*]

And, the Member for Diego Martin North/East advertised in the newspaper—and I have an article here that came to us earlier—where in anticipation of this debate, the *Trinidad Guardian* Monday, April 25, I believe today, bold headline, "Imbert to announce tax waiver details today on luxury cars", and high anticipation that today we will get a good analysis of what waivers are coming—how, why, to who.

But, so far, the Minister of Finance did not tell us anything about these waivers; where, how, what is the policy, what is the procedure, who will benefit, who will not benefit, why. Because, the Member for Caroni Central, again, made the point, this is economic policy by "vaps". So, you announced online tax and then you realized that you did not think it through, you say, hold on, I think we will have to exempt certain goods online. You announced VAT reduction and when you work it through you say, no, I think we have to change the schedules somewhat. You announced, and we have the announcement here, Madam Speaker, in the midyear review. I just want to quote from the midyear review that was on April 08, 2016, and the Minister of Finance told us. He said:

“...Madam Speaker, in order to raise the revenue to deal with all of the matters in this Finance Committee Report”—I am at page 20—“to deal with all of the goods and services and the other items of expenditure, we also intend to increase by 50 per cent customs duty on motor vehicle tax on luxury vehicles, starting with private motor vehicles with an engine size exceeding 1999 ccs.”—cubic capacity of the engine size, and he blurted out—“This measure will take effect immediately.”

That was on April 08, 2016. Then today, a few days after, the Minister of Finance indicated that we will have a waiver because people did not adjust to the suddenness of that policy.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: What happened to the used-car dealers?

Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes, the used-car dealers, nobody adjusted to the suddenness. But, this is a Government for seven months telling us that they are consulting everybody, at every turn, at every street corner, we are consulting. But, the people who are to be affected, the Minister of Finance says, they were taken by the suddenness, so they did not know, because you did not consult; you did not inform; never engaged, and we have tax waiver details.

But what are the details? We do not know. So, we have several companies in the country, some of us know them. I mean, it is Sterling Services, Diamond Motors, Massy, importing new cars, ANSA McAL. Now, where is this list coming from? How is this to work? Are you saying that the companies will give the Ministry of Finance and the Minister a list, and say, “Boss, these 20 people apply last week for their—pay down on vehicles and we are importing,” because, that is a process. Persons will pay a certain percentage of the cost; it goes to the dealer; they make a request to import; it takes a few months; it will come down here on the bond—as he quite rightly said—that would take some time as well; go into the showroom, that will take some time. But, how much time? How is this to be fixed?

Are you depending on the company to give you a list of all those persons who have ordered motor vehicles, luxury cars over 1999 cc, and who are they? Who are they? And how can you put a policy in place where the dealer will just inform the Ministry of Finance? They could put in John Smith, Jane Smith, anybody. So, what happens in a system like this where you do not think it out is that it is open for corruption. It is open for misuse. [*Desk thumping*]

So, the company says they abused that system, so they can now call up people, their friends and family, and special clients and financiers, and say, “Boss,

this thing coming, eh, go down quick and order your car.” And, when they go to order they backdate that by a few weeks, and say, “Look, my name down there, you know. My name down there, we ordered”—and they supply a list to the Ministry of Finance to get exempted from the 50 per cent. Because how else could you do it? And today I would ask the Minister, is he aware of any former Minister in the PNM administration, or any Minister in the current administration, who has also ordered brand-new luxury motor vehicles that will benefit from this waiver? [*Desk thumping*] And tell us, because if you do not tell us I will tell us. I will tell us. [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

Madam Speaker, because it is one thing to say Ministers can purchase. This does not affect Ministers, we know, they can purchase without paying motor vehicle tax, custom duties, VAT, and so on. They know that. They purchase every two years, I believe, a vehicle, and nothing is wrong with that. That is the perk of the office I always say. The former Member for San Fernando East had it right, that is the perk for the office. Although I think they took a decision now not to avail themselves of that, but that is their issue.

Hon. Member: After they buy it.

Dr. R. Moonilal: After they buy it. After they buy it they said, “we are not availing ourselves”. Then they discovered that Ministers already ordered, because what you do is you order not for yourself, but for friend, family, spouse, partner, spouse and partner [*Desk thumping*] and you order, vehicles are there. What is the policy surrounding the waiver of taxes on motor vehicles already ordered? Our information is that—

[*Hon. F. Al-Rawi stands*]

Madam Speaker: Attorney General, in terms of what statement?

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, 48(6) in respect of the statement that he is making about ordering vehicles for some untoward purpose. It is by far past the tone, it is delving into some degree of impropriety, by tone, by context, and by content.

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East, in terms of the statement I will say by actual expression of words, unless you have facts to back that up, I would ask you to withdraw that.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, I am merely asking a question. I have never made a statement. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Member, in terms of the context itself and your tone did not connote a question. So, I would ask you—[*Interruption*—there is a tone for a question for all those who do not know. But, please, withdraw that statement.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, could I change my tone? Madam Speaker, could I humbly and gently ask the Members opposite if they are aware of other Members and Ministers who may have ordered luxury motor vehicles?

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, 48(6) again, on a point of general privilege under section 55—

Madam Speaker: Both cannot be standing, please.

Mr. Al-Rawi: And I am standing on a point of order. Yes, Madam Speaker, most respectfully, for a past Leader of Government Business in this House—*[Crosstalk]* Madam Speaker, just to raise the point—*[Interruption]*

Madam Speaker: Members! Continue, Attorney General.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Under 48(6), not only is this device aroused to circumvent your direct ruling, but I take serious affront, if the Member has something to say that is factual I have no complaint. But, one must have the courage to say what one wants to say, not to speak in circles this way and then to flout the Chair's ruling, Madam Speaker. *[Desk thumping]* *[Continuous crosstalk]*

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East! *[Interruption]* Member for Caroni East! Member for Diego Martin North/East! Member for Oropouche East, I would direct that you withdraw the question, and please continue. You must first withdraw it.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, I withdraw.

Madam Speaker: Thank you.

Dr. R. Moonilal: We think the Member protested too much. Could I proceed?

Madam Speaker: Members, please. For all Members here, when the Chair rules I would rather not hear any comment based on my ruling. Please continue.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, on 48(6) on the record of this Parliament I am saying, if the Member has something to say then have the courage to say it openly *[Interruption]* but, to say about protest, Madam Speaker, it is insulting within the parameters of 48(6).

Madam Speaker: Attorney General, the Member has already withdrawn the statement. *[Desk thumping]* Excuse me! Members! Members, everybody in here is bound by the Standing Orders. Your behaviour is beneath the decorum required of this House, and that would not be tolerated by this House. This might be a very

stimulating debate, but everybody would have the opportunity to speak in accordance with the Standing Orders. I rule that the Member for Oropouche East withdraws his statement. I take it he has, and I also, for the guidance of all Members here, in future when the Chair rules, I really do not want what, in local parlance, is called, “the echo”. Continue.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. On this matter of climate change—is okay? [*Laughter*] On the climate change issue, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, and Minister, gave us some information because he was seeking to clarify some matters, and given that one of the objectives of this Bill is, of course, to deal with matters of energy and fossil fuel reduction, and so on, and demand; the Minister of Finance sought to correct the record somewhat, he believes, concerning the signing of the global instrument on climate change and Trinidad and Tobago’s participation in that.

I am sure the Member for Diego Martin North/East—I know him to be a very honourable man—it was never his intention to mislead the Parliament, nor the country, when the Member and Minister of Finance indicated that Sen. The Hon. Moses attended and signed the international instrument in Paris in December.

Mr. Imbert: I never said that. I never said that. I was informed on Friday.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, I am happy for the clarification from the Member, so I can proceed. For the record, the Minister of Foreign and—something else I think he is called—Caricom Affairs, signed the instrument in New York quite recently—

Mr. Imbert: I said so. I said so. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: But, I cannot hear myself. Member, I would like to indicate that in December 2015, when this matter was being discussed and signed on to in Paris, Trinidad and Tobago had three delegates, of which there was no Minister or Head of Government. [*Desk thumping*]

3.30 p.m.

The Prime Minister of India was there, the President of the United States was there, about five Prime Ministers in the Caricom were there. There was no Prime Minister from Trinidad and Tobago and I am sure the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago had other more important matters to deal with. I think he was in London attending a party fundraiser, but he was not in Paris where other Heads of Government were to show their commitment to this global climate change instrument. And Trinidad and Tobago had three delegates. The only other country with such a low turnout, I believe, was war-torn Syria, the only other country.

So the Government's commitment to the environment must be measured because they signed a couple of days ago. Apart from that, Madam Speaker, they made a big thing of environment. Those Caricom nations signed in December, already ratified into law, the treaty. [*Desk thumping*] Trinidad and Tobago as of this moment has not ratified the instrument. So when you speak and boast about your commitment to the environment—when we were in office there was a Ministry charged with the environment. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Indarsingh: They disbanded that Ministry.

Dr. R. Moonilal: They disbanded it. It is subsumed I think in two or three different Ministries now, so you are not sure where one agency is as opposed to the other, all under the environment.

Madam Speaker, I am also informed that Grenada, which the Member boasted about in terms of their car—how they purchased car and so on, was one of those countries attending and signing and already ratifying into law. [*Desk thumping*] And they deposit their instruments—[*Crosstalk*] Again, Madam Speaker, please, when they have a chance to talk they do not talk; when somebody else is talking they are interrupting. Madam Speaker, and you see, that is their view. So, on the matter of the environment and the commitment of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to climate change and other ideals, this Government stands wanting. That is my point.

I move now to the next point. To be very clear, Madam Speaker, I am informed that during the period 1995 to 2000 the then UNC administration opened the CNG stations, including those at Rushworth Street, San Fernando; Cocoyea Village; Peakes, Tacarigua; Ramco, Churchill Roosevelt Highway and at City Gate. Prior to that, I am informed that we had one station opened before at Sum Sum Hill, whether that was functioning or not, Madam Speaker, I am not too sure about that. But, it is not today, you know, to get into a—I will use a lighter word, to get into a shouting match as to who did more for the environment and who do less and so on, Governments build upon what other Governments did. When we came in 2010 there was one. We built upon that and introduced six to eight stations, and today we will be happy if the current administration introduces 20 stations, nothing is wrong with that. But it is not a shouting match to say, who did this, who did that, and the Member for Caroni Central, quite rightly, outlined a lot of the issues, a lot of the challenges we faced and the achievements as far as it relates to the matter of the environment and what we were doing there.

The Minister of Finance told us earlier that part of the approach was to spread the burden of adjustment in the society. There is an interesting angle here, Madam

Speaker, that I want to raise. In the context of an economy where we are all aware of job loss, Madam Speaker, we have in this country now what is called “economic suicides”. Persons are killing themselves over their inability to provide for their family. Regrettably, we read in the newspaper, regrettably, of the death of David Francis who hung himself.

Mr. Indarsingh: Perseverance in Couva.

Dr. R. Moonilal: A retrenched worker at the Centrin Steel Plant, I believe, and the person took his own life over matters relating to inability to provide for the family. That is the context in which we live. Mr. Francis was not the first. I pray he would be the last, but I doubt it, because the economic situation is so grave.

And in that context we have had job losses, none other than the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development came to the House and one day sat in this House, the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development came from the other place, and rattled out, almost like calling the Lotto numbers, the amount of people who were retrenched. I think the tally is today, officially 5,000. It could be more like 8,000/10,000 persons who have left—suspect—who have lost their jobs. So we have wanton job loss in the economy.

But, Madam Speaker, during economic recessions as well, do you know there are also job-creating sectors? In the last time we went through this type of painful transition, it was earlier in the first decade of this century, it gave rise to what is called the private security industry; when crime became rampant and so on, the private security industry emerged. Today that industry employs over 10,000 citizens; well, I think non-citizens as well, the private security industry. But, Madam Speaker, you may call that low-wage, low-skilled, you know, hard employment because we know it is a difficult sector that, unregulated still, but that sector came out of economic difficulties and criminal enterprises expanding, I think, in the early part of 2002 to 2009 and so on.

Madam Speaker, today, there is a next sector developing and it has developed fully in terms of the used-car industry and even with luxury vehicles too. There is a particular subsector developing of technicians, garages, car wash in this country that treats with luxury vehicles. Colleagues opposite, I know many of them, you know, would enjoy their Benz and BMW and I understand a Porsche as well was parked up in the airport for some time—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Mitchell: A foreign-used Jaguar.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Oh yes, a foreign-used Jaguar as well. And, Madam Speaker, the point I am making is that an industry is creeping up where there are

persons who are fixing cars, doing the IT. Today, if something goes wrong with one of these luxury vehicles the computer challenge, the IT challenge is bigger than the database managing in a Ministry, eh. Because if one thing goes wrong with a car and the IT systems there, everything goes down.

Mr. Indarsingh: Diagnostic.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Diagnostic. In fact, they use words like “diagnostic” now to “fix car”. Madam Speaker, there is an industry developing of mechanics, of technicians at one level, but also of car wash that handles these vehicles. And the Member for San Fernando East would be aware, as he should, that even in Mon Repos and Cocoyea you have, and Corinth I think, you have car wash there that hires a lot of people. And I am sure you are a regular customer there as well, you know. [*Crosstalk*] Oh, they do not fix that.

Madam Speaker, those subsectors, if you do not watch how you go about you can make policy by “vaps”, you can affect those subsectors where people will even lose their jobs there because you do not have demand, people are not purchasing. And this Government’s approach to economic management is to pelt darts in the dark and hope you hit a bullseye, just “fling dart”. That is their approach to economic management. So we were bewildered when the Prime Minister announced his economic council, the finest minds in the country.

Dr. Tewarie: “And den he bring de IMF.”

Dr. R. Moonilal: And then the Prime Minister said in the House, I think, with great sincerity, he said: “So long I am the leader of this country I will do all in my power to avoid the IMF”, and then the Minister of Finance comes back in a plane with the IMF. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Tewarie: And the World Bank too.

Dr. R. Moonilal: And the World Bank. So today, we have subcontracted the management of Trinidad and Tobago to the IMF and the World Bank. [*Desk thumping*] They are in charge. And their approach, Madam Speaker, I have an article here, the *Guardian* of April 23, Saturday gone. And this has to do as well with the diversification issues which the Member for Arouca/Maloney spoke about, which I will come to later, when, Madam Speaker, none other than retired Prof. Dr. Ralph Henry and former PNM Minister Mariano Browne indicated:

“No need for outside help”.

Madam Speaker, Prof. Henry himself indicated in this article—

Mr. Indarsingh: Lester Henry?

Dr. R. Moonilal: Not Lester Henry.

Mr. Indarsingh: Oh, he is not Professor.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Dr. Ralph Henry, indicated that we have a lot of our own good advice. We have solid people who can make policy prescriptions on this board, the Economic Advisory Council. You have Mr. Terrence Farrell, Dr. Rolph Balgobin, “Prof. this”, “Prof. that”. Just today they announced two new members, Dr. Keith Nurse and I think somebody else. So that you are fulling up this economic council and the IMF take over the show, resident in Trinidad and Tobago to assist. Mariano Browne stated, Madam Speaker, a former PNM Minister I believe he is, he said:

“...he was bemused and amused that Government was going back to the IMF and World Bank...when we said...we did not want to go”—there. He said the Minister, meaning the Minister of Finance—“is trying to validate that”—what—“they are doing”—is—“right... he is also signalling that the ministry does not have the relevant technical expertise...”

That is what they are doing. Mr. Browne said that the intention is to raid the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. That is the intention. [*Desk thumping*] And to have the IMF validate their policy objective of raiding the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund.

And today, I ask the Minister who is so concerned about this issue of sharing the burden and ensuring that we reduce our dependence on fossil fuel as part of the development strategy that will take us into renewable energy. I am asking the Minister, what is the role of the IMF and World Bank vis-à-vis the Economic Advisory Council? Are they to meet? Are they to share ideas? Will they work together and who asked for this? Did the Minister consult this all-important Economic Advisory Council before walking on the plane back, because that is how it happened. The IMF and the Minister came down, I think, two of them holding the same boarding pass when they boarded the plane, they had their boarding passes together coming to Port of Spain and this is a betrayal of those persons who supported that administration.

Mr. Indarsingh: What about the advisors to the Minister? What they have to say on this?

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South. Do you intend to raise an interruption? [*Crosstalk*] Please confine your comments so that they do not reach to the Chair. Member for Couva South—

Mr. Indarsingh: I am guided, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Thank you.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, so we have the experts here saying no need for outside help and we will file the appropriate question to ask the Minister. Who is paying for these IMF officials in Trinidad and Tobago? [*Desk thumping*] Who is paying? The Government is paying. So now we have no money to keep workers—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, your 30 minutes have expired. You are entitled to 15 more minutes.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes, Ma'am.

Madam Speaker: Do you intend to seek my leave?

Dr. R. Moonilal: I seek your leave.

Madam Speaker: You may continue.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*] So, Madam Speaker, the Government is paying for the IMF advisors in the country today. They are paying for them to be here, while they are also paying for national Economic Advisory Council members, the membership of which they are increasing every day.

Now, we are being told by the Member for Arouca/Maloney that they are very clear, they want to embark upon a rapid development and diversification strategy. The IDB will now help with that. So what is the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago doing? What is the Government of Trinidad and Tobago doing if you subcontract to the IMF, the World Bank, the IDB? [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, having spent five years liming in Opposition they come into Government without a plan, without a clue as to how to develop Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] They told the country that they had a plan, but what was that plan—to go to the IMF? And a writer said it today, I do not have time to quote extensively. I think it was actually a Member of the Economic Advisory Council, one David Abdulah, former Senator, now is crying blood. Having helped to put the PNM in office, he is now saying today, this David Abdulah, that the IMF has a set prescription: retrenchment, privatization, selling out national assets, changing the value of the currency and today, the Member comes to the Parliament and tells us, listen, we want to share the burden, but did not even consult with the Economic Advisory Council of which Mr. Abdulah is a member —

Hon. Member: Still.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Yeah, he is still a member, so far. And because this is the article. It is in the *Newsday*, Madam Speaker, of today, page 9:

“Abdulah says Imbert not sure of what he’s doing”.

Now, we knew this. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Indarsingh: Read it into the record.

Dr. R. Moonilal: For the record, we knew this since September 2015. Mr. Abdulah woke up this morning and discovered that. And then the former Governor of the Central Bank, who they throw out from a window at the Financial Complex, is now saying that it is an OJT Minister of Finance. [*Desk thumping*]

3.45 p.m.

Madam Speaker, I want to ask the Minister of Finance in relation to this measure, was the measure—

Mr. Al-Rawi: [*Inaudible*] Madam Speaker.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Again? You have something on—

Madam Speaker: Member, I would ask you in terms of that last statement to find another way to say it, I am sure.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, I am just enquiring kindly from the Attorney General if there was some bug on the seat that was provoking him at regular intervals to rise like this? Madam Speaker, could I continue?

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East, in terms of the statement that I had asked you to address and therefore find a better way to say it, dealt with the Central Bank. So if you can correct that, and also if you could withdraw that last comment, please.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, I withdraw the last comment and I move on.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Arouca/Maloney—the speaker that was not carded to speak—raised several matters which I will just touch on briefly, and was somewhat provoked by the Member for Caroni Central who regularly reminds us that the opposite side is without a plan and so on, and I think that is also—

Mr. Indarsingh: Rightfully so.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Rightfully, that is his refrain. Madam Speaker, the Member took a few minutes to speak about plans and incentivizing the private sector and so on, and today—I can use the word “hypocrite”—hypocrisy, not hypocrite. Today, the hypocrisy is coming out. When ArcelorMittal asked the Government to meet to discuss what they were going to do, they had no time to meet Mittal, and they had no time to meet Mittal, but today speaks about incentivizing the private sector to save jobs. [*Desk thumping*] Could you imagine that? When a major multinational was going to pull out to lead to 650 job losses and said, “Let us meet to discuss our plans, what we are doing”, maybe then you could have met with the Mittal group to speak about incentives, to see what you can do as a Government.

Had we been in office, 650 steel workers would be at their jobs today. [*Desk thumping*] I say that categorically and without apology.

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes.

Dr. R. Moonilal: I say that without apology. Had the Partnership Government been in power today, 650 workers at Mittal would have been at work, [*Desk thumping*] and Centrin. The Member for Siparia would have met or sent a ministerial team to meet that company to discuss with them [*Desk thumping*] how we can save jobs. We did it before when we were in office. There were companies that were also finding hard times. Their idea of incentivizing the private sector is Grand Bay, asking the EXIM Import Bank to what?—guarantee a loan. The Export Import Bank gives demand loans. Today they are not giving demand loans. They are guaranteeing a loan. If that company cannot pay back, it is taxpayers who will pay that.

Madam Speaker, today, they have no authority to speak on diversification. When we were there, the hospital projects—capital investment projects—were meant to expand our capacity to earn foreign exchange in health tourism; was meant to expand our ability to attract persons to come to Trinidad and Tobago for health care. This is why we made a massive infrastructure investment, training nurses and doctors—for the Minister of Health to tell the country, “Ah doh have staff. What yuh wah me do?”

That is not satisfactory. You cannot do that, and cannot tell us when we will open the Children’s Hospital. You cannot tell us—the Minister of Education is now telling us we have some problem with the Penal/Debe Campus and cannot tell us what are you doing about—first, what is your problem? What are you doing with it? That was also meant as an area for diversification, the tertiary education sector. [*Desk thumping*] It is a job-creating sector. When people get

jobs they pay taxes and when they pay taxes, Government earns revenue. It is a simple explanation. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Everything is a problem, and they have no solutions.

Dr. R. Moonilal: This is it. After seven months they come to the table and tell us everything is a problem. And I want to tell my friend from San Fernando East, “house is not snow cone; it doh melt”. The Partnership built houses. We built thousands of houses in San Fernando, [*Desk thumping*] Chaguanas, Princes Town. We built houses. A house is not snow cone; it does not melt. You know—and I think they banned themselves from using helicopter, but if you do an aerial tour you will see the massive investment in housing in central and in south Trinidad. And so, after seven months you have not built anything. You are proudly smiling, giving out keys for houses that we fixed or built.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yeah, yeah. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: You understand? What are they doing after seven months? Madam Speaker, “they drinking” champagne in Laventille. I see my friend, the Member for Laventille West, popping bottles in Laventille, drinking champagne; saw the Prime Minister pouring for someone. He looked like a butler, Madam Speaker. That is what they are doing while we are talking about diversification.

Madam Speaker, this matter before us speaks to this issue of not understanding a sector, because we do not know how much revenue we are raising from this measure. Why 50 per cent and not 75 per cent? Why 50 per cent and not 25 per cent? Because we do not know how much revenue you get. So it is not revenue. But that defeats your first objective, because then you are not sharing the burden at all. If you do not know how much revenue you are going to raise from this, you cannot argue that you are sharing the burden because you do not know the burden. Then you come to say, well, this will help with environment and so on, and you carry that type of argument.

But in the used-cars sector as well, they have increased the cost of gasoline, of diesel. They are now coming to say they will build CNG plants “and ting” all over the country and they will go into non-fossil fuel energy and so on, and so far after seven months nothing has happened. It is just talk and talk and talk, and we are seeing no—the business community in this country is seeing no sign, no solution.

And, Madam Speaker, this matter of the engine size and cars and so on, everyone knows that if you go beyond 1999 cc, of course you go into, generally, luxury vehicles, but not always luxury vehicle. The Minister has indicated that there are some bars there to protect farmers and public transport vehicles and so

on. When you come down, you get into the cheaper engine size and cheaper cars and so on, with less power. And Madam Speaker, the Government has no strategic policy in dealing with the car industry—[*Desk thumping*]*—none. Today it will be 50 per cent. When they go along it might be 75 per cent by September. As they go along further, Madam Speaker, they will come back with other taxes. It is a question of tax, tax, tax.*

The Minister of Finance speaks about Prado vehicles and so on, and I ask him, you know, which Minister in this Government driving a Prado? Which one? Because that is not the car of choice, I am sure, for my colleagues opposite. But the Minister did not tell us another interesting point which we can raise on this matter. Is this measure designed, as well, to save foreign exchange? Is it a matter aimed at reducing the demand for foreign exchange? Because the foreign exchange issue is a troubling issue. Firing the Governor of the Central Bank did not change anything, as they thought it would. So that is a problem as well. Is this measure intended to save foreign exchange? And if so, how? And how much do you intend to save by doing this?

Madam Speaker, the Member for Caroni Central spoke in great detail about the achievements of the former administration as it relates to the environment, so I “doh” want to go on to that anymore. But the Member for Arouca/Maloney spoke about the Government’s great policy decision of reducing VAT from 15 per cent to 12.5 per cent. I do not know of any lobby groups in this country that came in the public and said, “We demand that you reduce VAT from 15 per cent to 12.5 per cent”. They did that as a populist measure that I think they put on the platform. When they realized that they lowered VAT to 12.5 per cent and will lose revenue, they then increased taxes on everything. [*Desk thumping*] So you gave with one hand and took away with the next hand. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Indarsingh: “What kinda con man, smart man”—

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, they do that in Las Vegas. You do that on a gambling table, Madam Speaker. You give with one hand and you take away with the next hand. So you never win. The house always wins. This is a case where the Minister of Finance is the house. He wants to win with everything he does. So reducing the VAT meant nothing, Madam Speaker, because you increase the cost of living by the plethora of taxes you have placed on the population.

And then today, again, this policy—I think the Member for Caroni Central dealt with it—shifting blame. Everybody is to blame except the Government. So you lower the VAT. You say, “Listen, we did what we had to do. The fact that the

consumer not benefiting, that is not our fault". But you have a regulatory role, a monitoring role. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago, through Consumer Division, Legal Affairs and so on, can monitor, can regulate, can ensure that an institution is in place to ensure that supermarkets pass on any benefit at all to the consumer. You cannot come to the Parliament and tell the country, "Well, we did our role. We wash our hands. We lower VAT." No, no, no. You must ensure that the consumer, where the consumer can benefit, does benefit. That is also Government's role. That is also policy and programme required. And today, they are washing their hands on that matter, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker—I believe I have a couple minutes left—the Member spoke as well, of the food import bill and the creative sector and so on, and all of that is fine. All that sounds good. But what tangibles are you going to give to incentivize that sector? The creative sector received support by governments over the years. It is wrong to think that only one government meet and treat with that sector. Several governments have given support.

And, in fact, another job-creating sector is particularly in the creative industries and to a lesser extent the entertainment sector. Because coming out of the problem we face now is really to identify which are the new sectors for job growth. We know where we are not going to get jobs. We are not going to get jobs in the steel mill; we are not going to get jobs in the government central bureaucracy. They are removing contract workers. Listen, this country, whether you are a Governor of the Central Bank or you are sanitation workers in San Fernando, you lost your job.

Mr. Indarsingh: And they arresting.

Dr. R. Moonilal: And they arrest the union leader, I think, down in San Fernando as well. So from Governor of the Central Bank to sanitation workers in San Fernando, all gone. The Government needs to tell us which are the job-creating sectors you are targeting and how you are going to do that. [*Desk thumping*] And in this measure—this one measure—you run the risk of affecting a certain subsector that could lead to further unemployment and job loss, and loss of income.

And, Madam Speaker, the people who are involved in these sectors and so on, if you leave them without jobs, you leave them without income, because you want to cut CEPEP and cut URP and cut this and cut that. You are going to—I want to say—I cannot say that. You are going to lead to more economic suicide and you are also going to lead to more poverty.

Madam Speaker: Your speaking time has expired.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Ma'am. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Laventille West. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity accorded to me to make a brief contribution in this very important debate. Madam Speaker, I want to begin, as I must do, by suggesting that my colleagues on the other side, they normally would proceed, showing flagrant disregard for the concepts of shame and carefulness in their thoughts and sentiments.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Your language, the language—48(6). Very disrespectful.

Madam Speaker: I would ask you, Member, please, to rephrase that statement. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Hinds: I thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I find, Madam Speaker—guided by you—that, you know, I would have thought that they would be—given their track record; their recent track record, they would be a little more careful about the things they say, especially in public.

I heard the Member for Couva South—you may have missed it—shout across, during the course of the contribution of the Member for Arouca East—

Hon. Member: Oropouche.

Hon. F. Hinds: Oropune East.

Hon. Member: Oropouche.

Hon. F. Hinds: Oropouche East, that “too many Ministers”. We have 23 Ministers in this Government.

Hon. Member: He did not say that. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. F. Hinds: He said that. [*Crosstalk*] We have 23 Ministers on this side. We came down from the very lofty amount of 33, as established in the last Government. In so doing, the public must be reminded that we immediately, over the ensuing year would have saved this country about \$45 million. [*Desk thumping*] That is what we did. And we made the whole—

Mr. Indarsingh: Point of order. Madam Speaker, the Member is misleading the House.

Madam Speaker: Is it a point of order?

Mr. Indarsingh: I just want to say categorically—

Madam Speaker: Member, could you quote the Standing Order?

Hon. Member: He does not have any.

Madam Speaker: Please proceed.

4.00 p.m.

Hon. F. Hinds: Thank you very warmly, Madam Speaker. In that and in so many other things, part of the challenge we face on this side in these times is really to save this country millions and millions and millions of dollars that had been bleeding over the last five years.

The Member for Oropouche East, he protested loudly during the course of this debate, based on your intervention, Madam Speaker, about a comment that would have come from this side, presumably from the lips of the Minister of Finance. Apparently the Member for Oropouche East forgot, in this House, who denigrated this House, similar to a previous Member for Tobago East, when that Member for Oropouche East shouted on the record in this House some comment about “stink mouth” and denigrated this House in a way that was reminiscent of a previous Member for Tobago East, standing in this Parliament. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I was about, while he was speaking though, to rise on Standing Order 8(1).

Madam Speaker: The hon. Member.

Hon. F. Hinds: The hon. Member. Standing Order 8(1) demands that the debates in this House be conducted in English. He began and in his first sentence, I do not know where he found this construction, but he said “tintilate”. Now that word does not exist. It is not English. He was in breach of that Standing Order. He was in breach.

Mr. Charles: Madam Speaker, 48(1).

Madam Speaker: Well, I overrule the objection. It is a debate. These matters were raised.

Hon. F. Hinds: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. And then went on to describe the intervention by the Leader of Government Business, the Member for Arouca/Maloney. He went on to describe the Member’s contribution as a cameo.

Well, I think I had to agree with him here. I took the time to check the meaning of the word “cameo” and it means a short descriptive literary sketch, which neatly encapsulates someone or something, and I think the Member did just that. [*Desk thumping*] So I am obliged to agree with him on that score.

Another meaning of the word “cameo” says a small but noticeable part in a film or play performed by a famous actor. The Member for Arouca/Maloney’s intervention was short. It was sufficiently noticeable to have drawn Standing Order 44(8), and the Member for Caroni Central needed two minutes to attend to issues that she so potently and poignantly raised. So it was noticeable. It did not go unnoticed, and of course, it was delivered by a very distinguished and famous person and Member. So cameo was a proper description, though he intended to be pejorative in his manifestation of the term. But most of all the Member’s intervention, the Member for Arouca/Maloney, was truthful, historically accurate and honest; all attributes that seem to escape our friends on the other side.

The Member for Oropouche East spoke at length about the business of the IMF. He told us that the political leader of the PNM, the Prime Minister, and the Member for Diego Martin West came to this House and told the country in great aplomb, he asserted confidently, that as long as he was the Prime Minister of this country he would do all that is within his power to keep an imposition of the IMF out of Trinidad and Tobago.

Now, I think that was quite noble and all of us on this side and all right-thinking citizens would support the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago on this. I applauded him profusely on that occasion and will do so every time. The fact that we have asked IMF advisors to come here prior to, before they have to impose themselves on Trinidad and Tobago and our economy, in accordance with the treaty that we are a member of, a signatory to, I want to compliment the Minister of Finance who encouraged them to Trinidad and Tobago, for his ingenious approach in dealing with this. I want to commend him. [*Desk thumping*] And the word “ingenious”, for those who may have missed it, means inventive, creative, imaginative, original, insightful, inspired, perceptive and intuitive. It is an advanced state of affairs, forward-thinking.

For some in this country and in this world and not always for the wrong reasons, sometimes for good reason, but for some in this country the IMF is just always a bad word, but I want the citizens to know, for a very long time, Trinidad and Tobago has been a member of the IMF.

Mr. Imbert: Since 1962.

Hon. F. Hinds: Since 1962, a member, and the IMF are often and regularly here conducting what they call Article IV Consultations, where on a periodic basis, under the treaty we agreed to it, along with many, many other countries of the world, and they would examine our economic essentials and give advice to protect us from crossing that horrible line. When you cross that horrible line, they then have to impose themselves, under treaty, upon you and make some prescriptions that often countries have difficulty in dealing with. So if the Minister of Finance in his absolute wisdom can bring the expertise of the IMF to bear now, to guide us, to steer us away from that pitfall, I think he ought to be commended. [*Desk thumping*]

The Member for Oropouche asked: what is the Government doing? Well, that is what we are doing. We are trying to keep this country out of the hands of an imposed IMF and we made that very clear. We are managing this difficult country in a very difficult time, in a difficult economic environment.

He quoted David Abdulah, a member of the advisory committee. David Abdulah and many others were selected by this Government, not people who are beholden to this Government or members of the PNM. We in the public interest put together some of the best minds in the country in that advisory committee to assist, to contribute to the well-being of this country. [*Desk thumping*] That is a noble thing. That is a noble thing and we are not afraid of David Abdulah. In fact we welcome his brilliance and his thoughts. They had him as part of their Government. He was a UNC Senator. He blocked his nose for about a year and when he could do it no more he ran away and left them alone.

So if David Abdulah has a view he is free to express it and I read the article that the Member made reference to. And what David Abdulah was essentially saying—and I do not agree him, but he was saying—is that the Minister of Finance demonstrates that he has no confidence in local economists. Well, our advisory board is packed with local economists and all the economists in the Central Bank and in the Ministry of Finance are all locals. We are not averse to that at all. But David Abdulah was essentially taking the point that the Minister of Finance is showing greater confidence in the international economists, as opposed to the locals, and I think I have disposed of that as being inaccurate already.

So I want to press on. The measures that we are dealing with here today, two of them essentially, it is two Motions brought to this House by the Minister of Finance and in essence one is to affirm the Customs Order to give effect to the measures that we are debating. And the other one is the Order itself to be confirmed by this Parliament. It has to do, as the Member for Caroni Central

demonstrated and we all know—with issues of taxation, issues of revenue, issues of revenue generation and issues of environmental concern. But around all of that, it has to do with the management of our economic affairs, given the new circumstances in which we are put.

I want to place on the record, just to gainsay some of the untruths that may have fell from the lips of my friends on the other side. I want to make the point very clear, particularly for the young people of Trinidad and Tobago, it is well-known that fossil fuels have serious adverse environmental impact. CNG is a cheaper and a cleaner fuel, and as a recognition of that, up to, before 2010, the Government of which I am proudly a part and the party of which I am always proudly a part, which offered this country government for so many years in their national life, we had established CNG stations in Mayaro; in Arima, two stations in Arima; in Mount Lambert; in Sea Lots; in Barataria; Wrightson Road in Port of Spain; Cocoyea Village, San Fernando; Rushworth Street in San Fernando; yes, Point Fortin; Couva; Chaguanas, two stations in Chaguanas; Curepe on the highway and in Claxton Bay. We did that a long, long time ago. [*Desk thumping*] And I remember budget after budget, the last Minister of Finance, not the last, the one before, Sen. Howai, coming to this Parliament and telling us ad nauseam that they would put more in place. I do not think they managed to do very much more than that. Our record stands tall.

The Member for Caroni Central, he told us on account of these measures citizens have to pay more for cars. Well okay, that is true. He told us a lot about taxation and revenue and that the Minister of Finance did not mention it, as though the Minister of Finance was trying to hide something. I just want to remind the Member for Caroni Central and his colleagues in the UNC that the Government needs money to run the county, must have that, and the Government today has no money. The Minister of Finance came here on diverse occasions and made that pellucidly clear. And, therefore, this Government finds itself scrimping and scraping for revenue, parsimonious conduct, if you may.

The Member for Caroni Central asked: why are we raising money through taxation? I would have, in another place, described that as foolish. But, of course, this is Parliament and I ought not to do so here and would not. What is this revenue for? He wants us to tell him now what is the revenue we are collecting that would go into the Consolidated Fund—what is it for?

Dr. Tewarie: I said you had no plan.

Hon. F. Hinds: I am being disturbed, Madam Speaker. If you would protect me I should be thankful.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni Central, I remind you of Standing Order 47, which deals with interruptions. Continue, please.

Hon. F. Hinds: He wants to eat his cake, give it away and still have it. You spoke already. He asked: What is this revenue for? What are our priorities? Our priority at this time of necessity is to stabilize this economy, to stabilize this country from the turbulence that the UNC left it in. That is our priority. [*Desk thumping*]

I give you an example of that turbulence. They decided, the last Government, that they would construct a highway from San Fernando to Point Fortin. The engineers' estimates, internal engineers' estimates, was \$3.6 billion. We are facing the spectre, Madam Speaker, after five years of their mismanagement and waste and all kinds of confusion around it. It is still incomplete, 49 per cent of the work done and this country will eventually pay \$10 billion to do it. They did not borrow from the World Bank or the IDB at very low interest rates, with concessions and a moratorium in order to fund it. They decided in their lack of wisdom, to do it from the current account and left us with a big hole to deal with. It will take this country and the taxpayers on whose part they very deceptively pretend to speak, \$10 billion.

He made a meal over the fact that we had announced our intention to give this country, by way of a modernized, efficient transportation system, a rail system, a mass transit system. We never settled. We called it mass transit because we did not decide exactly in advance what it would be, what form it would take.

4.15 p.m.

We also did not—we were careful throughout the campaign, every one of us, we never told this country, “We will give you a mass transit system”. We said, “That is PNM’s plan, and when we go to Government, we will seek the independent expert advice from an objective, independent, knowledgeable body, the IDB, and if they said that they thought [*Desk thumping*] it was feasible, all things considered, then we would have done it”. That is what we said, [*Desk thumping*] and true to our word. In honesty and with distinction, we went to the IDB with the project, and they having a look at the national economy, using the experience they had from around the world, looking at what we had intended, they said, at this time it is not feasible. We told the country in advance, if the IMF said it was not feasible, we would not have imposed that on the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] That is all. Honest, dignified, real and true, [*Interruption*] and those are the facts, Member for Caroni Central.

So, this Government knows exactly what it is doing. This Minister of Government, knows exactly what he is doing, and I have been doing it for the last seven months in the Ministry of Works and Transport, and I can boastfully say today—and I will bring evidence if you need it—I, as Minister of Works and Transport have saved this country billions of dollars, millions of dollars since I have sat in that place. [*Desk thumping*] And this country will see more and more of that as we go forward. [*Interruption*] They will see more.

The Member for Caroni Central—[*Interruption*] you hold on, not one cent will be stolen or wasted, [*Desk thumping*] once I have strength in my body. [*Interruption*] Yeah, I know who I am talking about. [*Laughter*]

The Member for Caroni Central, he said the people, in colloquial terms, “de people are bawling”. Well, they did not start bawling now, they bawled bad and hard for the last five years “like goat”. [*Laughter*] “Dey bawl.” The UNC made them bawl. It is only pain you all gave them, and all they tell me—I was in my constituency all of yesterday. All they tell me is, “dat dey want to see some people geh jail”. That is what they tell me. [*Desk thumping*] They tell all of us that. Jail! I was talking to a group of people in Success Village yesterday, I was talking to them about what we are doing, and I saw red eyes watching me. “All dey want is jail!” [*Crosstalk*] And I had to assure them, the Member for San Fernando West as Attorney General, and the Member for Port of Spain North/St Ann’s West, as Minister in the Office of the Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, they are working assiduously, getting behind all the nuances, and all the treachery and all the tricks that they put upon this country. Bit by bit, sheet by sheet, line by line and following process, and a day will come. On that, I say no more.

He cried out about used-car dealers. He reminded us that they import some as little as 15 cars, some up to 200 cars. I remember in the Senate as an Opposition Senator, I remember as a citizen of this country, for five years they had a constant running battle with the used-car operators, used-car importers in this country. When it was not Vasant Bharath, it was the Prime Minister herself, the then Prime Minister. They had a running battle with them, as they were trying to bring new people into that market and doing all kinds of things. They seem to forget, and that is the reason why I began how I began, demonstrating to you, Madam Speaker, that it appears as though they are averse to the concept of shame. Any objection?

[*Mr. Hinds sits*]

[*Laughter and desk thumping*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: [*Inaudible*] No respect for the Chair. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Member, please continue.

Hon. F. Hinds: I thank you very warmly, Madam Speaker. We decided that we would for the sake of the environment—and you know we do not have disposal facilities here for a lot of junk. So foreign-used cars eventually end up on the dump heap here, you know. So you know what? We reduced the age of the cars from six years to four years. That is a good thing. And the Member for Caroni Central tried to mislead us, to tell us about how hard four-year-old cars are to get, but still the used-car dealers on whose behalf he purported to speak today, they want to import—if you give them a licence for 500, they will take it.

And new cars, he admitted that new cars are being sold in Trinidad and Tobago, not even four years old, zero years old, sold aplenty. So I do not get the point, and he suggested—the Member for Caroni Central suggested that the used-car dealers are wondering whether we are squeezing them out of the industry to favour the new-car dealers. No.

It was we who introduced the foreign-used-car regime in this country. [*Desk thumping*] It was we who opened it up, and as you go along you improve it, you do things and that is what responsible Government is all about. So I do not know what is all that bleating from the Member for Caroni Central. And talking sanctimoniously about the fact that we are taxing poor and salaried people, and we would not go after the business people, some of whom, or most of whom are not paying taxes. They knew that for the last five years, did nothing about it.

We proposed a revenue authority to make tax collection more efficient and more workable in this country, and they objected to it. [*Crosstalk*] It was we who decided that the little man in this country should not be paying any income tax if he earned in the first place up to \$5,000—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Now six.

Hon. F. Hinds:—and recently the Minister of Finance took it to \$6,000, and I would beat the desk for that every day. [*Mr. Hinds thumps the desk*] [*Desk thumping*]

It was we who did that. What is he telling us about the poor man? “Is we who introduced GATE. Is we who introduced CDAP. Is we who introduced the School Feeding Programme. Is we who introduced free transport, supported and subsidized books.” It is we who did that for the poor people. We wrote a document called “Accounting for the Tax Dollars”, since way back in the 80s. We could account for the tax dollar in this country, and we have always done that, and

if we did not do for poor people in this country, you tell me who did? They had big—look, “leh mih leave dat for another debate. Leh me leave dat”.

The Board of Inland Revenue obviously needs modernization, and the Revenue Authority was the way forward. Only last week, I might say, the Cabinet is contemplating strengthening the Inland Revenue Division, and giving them more technical skills aplenty. This morning we dealt with it in F&GP. So let me press on.

Madam Speaker, the measures that are here today, the measures that are before us today, would have a direct impact upon an institution that is within my purview, and that is the Licensing Division, the Transport Division. So that the efficient operation of the Transport Division is very critical to all that will happen here, because it is the Licensing Officers and the Transport Division who will decide whether a car is 1999 cc or otherwise for these measures to kick in.

So let me say a little bit about the Licensing Division. That institution has posed a significant challenge for the last 20 years. There are some people including me in this country, who—I am on record as saying it is one of the most corrupt and inefficient places in the whole of Trinidad and Tobago. And now that it falls to me as Minister of Works and Transport, I feel committed and duty bound to taking action to improving it. I am not going to sit and do nothing about it. Many efforts to improve it have largely failed.

In 2009, however, a PNM Government, in an attempt to deal with this problem, signed on with a heads of agreement, we signed a heads of agreement with the Government of Canada to establish a motor vehicle authority, which was to take the operations of the old Licensing Division upward and forward. The agreement provided for the Province of Nova Scotia to provide information, advice and subject matter expertise. And secondly, to access to a motor vehicle registry software under a software agreement. We did that.

Madam Speaker—[*Interruption*] yes, the PNM did that. The idea was to be able to provide a service, a quick service to the members of the public around the country at kiosks even, where this information held at the licensing office would be easily accessible. Pursuant to the Heads of Agreement, the Barrington Consultancy Group from the Province of Nova Scotia was contracted, to assist this Government in that transformation process.

Up to May 2010, prior to May 2010, the then Government had reached its target for the transformation of the Licensing Division. The first phase was completed. This included digitization of the licensing records, completion of

business policies and procedures, training of staff, installation of software systems, motor vehicle authority operating model for Trinidad and Tobago, and completion of an MVA Bill. We had completed a Bill up to 2010.

Subsequent to May 2010, the project was undermined by delays and mismanagement. One of the factors I discerned for this was when the last Government, trying to create another Ministry as it did, to make 33 Ministers so they could have favoured 33 of their friends. They separated—[*Interruption*]—yes, “tutty tree”. They separated—yeah, in colloquial terms, “tutty tree”. They separated the Ministry of Works and called it the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure and the Ministry of Transport, that project was then in the old Ministry of Works and Transport. It now went to the Ministry of Transport simpliciter, they having separated it. That transition, it took the new people at the Ministry of Transport a long time to become acquainted, to acquire the resources, the skills to develop the whole Ministry. So it took them at least two years, I am advised to get going on this matter.

Eventually, not long before the election, they found themselves in an attempt to carry out this policy with the MVA, they found themselves, as I said here before, and we said in the campaign, and to remind the national community, they spent, what? They were supposed to have spent \$45 million on a building in Caroni Settlement. They eventually spent on that building, \$269 million. Every time I drive past and I see it, I ask myself, where is the \$269 million in that?

Mr. Imbert: Who was the contractor?

Hon. F. Hinds: And the contractor is a well-known, a friend, SIS, who disappeared shortly after the election of 2015. According to the report, gone to Panama, cannot be found, favourite friend of the UNC, \$269 million on what was supposed to cost \$45 million.

The need, however, Madam Speaker, for a new motor vehicle authority to improve service delivery, efficiency to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, remains critically urgent. They spent a lot of money but they did not achieve the mark.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Laventille West, your 30 minutes have expired. You are entitled to avail yourself of a further 15 minutes. Might I ask, how much longer you intend to be?

Mr. Imbert: I would use every moment of it.

Madam Speaker: Might I then suggest, it is a convenient time that we take the suspension now. This House do stand suspended for half an hour.

4.28 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

4.58 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Hon. F. Hinds: Madam Speaker, before we took the adjournment, I was making the point that we are going to treat with this matter of the need, the critical need, for improving this service and the delivery of that service to the people. In this regard, the Ministry has completed its review of the draft of the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Bill, 2016. I was scheduled to go before the LRC today at 1.30 to treat with it, I am here. I do not enjoy the gift of bilocation, neither does the Attorney General, so we will do so, I suspect, on Wednesday of this week, but we are getting on with the people's business.

The highlights of this Bill will be the creation of a Motor Vehicle Authority and the authority will be able to manage its own staff, improve business efficiency and embrace modern technologies. It will require the registration and oversight by the authority of all fleet management facilities operating in Trinidad and Tobago, motor vehicle rental agencies, regulation of vehicle inspection centres, regulation of driving schools, management of maxi-taxi and taxi services.

You must agree, Madam Speaker, a very comprehensive approach to dealing with the question of the Licensing Authority, traditionally, those issues, we will be introducing tagging of all vehicles entering Trinidad and Tobago, and that will deal with some of the issues of stolen vehicles. Some stolen vehicles—vehicles stolen from abroad—are registered in Trinidad and Tobago and become, if you like, sanitized that way, laundered in our registration system. That is one of the things we have to deal with.

In that regard, I want to say frankly here today it could hardly happen without complicity on the part of staff of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in those departments. I want to warn my fellow citizens who work in the Transport Division, who will be working in the Motor Vehicle Authority, do not be tainted. Do not be swayed by blandishments of other people. Keep your integrity about you. You prayed to God, you fought for your job, now you have it. Do not put it at risk because somebody comes and offers you some minor blandishment. I ask the young people—right now we have some matters under investigation. They have been put in the hands of the police, and the chips will fall where they may in this regard, but I want to warn the young people of this country who might fall prey to those blandishments.

We propose as well to improve revenue generating capacities and incorporating corporate governance best practice. My Ministry is currently finalizing legislation to introduce modern technologies for the detection of driving

offences. For example, before the end of this year, we will be coming to Parliament with legislation to deal with the red light camera systems where we will pick you up if you breach a red light, and you will get a love letter in the mail as happens in England, in America, many states and Canada and around the world. [*Desk thumping*] We already have a couple cameras around the place doing the work, so the technology is in place. The legislation is coming soon and the people of Trinidad and Tobago will be better served in that way. With that technology, certain things will happen to assist in the management of crime in this country as well.

We are now in the process of training 40 new licensing officers as they are now called. Previously, just about 15 of them did a lot of work in this country. We are now—thanks to the Public Service Commission, they have just recruited 40, and they are now being trained at the Police Training College. They will be trained to deal with the issues that are in front of them. The Licensing Authority and the commissioner will be training police officers who interface with citizens out there who produced driver's permits. Sometimes the police, not so au courant with these, may not detect easily a false permit, and false permits there are.

I have a copy of—I do not want to reveal it, because this too is the subject of a police investigation—but I have two copies or two photocopies or images—let me put it more accurately as a lawyer must. I have two images of driver's permits for the same person with the same picture, with completely different data in the atmosphere. That is happening regularly in this country. That matter is now gaining the attention of the police and the operator and the operators of this dark and dirty scheme will soon be found out. In fact, already found out, but will soon be brought to justice. So, again, I want to warn the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, crime and dishonesty never pays. [*Desk thumping*] Somebody is going to get you and the lil money will be of little value when that happens.

I saw last week a young man who made 15 years in jail, he has sworn—and I believe him and I admire him and I love him and I respect him—notwithstanding all the temptations, he has tried to get work since he came out of prison, nobody wants to employ him, but he has promised us in public, he will not touch anybody's thing. He is going to pray and find work. Now, I do not want too many citizens having to live what he has lived. He did his wrong, he went to jail, but he is now in a spot of bother. I am calling on the young people working in the state system, Licensing Office and otherwise, be careful. Do not put too much at risk. Do not put anything at risk. It is not worth it.

So, Madam Speaker, those are some of the things that we propose to do. We have been plagued by a shortage of Licensing Officers and, as I said, 40 are being

trained as we speak. One of the problems at the Licensing Office is that most of the important transactions, most of the transactions, have to be signed by a Licensing Officer. They were few in number, they have to be out on the streets, that created a backlog and the service was inefficient. These 40 new officers, and more as necessary, will improve that situation. I have already alluded to the fact that I will not try to hide from the fact that the Transport Division is a hotbed of some elements of corruption, and we are working hard with those who are minded to do so to try and improve that. A lot of touting takes place.

There have been long delays. People have to wait two weeks or more to obtain a certified copy for a vehicle, and that wait gives a window of opportunity for corruption because somebody working in there tells the hapless citizen: “I could get it for you tomorrow”, and the citizen is prepared to go and get his loan for his car or what have you from a credit union, from a bank. He is prepared to pay a little bribe for that. I want the citizens of this country to know right now we have the capacity and we are delivering certified copies in one day, and you do not have to spend any unnecessary money for that. [*Desk thumping*] I understand people are still telling the public you have to wait two weeks. That is not the truth. You can get it in one day, and cut out that nonsense.

Madam Speaker, I want to inform this House for the record that there are on record, as we speak, 854,337 vehicles registered in the Transport Division database. There are about 25,000 that we are now trying to find the records for, and to scan into that system similar to what the Barrington Group was trying to accord. That system with trustworthy and credible information on a database is critical to the management of all of this. It is critical to dealing with crime because motor vehicles are used significantly in the commission of a host of other crimes, and if we could treat with that we will do well.

We did not have to spend no \$269 million on no building. We are now in a position where we are building this database. We need 25,000 more of the vehicles that are in the atmosphere. We are putting them on the system, and shortly we will be able to make this system available, at the use of a credit card or a LINX card or so, at different points around the country for the benefit of the citizens. That was what the whole Barrington plan was about, but they, my friends on the other side, did not see it so beautifully. They spoilt it. Today we owe Barrington money. We have to pay more if we have to continue, but this Ministry is working to rectify that as the situation now stands.

Insofar as the licensing of vehicles are concerned, the last time I spoke here, I proudly said—I quoted a letter that was written to me about the Transport

Commissioner and his division, Mr. Richards, where Mr. Philip Knaggs, one of the importers commended them for the swift capacity to license motor vehicles and we are continuing on that process.

We are now introducing the computerization of the registration process in respect of roll-on/roll-off vehicles, something that we alluded to in the debate here today. We are moving swiftly towards electronic-based regulation testing. You see the regulations that every citizen must do and pass in order to get on to a driver's permit, Madam Speaker, there is a human element correcting those tests and inside of that human element there is an element of corruption. Sometimes people fail, but they are allowed to pass. There are people who do not read one word of English, but they have driver's permits in this country. There are people who do not even go to a driver's test, but they have driver's permit in this country, bona fide ones, issued by the Transport Division. Those are some of the things that the citizens are all aware of, and we are struggling to put an end to.

In fact, I have on my desk for consideration, the introduction of that test in other languages. For example, in Indian, or some elements of Indian languages from the Indian continent, of course, because there are many; Chinese and Spanish as well, because the Immigration Department in this country, through the Ministry of National Security, allows citizens in here lawfully to work, to live, to enjoy residence and these people want driver's permits as well, but in English they have difficulty. There is a whole issue around that, and we want to contemplate sorting that out.

I want to touch on the question of diversification. The Member for Caroni Central dealt with it, and we understand the need for it, and it is in that regard the Prime Minister announced that he wanted—and he said it in the budget debate—to introduce a plyboard/plywood plant in Trinidad and Tobago. In today's papers, *Newsday*, Monday April 25th at page 17, the headline "Padarath: What of wood factory?" The Member for Princes Town is complaining that the PNM promised a wood factory and, thus far, he has not had it. He is quoted in the *Newsday*:

"...the country has since heard nothing more of the ply wood proposal, Padarath accused Dr. Rowley of 'mamaguying' the population with promises that never materialise.

Padarath lamented a lack of discussion on the issue of job creation and diversification...

He recalled Dr. Rowley saying on July 11, 2015 on a political platform that the creation of a ply wood factory would be one of the first priorities..."

So the Member for Princes Town is protesting that we have not put in place the wood factory. So I could give the Member the assurance, it will be coming soon and he will get his heart's desire. [*Laughter*]

Madam Speaker, in conclusion, with the few minutes I have left, the question of the taxation of these vehicles, we know that with a good and effective public transport system in this country people would leave their cars at home, it will be better for the environment. We are trying to improve the service at PTSC, working constantly.

5.10 p.m.

I just spent some money on buying some new engines, on bringing a Chinese team here, bringing a Brazilian team here, bringing a Venezuelan to repair all of our buses. We have a number of articulated buses that are out of commission, I am determined to put them back on stream. Tobago reported to me this week that they have seen many more buses on the road. The transport secretary in Tobago confirmed that to me last week. So I am proud of that, we want to do much more of that. With increasing prices, and we say to the maxi-taxi drivers, you do not have to increase no prices, but if you do, you put the people under some pressure, and more and more people are demanding PTSC service so we are trying to deliver that.

We have cleaned up the bus route so that the PTSC and the maxi-taxis could operate more freely. And most of all, in conclusion, Madam Speaker, we have a very ambitious and achievable national road development plan that we are running on. We are building a highway from San Fernando to Mayaro, two phases, [*Desk thumping*] San Fernando to Princes Town, Princes Town to Mayaro. We have already gotten Cabinet's approval and we are on the way in sorting out consultancy services for an alignment for the Valencia to Toco route, a new Moruga Road, [*Desk thumping*] and we got Cabinet's approval for the Wallerfield to Manzanilla as well.

Madam Speaker, I submit to you, when we do those things we would have improved road transportation in Trinidad and Tobago significantly. For those reasons and more, I entirely support the Motion as offered by the Minister of Finance here today, commend it to my colleagues in this House as sensible and useful, and all for the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. May I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (*Caroni East*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for allowing me the privilege and the opportunity to contribute to these two

Motions brought by the Minister of Finance, with particular reference to the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, Chap. 48.50, the amendment to that in terms of raising the tax on certain vehicles of certain sizes, and the other is the Customs Act, Chap. 78.01, and the amendment to the First Schedule, Order 2016, which is the Customs Act, increasing the customs duty by 50 per cent on a number of vehicles with varying cc, starting from 1999 and above.

Madam Speaker, before I go into the details of this as well, I would like to, first of all, respond to some of the statements made by the Member for Laventille West. One of the first statements he made, which does not speak volumes for this Government, is the issue of the IMF coming into Trinidad and Tobago, and he complimented the Minister of Finance for what he called an ingenious and imaginative, and intuitive, forward-thinking decision to bring the IMF into Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, this Government had five years while in Opposition. They said that they had a 2020 vision, then they came with a 2030 vision, and they told the population all sorts of things, that how they are going to bring a better quality of life to the people—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Indarsingh: “Dey throw dey manifesto.”

Dr. T Gopeesingh: And they throw the manifesto. Yes, the manifesto was there, but it seems as though they have abandoned their manifesto [*Desk thumping*] and they are working by “vaps”.

It seems as though from the inception the Government did not have a clue about what economic policy that they would bring to this country, and they were not prepared to take governance. So the people, the population, are now saying they feel betrayed and they feel fooled by what this present Government has done to them to get their votes and put them into Government, because for the last seven months we can see no evidence of any economic activity with any purposeful result that would carry the country forward so that the lives of our citizens will be improved. But from day one the hon. Minister of Finance seemed to, and the Government seemed to want the IMF to come in and give them advice from day one. The Minister of Finance indicated that, that they took the advice of the IMF from early on and they began to impose the advice of the IMF onto the population.

So what happened, and what is paradoxical is that the Member for Laventille West said that any time the word IMF is always spoken about, people are saying it is a bad word, but this country must never forget what happened between 1986 and 1991 under the NAR when the boom occurred during a PNM administration,

prior to that, and the bust occurred just before 1986, and because of that the NAR was voted 33/3 into Government because the people were fed up with what had happened in terms of the economic damage that the PNM had done prior to 1986.

When the IMF came in they indicated that there must be structural reforms, and a number of things that they began to impose upon the Government at the time, that the Government, because of the weak financial situation it was in then, had to implement a number of these policies. And it was very telling when the then administration had to cut, reduce the salaries of public servants by 10 per cent, and remove COLA, and a number of other areas which the IMF had said that the Government must do at that time, and the consequence of that was obviously the Government was removed in 1991.

It is the same thing happening over again. It is the same prescriptions they are coming with and telling this country. So when the Minister of Finance admitted that they had discussions with IMF, and took their advice from early on, where else are we heading? But it is so ironic that the hon. Prime Minister just a few weeks ago came into this House and indicated, with much bravado, that under no circumstance must IMF have a hand in the management of the economic situation of Trinidad and Tobago, [*Desk thumping*] and that he will try to keep the country out of the hands of an imposed IMF, but that has failed. Because here it is, everybody saw the photograph of the hon. Minister of Finance coming to Trinidad and boasting that he has—the IMF team came with him and the World Bank team came with him.

So on one hand the Prime Minister is saying that we want to keep IMF out of the country, and on the other hand the Minister of Finance is saying, welcome, come with me on the flight and have a nice time in Trinidad and give me advice, because they are incapable, Madam Speaker. They are incompetent. They do not have the capacity and they lack the imagination to carry this country forward, [*Desk thumping*] so they have to rely now on the IMF. And who they have to rely on as well? Also two former Central Bank governors who had worked with the IMF before, and, therefore, lacking any ability to put anything new on the table, they invited their friends from the IMF to come with them to give them some help. So we have a team here now, the Minister of Finance, two former governors of the Central Bank—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Indarsingh: And a former Permanent Secretary.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh:—a former Permanent Secretary, and nothing from the Economic Advisory Board to come to do anything for the Government, except to

give them the advice. And what advice they have given them? What is happening?

Let me just state what the IMF report said in March 17, 2016, a Press Release No. 16/115: IMF Staff Completes 2016 Article IV Mission to Trinidad and Tobago, and I quote from one of the paragraphs:

“Despite the great challenges posed by the need to adjust to energy prices, Trinidad and Tobago still has enormous strengths, including a well-educated work force and a stable political system. With substantial financial buffers and low, albeit rising levels of public debt...”

And let me just speak about the substantial financial buffers which the IMF spoke about. They have acknowledged that the previous administration had placed this country in a strong economic situation with reserves of over US \$11 billion in foreign exchange and over \$5.6 billion in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, coming up to over nearly US \$17 billion, close to TT \$116 billion.

So IMF had to agree that the previous administration, the previous People's Partnership administration under Mrs. Persad-Bissessar, had placed Trinidad and Tobago in a strong financial situation so that the ability for buffers is high, but they are also now speaking about the increasing public debt. Our previous Minister of Finance, Sen. Larry Howai, was very loath to take the country beyond a debt-to-GDP ratio of 45 per cent, and in one fell swoop this Government came in and asked for \$50 billion more to be borrowed, and before long the debt-to-GDP ratio would go close to 70 per cent debt-to-GDP. We must ask the question, where are we going to be in 2020 and in 2025? What are we going to tell our children and grandchildren? Where are we going? And from the performance of this Government the population cannot see the light at the end of the tunnel. They are anxious to see what the Government has to offer, and after seven months this Government has offered no economic policy to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

So what are we saying? What has the IMF done for the country so far? What advice have they given? Is it the loss of jobs of almost more than 10,000 people?—the anguish of people who some, unfortunately, are committing suicide; increased food prices, increased inflation, increased cost of transportation and the multiplier effect it has; no foreign exchange, increased cost of consumer items, no investment, no foreign direct investment. No sight of any new source of foreign exchange, the manufacturing sector has been paralyzed, no infrastructure development; all these are happening while the IMF is advising the hon. Minister of Finance and this Government. So what advice has taken place?

5.25 p.m.

They speak about the management of the economic affairs of this country. People are asking: what is the Government's economic policy? Show us your economic plan. Is it taxation and taxation and taxation? You have none. You cannot tell this country after seven months that you have any plan.

So you came in the budget on October 05, 2015 and told the country the time was too short for you to make a complete budget presentation—one month—but you were in Opposition for five years. You did not think that if you won government you would have to come and do something? When we came into government we had a 120-day plan, and we implemented our 120-day plan with over 90 to 95 per cent success. [*Desk thumping*] Our Prime Minister made sure that all her Ministers performed within those 120 days, so we can still boast of a 120-day plan. What did you have? You had any plan?

The IMF is now saying in their report, and I quote:

The new Government agrees that policy adjustments are needed.

So in other words they are telling the Government these policy adjustments are needed, and the Government has agreed. Who is running the country? Is the IMF not running the country?

Since assuming office six months ago, the Government has already taken some difficult but necessary steps in the face of sharply lower energy revenues, including widening the tax base.

Let me speak about that one time. The hon. Minister of Finance had indicated that the revenues on VAT would come close to \$12 billion. I quote from the Draft Estimates of Revenue for the Financial Year 2016. The hon. former Prime Minister was there asking, if you say that you are going to get \$12 billion from VAT, show us how you are going to get it, because we were able to get \$5.6 billion, so you need \$6 billion more.

He knew he could not have gotten that because he said he was going to reduce the VAT to 12.5 per cent, but then—I do not know whether it was deliberate and he did not tell the population that he was going to remove the zero-rated items, about 7,000 items, therefore he was going to increase VAT from these. But he said he was going to start that in January. It did not start until February. When the country is in economic depression and recession, there is no economic activity so therefore the amount of money you would get from VAT is diminished considerably.

So when he said he was going to get \$12 billion from VAT, the people said that they have fooled them again, because he has not received—and he admitted

recently in the midterm budget review that he has fallen short so far by \$3 billion, and he is not even going to reach the \$6 billion. So how is he going to explain what is happening with the VAT situation? We told him so and he just ignored us, or he just felt that there was no necessity for him to listen to us.

Cutting fuel subsidies. The issue of fuel subsidies is something that has been thrown up for a long time, and in a time like this where you need to have some increased funding, the thought process on that, we cannot have much difficulties in this. Then reducing the number of Ministries with a view to streamlining the civil service. This is what the IMF told the Government to do at the beginning, and this is where the hon. Prime Minister says that he is going to reduce the amount of Ministries.

The Member for Oropouche East never spoke about the amount of Ministries that they have on their side. So when the Member for Laventille West began to speak about our saying that they have plenty Ministries and so on inside there, it is the IMF that has told them they have to do this, and this is what the hon. Prime Minister has done. So the people of this country are saying that this country—the Minister of Finance and the Government has subcontracted out the country to the IMF. [*Desk thumping*] They have subcontracted the country out to the IMF.

Trinidad and Tobago enjoys the distinction of having top, experienced, professional journalists who have trained most of the journalists in this country at this time. I want to just quote from the *Sunday Express* of April 24, 2016, what Mr. Lennox Grant said.

Mr. Imbert: “Gimme a chance nuh.” [*Laughter*]

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: He said:

“Amid such stress, Mr. Imbert must have been glad to get away from Wrightson Road. He represented himself in Washington as a T&T Minister eager to accept IMF and World Bank help and willing to adopt their recommendations.

For ‘advice on a number of pressing matters’, he asked for more ‘experts’ to come to his aid.

That was pushing against an open door: the requested experts found seats on the same return flight he took.”

He brought them up. The article reads:

“IMF friends and family enjoy welcome.”

So the Prime Minister says, “We doh want IMF”; the Minister of Finance says, “Come in, enjoy and have a good welcome”.

Dr. Moonilal: They sat on his lap.

Madam Speaker: I just want to caution you under Standing Order 55(1)(b). Please continue.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you. I am moving away from the point just now:

“So the IMF is here, in the capacity of advisers and fixers, providing preventive maintenance of the T&T economy, and occupying such a low profile that, like Dr. Hilaire and Mr. Williams, they could be taken for family.”

So welcome to the family of the IMF; welcome to the destruction of the economic situation of Trinidad and Tobago and welcome to loss of jobs, unemployment, removal of subsidies and all the negative things that are occurring across the country.

The Member for Laventille West spoke about the stabilization of the economy. What part of our economy has been stabilized? Is there an economy? Is anything happening? Everywhere you go people are amazed. They are saying, “What is happening to this Government? What is happening to this country?” We are going nowhere. We are reversing all the gains that the People’s Partnership Administration made during their time, and there is a precipitous decline in terms of the standard of living [*Desk thumping*] As the Member for Caroni Central said, you are removing altogether the middle class population and you are pauperizing further the poor and indigent population. This is what the PNM is doing to this country. Massive destruction of the lives of citizens of this country.

Then the Member for Laventille West went on to speak about the party, and the Government had established CNG stations in a number of areas, and he began to speak about the areas. The People’s Partnership Government built LNG stations in Brentwood in Chaguanas, Peakes, Tacarigua, Ramco Churchill Roosevelt Highway, St. Christopher’s. City Gate has a CNG station.

Hon. Member: Tedious repetition.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Repetition of what? “You cyar even speak”; forgive me. People want to know when you speak—[*Laughter*]

Madam. Speaker: Member for Caroni East, could you please address your contribution to the Chair?

Hon. Member: Uncharitable!

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: When they look for trouble, they must take the trouble.
[*Crosstalk*]

We have a CNG station right at City Gate. It was us, the People's Partnership administration, that started to give incentives for hybrids and electric cars. [*Interruption*] These are my notes. It was under the Finance Act of 2015. We introduced CNG buses, and 10 per cent of the PTSC is now CNG. Foreign-used-car dealers now can import hybrid cars up to four years old, as we did in our Finance Bill of 2015.

So, Madam Speaker, when we speak about revenues, and these two Orders in fact increasing the revenue by 50 per cent in customs duty and 54 per cent in motor vehicles tax. The Minister has no ability to tell us how much is going to be generated from there. In fact, the more you increase the pricing of these vehicles, the less people will buy. This has been said by the Automobile Association, and therefore what is the net gain you are going to have when you increase the taxation on it, but less people are purchasing them.

In addition to that, most of these upscale vehicles are purchased by companies, and companies get back their VAT and then companies claim their expense under depreciation and other expenses. So therefore when you feel that you are going to get increased revenue from this imposition, you in fact might be getting less than you originally started with.

Once they came with a budget; then they said by the midterm review they would begin to give the country much more information; nothing was forthcoming. Before that they had the ability to tell us a little more under the Variation of Appropriation; nothing was said of any significance. So they had once, twice, three times, this is the fourth time, an opportunity to tell the country about the economic performance and the way forward, and they are unable to do that, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Nobody spoke anything about the used-car vehicles in terms of how it would affect them. The particulars of the tax—we know that the new vehicles, the upscale vehicles, will have this tax imposed, but hidden somewhere under the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, Chap. 48:50, No. 6:

“Completely built-up foreign used motor vehicles imported by persons other than returning nationals, seventy-five per cent of the tax specified in subparagraphs (1), (2), (3) or (4).”

Subparagraphs (1), (2), (3) and (4) spoke about the 50 per cent increase.

5.40 p.m.

So therefore, under line item six, paragraph six, completely built up foreign-used motor vehicles will have an increase of 75 per cent on the 50 per cent increase. So just as a mathematical calculation, \$100 is the purchase for a vehicle, let us say, 50 per cent increase is \$50, so that is \$150 now. So the foreign-car dealers will have to pay 75 per cent of that \$150 more.

So therefore, the Minister of Finance has not told the population that the completely built-up foreign-used motor vehicles are going to increase in price because of the increase in the customs duty and the motor vehicle tax. You perhaps can speak about that when you are winding up and give us some explanation on that. So I do not know whether this would have slipped the hon. Minister or his technocrats, because the country is not aware that completely built-up foreign used motor vehicles, the cost of that will increase as a result of the increase in the imposition of the customs duty and the motor vehicle tax on these new vehicles as well.

You know, it is ironic that the Member for Laventille West could come back here and speak about five years of mismanagement and waste. That is the mantra and that is the mantra that they have been speaking about for the last number of weeks before the election and seven months they come back with the same thing. But as my colleague from Tabaquite will tell you, when you look at all the infrastructural development that has taken place in Trinidad and Tobago—and today is not a time when we can enumerate all of that—the population knows it, from schools to hospitals to bridges to roads to every area. And when we look at value for money under the PNM administration versus value for money and we look at the cost overruns with NAPA and SAPA over \$1 billion each and the Tobago Hospital from \$150 million to nearly \$800 million and the Tarouba stadium from \$200 million to \$800 million and this waterfront project from \$2.1 to \$4.2 billion. So you have no authority, no moral authority to continue to make those empty statements that have no foundation whatsoever. And it is time that you look to see what you are going to do for the country [*Desk thumping*] rather than looking back all the time.

And they even have the audacity, the temerity, to speak on the mass transit system which they fooled the population and told the population that they were thinking about bringing back the mass transit system. And the Minister of Finance when he was Minister of Works and Infrastructure had the gall to spend \$545 million on a pre-feasibility study.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Caroni East, your 30 minutes have expired. You are entitled to 15 minutes. Do you intend to avail yourself of it?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Please, continue.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: He says the Government knows exactly what it is doing. The Government knows exactly what it is doing. So they knew that they had spent \$545 billion. We are still paying for it. In this financial committee we showed that we had to pay money for this, the Brian Lara Stadium, the waterfront project and we have to pay for this waterfront project for 17 years at \$256 million per year. Our grandchildren and our children and grandchildren financial stake is mortgaged with this alone for 17 years. Yeah. For 17 years.

And so the mass transit system, they did not need the IDB to tell you that or whoever to tell you that. The population was fooled and you knew that it could not work, and the Minister of Finance was a person then, he said he is looking at whether \$20 billion will be enough to bring on the mass transit system and he was looking into all avenues as far as that is concerned.

So let us examine in terms of what revenue is coming to this country and where is this place, this customs and motor vehicles tax. And I am reading from the *Estimates of Revenue 2016* and excise duties, the revised estimates of 2015 was \$710 million and the estimates now for 2016 is \$719 million. So would the hon. Minister indicate whether the imposition of this tax will bring on the \$9 million more or how has he quantified it? Because we believe that, based on his own admission, he has not been able to quantify how many vehicles are being sold, whether it is foreign-used vehicles or new vehicles and therefore, cannot give an adequate answer to the revenue that he hopes to generate from this.

And when we look at Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, Chap. 48:50 under the revised estimates of 2015, we had \$547 million and the estimate now is \$609 million, \$62 million more for motor vehicle taxes and duties. This is the *Estimates of Revenue for 2016*, the yellow book. This yellow book. So this is the work of the Government, this present Government. So where is he getting the additional \$62 million from? And therefore, we are saying that you are not going to get this and therefore, you will have another shortfall, shortfall upon shortfall because you indicated to the population this is where you are going to get some money and this is where you are going to get the money and you are not going to get the money.

So when you bring down your expenditure from \$63 billion to \$59 billion as you said in your midterm review, and originally in the budget debate you said you are going to have a shortfall of \$23 billion because you are only going to be able to realize \$40 billion or \$42 billion. You have to tell this country now, hon. Minister of Finance, what is going to be your revenue for this year, 2016 fiscal year? Seven months have gone and the country does not know how much money you have collected, how much you are going to spend and how you propose to get the money that you want to spend.

And then, you fatally made mistakes of pegging the price of oil at the beginning of \$45 and \$2.75 for gas when you know that the price of gas and oil was going to be way below that, and you had to come back now and peg the price of oil at \$30 and now gas at \$2. You pegged the price of gas at \$2.75 when gas was about \$2.20, \$2.30 at the time. So what were you trying to do? You confused the population and, I believe, whether you confused yourself, hon. Minister of Finance. [*Desk thumping*]

So value added tax you have \$12 billion and everything under sub-head item for 2016 the estimate was \$14.27 billion and that is in the context of tax revenue of 40.798 for estimates for 2016, which this book said that is the revenue that you are going to collect, Income and Profits 23, Goods and Services 14, International Trade 2.8 and Non-Tax Revenue 8.7 from Property Income, Other Non-Tax Revenue, Repayment of Past Lending and that came up to \$49 billion, \$49.5 billion in 2016 from the *Estimates of Revenue*. We are nowhere close to that.

So I would have expected that the hon. Minister of Finance would have come today to give a broader picture and contextualize this, what he thinks is increase revenue generation by the imposition of these two Orders in the context of a wider picture. You did not do it in the budget debate. You did not do it in the variation of appropriation. You did not do it in the midterm review, and today again, you are treating us with scant courtesy and just coming to pass this piece of legislation. [*Desk thumping*] The country demands an explanation of where we are in terms of the finance. Do not hide behind all sorts of things and expect that the country will want to believe what you are saying. They do not. They are treating what you are saying now with scant courtesy and disregard because they believe that they have been misled and they have been betrayed.

And the hon. Minister of Finance was one of the persons, when we were in Government and he was in Opposition, who berated the Government at that time and the Minister of Finance and the Economy and called him an OJT Minister of Finance. Well when the same statement is made in similar circumstances in terms of the incumbent, people become very annoyed. But that is the perception outside.

That is the perception outside. And he criticized the Minister of Finance and the Economy then and the Government for the Moody's downgrading. And there was a big hue and cry and he spoke for the entire 45 minutes on the downgrade by Moody's. And today what is happening? Moody's has downgraded the country and he admits Trinidad and Tobago slipped a notch. And I read from Sunday April 24 from the *Express* again, by Aleem Khan:

“T&T slips a notch

Exactly one week after Moody's Investors' Service downgraded Trinidad and Tobago's creditworthiness to one notch above 'junk',”

—one notch above junk.

That was the Member in the Opposition when he thundered against the Government at the time of Moody's downgrade. But what is happening now? Moody's has brought this country one notch above junk.

“...its New York neighbour, Standard and Poor's Ratings Services...lowered T&T's ratings to four notches above junk.”

And the Minister of Finance is saying it is a good rating [*Laughter*] although the outlook is negative. I am just quoting from the article. And in a cut and paste from its December 24, 2015 statement, Standard & Poor's said it is maintaining its negative:

“...outlook on...”—Trinidad and Tobago's—“long-term ratings to ...reflect an at least one-in-three chance that prolonged low energy prices”—and—“...potentially low GDP growth prospects...”—could result in—“...a steadily rising debt burden”—resulting in—“...a downgrade in the next two years.”

So we have a downgrade now and expect further downgrade in the next two years. And when he speaks about borrowing on the international money market, he knows that the cost of borrowing in the international market will increase exponentially. And he spoke about that recently where if we are downgraded, the percentage interest will rise. So you want to borrow, but you will have to pay more for it because the financial situation is chaotic. And I want to quote, Standards & Poor's went on to say:

Successful implementation of timely fiscal reforms along with a gradual recovery in economic growth would be needed to stabilize the government's recently growing debt burden.

The team, Imbert said, is helping him devise a new oil and gas fiscal regime, a reordered Heritage and Stabilisation Fund a solution to the foreign exchange crisis and more.

This is what you are asking for help. But the people are saying that you are asking for the help for the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund because you want to “mash up de fund” and you want to take all the money out of the fund which is US \$5.6 billion.

I remember in one of the presentations here you said we have the money and that is what it is meant for and in days of difficulty you must take it out. So you are going to remove \$5.6 billion. So forget this thing you said you are going to have, take out US \$1 billion in 2016 and US \$.5 billion in 2017. The people are saying that the entire US \$5.6 billion is going to be utilized by this Government. And you must tell this country what is the PNM administration and this Government going to do about the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. [*Desk thumping*] Be open and transparent about it. Do not hide behind anything.

5.55 p.m.

So, we have an issue here of purchase of foreign vehicles and foreign-used vehicles; new vehicles, foreign-used vehicles. The Minister admitted that he has no information, how many new vehicles are being bought in a year. But, some information is available, and January 2015, a Revised Policy and Procedures to Regulate the Fully Assembled Right-Hand Drive Foreign Used Car Industry in Trinidad and Tobago 2015 - 2018 Ministry of Trade, Industry and Investment and Communications. The information is here for the hon. Minister. Number of cars allowed for importation in Trinidad and Tobago, and it gives the years. And the last one they have here in 2012, total allocation in number of cars, 13,500; and number of cars allowed for importation in Trinidad and Tobago, 8,684.

So, the information can be obtained, and this is a document that came out of their Government by the Ministry of Trade and Industry. So, if you want I will lay it on the table for you to have a look at, so you can educate yourself, rather than the blunderbuss type of treatment you are giving to the Parliament and to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The people of Trinidad are confused as to where we are. They have no confidence in what you all are doing as a Government, and they know that Trinidad and Tobago is going to go worse and worse in terms of the economic consequences, and they feel very irate, they feel angry. So, you said you are red and ready, the people are seeing red, they are angry, [*Desk thumping*] and the streets of our country are now being red with the blood of people in Trinidad and Tobago. How unfortunate. So, Madam Speaker, thank you for the Government—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, 48(6), please. What blood on the streets of Trinidad and Tobago? Is the hon. Member—

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: The crime, the crime. The murders, the murders, and you have to do something about it, you cannot allow it to continue.

So, Madam Speaker, thank you for affording me the opportunity to tell this country that we are in no better position, we are in a far worse position. We were extremely good when we demitted office, and they have taken this country—seven months to bring this country to where it is today, with poverty and the economic situation worsening. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I wish to congratulate the Members who spoke on this side, the Member of Parliament for Arouca/Maloney; the Member of Parliament for Laventille West—I am afraid I cannot congratulate any Member on the other side. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I have been a Member of Parliament since December 1991, and I must say, in those 24-plus years I have never heard such rambling incoherence, irrelevant cacophony as I heard today. I just cannot believe that the Members opposite attended university and passed their exams, and it is an indictment on our education system. [*Desk thumping*]

Let me deal firstly with a point made by the Member for Caroni East, who cannot even be bothered to take two minutes to access proper information on what the international agencies have to say about Trinidad and Tobago, but, like his colleagues, relies on newspaper articles and columns, and so on. One distinguishing feature of Members opposite is that they are lazy. They do not bother to do proper research, and I shall now refer—[*Interruption*]—would you stop making noise. Madam Speaker, please.

Madam Speaker: Members, could we please observe the order with respect to silence when a Member is on his legs. Continue.

Hon. C. Imbert: I sat down here, I heard a plethora of insults coming from the other side. “Do so doh like so”. Madam Speaker, the Member—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Tewarie: Nobody insulted—

Hon. C. Imbert: Do not talk nonsense for me. Madam Speaker, through you, the Members opposite are pure and simply lazy, they do not do their own research. They simply regurgitate newspaper articles.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Madam Speaker, 48(4) and (6).

Madam Speaker: I rule there is no breach of 48(6), and as far as 48(4), that is an expression that has been used by each side to describe the other in this House. Continue, please.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I say “do so doh like so”. [*Desk thumping*] On April 22nd, Standard & Poor’s issued a rating for Trinidad and Tobago, and to show you that hon. Members opposite do not read, I shall now read from page 3 of that report. And I want to stress for Members opposite that they do not like to read and they do not like to listen. This is a statement made by the Standard & Poor’s rating agency about them, and hear what Standard & Poor’s had to say:

Economic contraction combined with loose fiscal policy during an election year—

Hon. Member: Say that again?

Hon. C. Imbert: Economic contraction combined with loose fiscal policy during an election year contributed to a central government deficit in fiscal year 2014/2015.

And I repeat, “they doh read and they doh listen”. We were not in Government in 2014/2015. They were. [*Desk thumping*] “Economic contraction combined with loose fiscal policy”. These are not my words. This is S&P, April 22nd, just last week.

The underlying erosion in public finances—under them—was worse as the previous Government—them—incurred substantial payment arrears. As a result, net general government debt increased in 2015, and is likely to rise again. The current account balance slipped after being in surplus in the previous years. The Government—them—heavy borrowing from the Central Bank prior to the election resulted in sharply curtailed liquidity in the financial system reflecting poor debt management—by them.

And you see if you had bothered to read, these are not my words. I have never seen an international rating agency be so critical of any government. Never! Never heard an international rating agency being critical of any Trinidad and Tobago government as I have heard this critique. That is what the world thinks of them.

But, you see, they are like ostriches, their heads are in the sand. They lost an election, and they do not know why they lost an election. It is because you did not persuade the population that you were the right party to run this country. You did not persuade the population [*Desk thumping*] that you knew what you were doing. You did not persuade the population that you were honest or sincere, most importantly.

Dr. Gopeesingh: You will regret it.

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, let me deal with another issue—regret what? You would be over there for a very long time. Let me assure you, hon. Members opposite: you would be over there for a very, very long time.

And, Madam Speaker, let me deal with some of these issues here. Let me deal with the Member for Caroni Central. The Member for Caroni Central tells us that the Government is vacillating on taxes. Madam Speaker, I just downloaded, out of curiosity, what happened in 2013 when they increased motor vehicle taxes. There was a similar huge uproar about it, coming like a thief in the night, and they gave a moratorium. This is what all governments do, they consider when they impose taxes, whether in a national budget, or in a variation of appropriation, or in any other Finance Bill when taxes are imposed suddenly governments make a decision, they consider whether they will give a moratorium on the taxes or not.

Standard practice in this country for 50 years, including several times under them. But, they would come in this Parliament and pretend that this is something new, that this is something that has just emerged in this PNM administration. They are politically dishonest. That is how they are. Politically deceitful people. Now, Madam Speaker, it was my intention [*Interruption*] to indicate in this debate, and I will do so now, the details of the moratorium that this Government intends to introduce, similar to what they did, and the Government before them, and the Government before that. We have taken careful note of how long it takes a roll on/roll off vessel to travel from Japan, which is the furthest point from which vehicles come to Trinidad and Tobago. It takes approximately four weeks for a roll on/roll off vessel carrying cars to travel from Japan to Trinidad and Tobago.

I have added another week for customs clearance, and another week for registration of the vehicle, and at this point in time the cut-off date for registration of vehicles exceeding 1999 cc engine capacity, when you add the four weeks transit time, the one week to clear customs, and the one week to register the vehicle, that is six weeks. If you take six weeks from April 8th, you would arrive at May 20th. So, that is your answer, and it is based on science. It is not based on “vaps”. [*Desk thumping*]

It is not based on whims, it is based on science, and I consulted and I did my own research. I did not just take what people told me. I checked how long it takes the car ship to come from Japan to Trinidad and Tobago. I spoke to people engaged in the customs and import industry, how long it takes to get the cars off

the docks, and I spoke to people involved in the registration of vehicles, and that is how we came up with four weeks transit time; one week to clear the vehicle, and one week to register; six weeks taking you to May 20th. And that applies across the board. There would be new vehicles that would be here already, there will be foreign used on their way. And I have also spoken to a number of motor cars dealers and this is acceptable to them. So, that deals with that. [*Desk thumping*]

So, using the powers available to me and the Government, where the Government is empowered to waive taxes on motor vehicles, we shall remit—this is the correct legal word—the taxes until May 20th. Anything that comes off to go to be registered after May 20th will be subject to the new taxes. So, that deals with that. And it deals with all those strange questions, “how you go find out wha goin’ on?” Will there be a list? I have never heard such juvenile debate. Obviously the Customs will have to do due diligence, obviously they will have to check the authenticity of the documentation presented to them, the bill of lading, the invoice, the ship's register. Obviously. This is done in every country in the world. What is so strange about Trinidad?

Is the hon. Member for Oropouche East telling me that our customs officials will not be able to deal with something as simple as this; something that has been done for the last 50 years; something which our customs officials have to do on a daily basis, check the validity, authenticity, and veracity of documentation presented to them? Are we simply saying that our customs officials are so incompetent that they cannot determine whether a vessel—the movement of vessels are tracked by agencies all over the world. They can tell you where a vessel is; what water it is in; at what time it would arrive in the port of Port of Spain.

There are databases—electronic and other types of databases—that make this information available. But, this is all known. They were in Government. It is shocking that someone would ask, how you go figure out whether a vehicle was in transit. It is shocking. The vehicle must come on a ship, the ship must sail in the water, and the ship must leave a port and arrive at either Point Lisas or Port of Spain, cargo manifest ASYCUDA system. I am just shocked at the juvenile nature of the proposals made by Members opposite. And I would just deal with another shocking statement by the Member for Caroni East.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Caroni Central.

Hon. C. Imbert: The Member for Caroni Central, sorry. Make me want to give back my university degree. [*Laughter*] Thank God I attended and passed at university before he was visited upon it.

But, Madam Speaker, let me just make a point. It is well established that taxation has two purposes. Taxation serves as a revenue-raising device, but taxation is also used to influence people's behaviour, and I will refer hon. Members opposite, I would not bother with the Member for Caroni Central because he knows better.

Hon. Member: You think so?

Hon. C. Imbert: Or he may not.

6.10 p.m.

I will refer, hon. Members opposite, those who want to listen, to a paper called, "Promoting Health: Interventions Strategies from Social and Behavioural Research". And in this paper, Madam Speaker, it speaks to economic incentives and disincentives, taxing and spending powers. And I quote:

"The government has a number of powers at its disposal to create potent incentives or disincentives for changing the behavior of individuals and businesses—the power to tax and spend"—Madam Speaker.

"The taxing power, while affording government the financial resources to provide...services, has another, equally important, purpose. The power to tax is also the power to regulate...behavior and influence...activities."

Now, this is well known all over the world, Madam Speaker. Taxation is used either to incentivize or to de-incentivize. This is child's play.

It is shocking that somebody who was a Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development is not aware of that. That is why you have high excise taxes on cigarettes and alcohol. The purpose of high taxation on cigarettes and alcohol is to de-incentivize the consumption of these things because they are harmful to your health or they cause poor behaviour. In the same way, Governments all over the world—Madam Speaker, I did a Google search, I got over 2,000 hits on the use of taxation on motor cars to de-incentivize consumption, on motor cars—over 2,000 hits. All sorts of learned papers, journals, books in the United States, in Europe, in the Far East on how taxation on motor cars is used to promote the environment, is used to reduce congestion, it is used to control human behavior in terms of conspicuous consumption, Madam Speaker.

It is there in the literature, but yet I have to hear hon. Members opposite tell me the only purpose of taxation is to raise revenue. Where do they live? Do they read? Do they know anything, Madam Speaker?

Dr. Tewarie: Would the hon. Member give way?

Hon. C. Imbert: No, I will not give way to you. It bothers me, it bothers me; they ran this country for five years. [*Crosstalk*] Madam Speaker, I would crave your protection.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni Central. I have warned you during the course of this debate, this is a caution, please do not let me have to rise again. Continue.

Hon. C. Imbert: Yes, Madam Speaker, “you see they could give but they cyah take”. They could give but—it shocks me that they ran this country and when—another one speaks about the IMF, not knowing of what he speaks. This country was forced into an IMF standby credit facility in 1986 for balance of payment support, and one would think—just go and read, listen and learn—when you enter into a standby facility with the IMF, conditionalities are attached, Madam Speaker. But the IMF has another purpose which is to provide technical assistance and support. [*Desk thumping*]

And I am happy to report that all I asked the IMF to do was to advise this country on an appropriate oil and gas fiscal regime in an environment of low oil prices in a mature oil province such as Trinidad and Tobago. And the IMF has experts and they have already come. I met with a team of three experts today and they are already advising Trinidad and Tobago what we should do about our supplementary petroleum tax to incentivize companies and to allow investment by the multinationals. What we should do with a petroleum tax. What we should do with our production sharing contracts, because over the years there has been an ad hoc approach to oil and gas taxation in this country.

We now have a hodgepodge of oil taxation and what the IMF team is helping me with is to come up with a competitive, an equitable and a stimulative policy, Madam Speaker, to stimulate investment and to enhance revenue. What they are in fact coming here to do is to allow Trinidad and Tobago to maximize its revenues from the oil and gas sector [*Desk thumping*] while stimulating the investment. But they do not know that because they do not read and they do not learn and they do not listen.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Chicken Little.

Hon. C. Imbert: Chicken Little approach to politics. And that is all I have asked the IMF to do: to assist me with a view on what we should do about oil and gas taxation. And they are giving me an added benefit, Madam Speaker. They are

going to assist me on transfer pricing, and transfer pricing is an area of massive revenue leakage where multinational companies charge—[*Crosstalk*] be quiet, multinational companies charge expenses in their head office which are unreasonable and thereby deprive Trinidad and Tobago of revenue.

So this much-reviled and much-hated IMF will help this country to design a competitive oil and tax regime which will boost revenue for Trinidad and Tobago and assist us with transfer pricing which will allow us to earn as much revenue as we can from the multinationals. And they do it all over the world, for countries all over the world.

Mr. Al-Rawi: They are frightening people for no reason.

Hon. C. Imbert: But they are frightening people for absolutely no reason, absolutely no reason. [*Desk thumping*] We are not in any standby arrangement; and under this PNM administration under the leadership of Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley, there will be no standby arrangement with the IMF. [*Desk thumping*] And as for the Economic Advisory Board, we made sure to bring as many diverse views as possible, because this PNM is all inclusive. [*Desk thumping*]

So we have people on the left, we have people on the right, we have people in the middle, we have trade unionists, we have businessmen, we have academics, all together in one creative, beautiful *mélange*, beautiful mixture of all our peoples—people who speak with a socialist bend, people who speak with a capitalist bend and we will listen to all of them. [*Desk thumping*] We do not dismiss anybody. We do not chase people away. We do not run them, Madam Speaker. That is why when Mr. Abdulah speaks we will listen. But it is an Economic Advisory Board. They merely advise the Government and we have put the best team together that we can find, the best local team and we will most certainly listen to them [*Crosstalk*] —be quiet!

But it would be foolish of us not to also avail ourselves of the best available advice from the international community. You must always have a second opinion, you must always have a third opinion and then you weigh up all the views and you come up with a home-grown solution which is what we are doing in the Trinidad and Tobago. We are making our own policy by availing ourselves of the best expertise locally and internationally. Something they could not do, but they do not have the vision to do anything like that. [*Interruption*] Yes, bleat about transfer pricing for five years and did absolutely nothing about it, Madam Speaker—absolutely nothing.

Let us deal with climate change. That is another masquerade presented in this Parliament by the Member for Oropouche East: typical, political deception. I am now going to read—and it is just for them—I am going to read from the *Hindu*, an Indian magazine called the *Hindu*, Paris, April 23, 2016:

“175 countries sign Paris Climate Agreement”

And hear what they had to say:

“With the planet heating up to record levels, sea levels rising...the pressure to have the Paris Agreement enter into force...was palpable at the U.N. signing ceremony.

The world is in a race against time,”—said—“U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon...

The agreement will come into force once 55 countries representing at least 55 per cent of global emissions formally join it...”

But, Madam Speaker, what was really intriguing about this article is that it made the point that 175 countries, including India, signed the Paris Climate Agreement in New York on Friday. That is what was so intriguing. But I had to hear the hon. Member for Oropouche East say India signed it in December and they ratified it. It is impossible to ratify a treaty before you sign it—

Mr. Al-Rawi: And he has a law degree.

Hon. C. Imbert: And yet he has a law degree, so they say. Impossible to ratify a treaty before you sign it, but he would come and fool the little children who are listening to him and say India has signed it and ratified it. India signed the agreement on Friday, side by side, with 174 other countries together with the hon. Dennis Moses proudly representing Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Fooling people, fooling people! It is shameful, Madam Speaker, it is shameful. And you know what is hard about it? There is an important point in the article I just read, the treaty will not come into effect until:

“...55 countries representing...55 per cent global emissions join...”—the treaty, Madam Speaker.

And it is expected to take effect in the year 2020. But India ratified it and signed it already, according to the Member for Oropouche East; trying to bring shame on Trinidad and Tobago. That level of deception is shameful, Madam Speaker, it is shameful.

Mr. Al-Rawi: And he run every time. He would not sit around to listen.

Mr. Deyalsingh: He gone.

Hon. C. Imbert: He is not here, he gone, he run away again. He knew that what he was saying was not true. He also screamed about ArcelorMittal, saying that this Government refused—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: “AccelorMittal”.

Hon. C. Imbert: —whatever he called it— this Government refused to meet with ArcelorMittal. I can speak for myself: I, in my capacity as Minister of Finance, met with representatives of ArcelorMittal twice and I reported that to the country and it was published in every newspaper that I had met with the Steel Workers Union and I had met with ArcelorMittal on the same day, approximately one month ago. And ArcelorMittal had reported to me at that meeting that in order—[*Crosstalk*] be quiet—to rescue that steel plant, it would cost this country \$3,000 million, \$3 billion, Madam Speaker.

But yet, the Member for Oropouche East trying to fool some people will say if they were in Government those 600 workers would still be working today. So what he is saying is that they would take \$3 billion of taxpayers’ money to put it into that where Mr. Mittal, the most successful steel magnate in the world, Mr. Mittal—Lakshmi Mittal—the most successful steel entrepreneur in the world has decided that he cannot compete with China in Central America, in Europe and in the United States and is closing down steel plants all over the world. The great Mr. Mittal cannot do that, “but we go take \$3,000 million of taxpayers’ money”, and he will make that preposterous statement that if they were in Government they would do it.

Madam Speaker, you know what he is doing? I feel so heartbroken about what has happened to those workers and he is using them as pawns in his political deception and to spread his hatred, but we will have none of it. [*Desk thumping*] I want to correct the record: we met with them. [*Desk thumping*] Shameful, absolutely shameful, Madam Speaker.

Let us go to the Member for Caroni East. I think I have dealt with him already. The IMF is here to deal with our oil and gas fiscal regime and to advise me how to maximize revenue to Trinidad and Tobago. That is—I do not think I have anything else to—he quoted Lennox Grant. You know, that bothers me, you know, they have no ideas of their own. They have no original thought. They cannot speak for themselves. They would not know an original thought if it hit them in the face, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Al-Rawi: That would require reading.

Hon. C. Imbert: That would require reading, as my hon. Attorney General tells me. That would require reading. You know, the hon. Member for Caroni East rambled on about the number of vehicles as if he were not listening. I am not sure if he was in the Chamber when I was speaking or not. It does not really make a

difference because I gave the figures for the number of vehicles imported into Trinidad and Tobago in 2014 and in 2015 at approximately 30,000 per year. I made that point. It is the same information that is available all in the public domain that he referred to. What is not available, because the Customs and the other agencies do not collect the data in this way, is passenger vehicles that have an engine size exceeding 1999 cc. That is the information that is not available. There is anecdotal evidence. You can talk to the car dealers and you can figure it out. But it is, again, an indictment on the paucity of reliable statistical data in Trinidad and Tobago.

6.25 p.m.

It is an indictment on what the Member for Caroni Central did to the Central Statistical Office, where you had people working from home, Madam Speaker. They could not even have a building to work in. He destroyed the CSO in that five-year period, and that is why, now, when I as—and both Moody's and Standard & Poor's and the IMF have recognized that he destroyed the Central Statistical Office. [*Desk thumping*] So that I, as Minister of Finance now, trying to get an accurate number on the number of vehicles that are passenger vehicles with an engine capacity exceeding 1999 cc, “cyar” get the information as quickly as I would like. I have tasked Customs to get it to me. I hope I will get it by tomorrow or the day after. But, yes, Madam Speaker, all we got from them was rambling, incoherence—

Mr. Al-Rawi: Hyperbole.

Hon. C. Imbert:—hyperbole and political dishonesty, and political deceit. Untruths, misleading, inaccuracy, deception; that is all I got from them today. Madam Speaker, this revenue measure—sorry, this taxation measure, Madam Speaker, its primary function—

Dr. Tewarie: You said it right.

Hon. C. Imbert: It is a revenue measure but its primary function, Madam Speaker, is to act as a disincentive. [*Desk thumping*] Every taxation measure has a function. Its primary function is to act as a disincentive. And I heard them say we could raise the taxes as high as we want, it will have no effect. Well, I do not agree. If somebody was going to buy a Prado costing \$700,000 and now he is facing \$800,000, I am sure there are many people who would think twice as to whether they are going to buy that luxury vehicle again. I am certain of it. And if by this measure we can cause a shift in consumption in Trinidad and Tobago, it must conserve foreign exchange. Members opposite were asking answers, whether this thing will help with foreign exchange. Of course, it will.

Hon. Member: It is axiomatic.

Hon. C. Imbert: It is axiomatic. Of course, it is axiomatic. It goes without saying that if you import less—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, your 30 minutes have expired. You are entitled to an extension of 15 minutes. Do you intend to avail yourself of it?

Hon. C. Imbert: Yes, Madam.

Madam Speaker: You may proceed. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you very much, Ma'am. I thought the 45 had run out. I feel slightly relieved. So, Madam Speaker, it is axiomatic that if you import less expensive vehicles, you would have a lower strain, or a lower call on our foreign exchange reserves. But, you know, one wonders how can they not see that?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: They cannot.

Hon. C. Imbert: How can they not see that? The cost of a Prado is \$700,000. The cost of a Hyundai Tucson is \$200,000. You cannot see that? They are not living in Trinidad and Tobago? So that people may now be moving towards the two-litre SUVs—the two-litre cars. I saw a nice Audi this morning—1.8 turbo Audi. So that people would shift towards the smaller cars. They cannot see that? They cannot see that this will help us save foreign exchange? They cannot see it will help us conserve fuel? They cannot see it will help us save billions of dollars; the whole move towards electric cars, and hybrid cars, and CNG-powered cars will help us to reduce our fuel subsidy? What planet are they living on?

And at no time have we said that those measures with respect to electric cars, CNG-powered cars, hybrid cars—at no time have we said this will not apply to foreign-used vehicles, Madam Speaker. We have never said that. They are the ones who have put up that straw man to knock him down. You know what a straw man is, Madam Speaker? A fictional character that you throw up—an imaginary thing—and then you throw it down. That is the straw man they put up.

Mr. Hinds: Like the COP—

Hon. C. Imbert: For all of the dealers who may be interested, Madam Speaker—[*Laughter*—I did not say that. Member for Laventille West, that is not kind. [*Crosstalk*] “Doh mine he might be a straw man in truth, eh.”

But, Madam Speaker, the fact is, I wish to assure all motorcar dealers, whether they are dealing in used cars, imported used cars, whether they are dealing in imported new cars, the tax measures apply to them equally. So that

used—and there are, Member of Tabaquite. I know the Member for Tabaquite has an interest in this. There are used electric cars. There are used CNG-powered cars and there are used hybrid cars that are available.

And, Madam Speaker, let me—since you so happily told me I had that 15 minutes. When I went to—[*Interruption*] Well, I saw the look on her face. Madam Speaker, when I went to Washington recently, I was walking around and I saw this showroom with some cars in it and went into the showroom and there were electric cars, and it was Tesla, for those of you who know about the manufacturer of cars. And they have high-end models and they are bringing out a low-end model. Well, I call it low end. It is called a Model 3, and it is going to retail for about US \$35,000, a little over TT \$200,000.

And the beauty about these vehicles, they are warrantied for about 500,000 miles. I cannot imagine who would drive a car for 500,000 miles. Some of them are 700,000 miles, the big ones. And there is no drive shaft, there is no transmission because it runs on electric motor. There are no gears because it is one speed—well, not one speed, but it is one engine. And I looked at this and I said, this is the future. I looked at it, I mean, not necessarily from Tesla. I am sure other manufacturers will come up with equally ingenious inventions. But I looked at it: no gas, long warranty, very little maintenance, coming in at about \$200,000, and I would urge—it is coming in, in 2017 or 2018, I believe. I think you put down US \$1,000 deposit and you can get the car.

And I urge our dealers—because I heard one of the hon. Members opposite in their rambling, say about, you know, one of the representatives of the dealers was saying they have to now think about looking at other types of cars. Yes, they do. They must. They must start to look at electric-powered vehicles, hybrid vehicles and CNG-powered vehicles. Because this same Paris Agreement—you see, I know the hon. Member for Oropouche “get mix up, yuh know”. The Paris Agreement was signed in New York, but he could not—the comprehension is the problem. It is called the Paris Agreement but it is not signed in Paris, it is signed in New York, and when you read the Articles, the agreement that all the 175 countries, including Trinidad and Tobago—and I say again, very well represented by the hon. Dennis Moses [*Desk thumping*] in the United Nations on Friday—they are talking about phasing out fossil fuels.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Have to.

Hon. C. Imbert: And look at the countries like Saudi Arabia. I was sent an article over the weekend. Saudi Arabia is now looking at the Norwegian model where they are trying to diversify their economy away from dependence on

petroleum. Could you believe that? Ten years ago if somebody said that Saudi Arabia would be trying to switch their economy to the non-oil sector, they would say the person is crazy to say that. But Norway has done it successfully. Saudi Arabia is doing it now and we, in Trinidad and Tobago, must do it, not just because of the oil price, but because of depleting reserves, Madam Speaker.

I have to re-emphasize, Trinidad and Tobago is what is known as a mature oil province. It is old. We have been producing oil here for 100 years. We are just like the North Sea in the United Kingdom where it is becoming more and more difficult to produce oil in Trinidad and Tobago. You have to use secondary recovery. Our gas reserves are depleting and so on. So we, like the rest of the world, have to prepare Trinidad and Tobago for the day—and that day will come. It may not come in the time span of the Members of the House of Representatives who are here present. Or maybe some of the younger ones, if they stay the course, will see it. But the day will come when the non-oil sector will have to contribute the bulk of the GDP to Trinidad and Tobago and we have to prepare the population for that.

We have to shift people away from fossil fuels. We have to encourage them to use solar, we have to encourage them to use wind power, bio-gas and all of these renewable energy sources. And this measure has all sorts of factors underlying it, not just to depress conspicuous consumption, not just to serve as a disincentive to these big cars outside there, not just to conserve fuel, not just to reduce pollution, Madam Speaker, but it is to prepare our population for the new world where fossil fuels and internal combustion engines will be a thing of the past, Madam Speaker.

And with these few words, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic (Amendment) (No. 2) Order, 2016, the contents of which are set out below be confirmed.

LN No. 47 of 2016 1. Part 1 of Appendix A to the Fourth Schedule to the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act is amended in Item (1) by deleting paragraphs (d) to (g) and substituting the following paragraphs:

“(d) Engine size exceeding 1999 cc but not exceeding 2499 cc 37.50 per cc

- (e) Engine size exceeding 2499 cc but not exceeding 2999 cc 45.00 per cc
- (f) Engine size exceeding 2999 cc but not exceeding 3499 cc 52.50 per cc
- (g) Engine size exceeding 3499 cc ... 75.00 per cc”.

CUSTOMS (AMDT. TO THE FIRST SCHEDULE) ORDER, 2016
(CONFIRMATION OF)

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Whereas it is provided by section 7 of the Customs Act, Chap. 78:01 that the President may by Order increase or reduce any import or export duty of Customs or impose new import or export duties of Customs and from the date of publication of the Order in the *Gazette* and until the expiry of the Order the duties specified in the Order shall be payable in lieu of the duties payable prior thereto:

And whereas it is provided by subsection (2) of the said section that every Order issued under that section shall after four days and within twenty-one days from the date of its first publication be submitted to Parliament and Parliament may by resolution confirm, amend or revoke the Order and upon publication of the resolution of Parliament in the *Gazette* the resolution shall have effect and the Order shall then expire:

And whereas the Customs (Amendment to the First Schedule) Order, 2016, was made under section 7 of the Customs Act and first published in the *Gazette* as Legal Notice No. 48 on the 8th day of April, 2016.

And whereas it is expedient to confirm the said Order:

Be it resolved that the Customs (Amendment to the First Schedule) Order, 2016, the contents of which are set out below, be confirmed:

- L.N. No. 48 of 2016 1. The Customs Act is amended in the First Schedule –
- (a) under the headings 8703.23.50 and 8703.23.60, by deleting in the third column the words “40%” and substituting the words “60%”;

- (b) under the heading 8703.24.90, by deleting in the third column the words “45%” and substituting the words “67.5%”;
- (c) under the heading 8703.32.50, by deleting in the third column the words “40%” and substituting the words “60%”; and
- (d) under the heading 8703.33.90, by deleting in the third column the words “45%” and substituting the words “67.5%”.

Madam Speaker, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Customs (Amendment to the First Schedule) Order, 2016, the contents of which are set out below, be confirmed:

- L.N. No. 48 of 2016
1. The Customs Act is amended in the First Schedule –
 - (a) under the headings 8703.23.50 and 8703.23.60, by deleting in the third column the words “40%” and substituting the words “60%”;
 - (b) under the heading 8703.24.90, by deleting in the third column the words “45%” and substituting the words “67.5%”;
 - (c) under the heading 8703.32.50, by deleting in the third column the words “40%” and substituting the words “60%”; and
 - (d) under the heading 8703.33.90, by deleting in the third column the words “45%” and substituting the words “67.5%”.

6.40 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

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, there is one matter that qualifies to be raised on the Motion for the Adjournment of the House filed by the Member for Caroni East. I now call upon the Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (Caroni East): Madam Speaker, I know that the Government wants to get away to—*[Interruption]* I do not mind. I do not have any objection to postponing. You want me to do it now? I will be—*[Interruption]*

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I therefore would ask the Whip and the Leader to just confer and address the House.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Sorry, Madam Speaker, if I may. The Whip and I conferred since before 12 o'clock today and the decision was that we would end at this time and that the Motion on the Adjournment will be done on another occasion. The Whip and I did confer on this.

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker, I confirm with the Leader.

Madam Speaker: There is agreement?

Mr. Lee: Yes.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 6.42 p.m.