



REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Debates of the House of Representatives

1st Session - 11th Parliament (Rep.) - Volume 5 - Number 35

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)**

THE HONOURABLE BRIDGID ANNISSETTE-GEORGE
SPEAKER

THE HONOURABLE ESMOND FORD9
DEPUTY SPEAKER

Monday 4th July, 2016

CLERK OF THE HOUSE: JACQUI SAMPSON-MEIGUEL

EDITOR: LILA RODRIGUEZ-ROBERTS
Telephone: 623-4494

(TYPESET BY THE HANSARD STAFF, PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY THE GOVERNMENT PRINTER, CARONI,
REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO— 2021)

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*Leave of Absence**Monday, July 04, 2016***HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Monday, July 04, 2016*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

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

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, Dr. Lackram Bodoë MP, Member for Fyzabad, and Miss Marlene Mc Donald MP, Member for Port of Spain South, have requested leave of absence from today's sitting of the House. Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein MP, Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla has requested leave of absence from sittings of the House during the period July 04th to July 08th, 2016. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

TRIBUTE**(PATRICK AUGUSTUS MERVYN MANNING)**

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, Mr. Patrick Manning, former Prime Minister and Member of Parliament for San Fernando East, passed away on July 02nd, 2016. Many of us have had the opportunity to serve very closely with him in this House, or at some segment in his 44-year span of service to this country. I now invite hon. Members to pay their respects.

The Minister of Finance and Acting Prime Minister (Hon. Colm Imbert): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the People's National Movement, on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, on behalf of the substantive Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley, and on my own behalf, I rise today to pay tribute to one of Trinidad and Tobago's finest sons, Patrick Augustus Mervyn Manning, our former Prime Minister, Opposition Leader and political leader of the People's National Movement. He was a statesman, a visionary and perhaps the best demonstration of a career public servant. Today, we mourn the passing of not only a man, but the end of an era in the political history of Trinidad and Tobago. There will never be another Patrick Manning. No one can take his place or do what he did.

Mr. Manning was born on August 17th, 1946 and, but for the times when he served his country as Prime Minister and resided in Port of Spain, he remained a southerner to his heart until his passing two days ago. A former student of

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Presentation College, San Fernando, and the Mona Campus of the University of the West Indies, and a geologist by training, Mr. Manning served as Member of Parliament for the San Fernando East constituency, from 1971 until 2015. His record of 44 unbroken years of parliamentary service is likely to remain untouched for a long time to come.

He was the fourth and the sixth Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, from December 1991 to November 1995, and again from December 2001 to May 2010. He was also political leader of the People's National Movement for 23 years, from 1987—2010, and was also Leader of the Opposition twice, from 1986—1991, and again from 1995—2001.

There is so much that has been said, Madam Speaker, about Mr. Manning since his passing. He has been described by many as the quintessential statesman, always elegantly clad, smiling with the public, and very affable in his interactions with others. However, those who were brave enough to meet him on the domino table knew the danger that lurked behind his smile, for he was calculating, strategic and simply brilliant at that game. His passion for the game of dominos, nurtured and developed during his academic sojourn in Jamaica, was matched only by his passion for music, and classical music at that. It was that same passion he desired to instil in the hearts of the many young persons who became involved in the classical music band, Divine Echoes, which he saw as an instrument to expose youth to a more sophisticated form of music.

Madam Speaker, the national and regional outpouring of grief we have witnessed over the past two days comes as no surprise to the PNM, especially from our young and not so young citizens. I was especially heartened to read the comments of some students, who were rescued by Mr. Manning, when their academic future seemed uncertain, because it was for them that he devoted a significant portion of his energy.

He had a special interest in education and the evidence of this fact remains there, for in successive budgets under his stewardship, education received a huge portion of the national pie. He felt that once the country focused on education, this would lay the foundation for our children to take up the mantle of leadership as they came of age.

Madam Speaker, you will recall that it was during my stint as Minister responsible for tertiary education, that I had the honour to introduce in 2004, the Government Assistance for Tertiary Education, GATE Programme. That singular act, fully supported, championed and enhanced by Mr. Manning in 2006, when he

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opened up the GATE to all, opened the gateway for thousands of citizens who hitherto, would have been unable to afford it, to pursue their dream of attaining a tertiary level education. When combined with the creation of the University of Trinidad and Tobago, there was an exponential increase, not only in the number of persons accessing tertiary level education, but concomitantly, in the quality of life of our citizenry. Such was the breadth of Mr. Manning's vision, Madam Speaker, and this is why he was always hurt by the critics of his vision for Trinidad and Tobago, encapsulated under the banner of Vision 2020, which I dare say was misunderstood at the time, but is now becoming more and more apparent as a fantastic vision.

Today, as we pay tribute to him, we do so in a building complex, the International Waterfront Centre, that formed part of his vision for the regeneration and revitalization of the City of Port of Spain. Only last week, our hon. Prime Minister, the current Prime Minister, opened the new tower that would house the Ministry of Education, and in the upcoming months, we will open as well, the remaining buildings in the Government Plaza. Notable among these developments, Madam Speaker, is the cluster of buildings to house the Customs and Excise Division, already opened, the Board of Inland Revenue, Immigration and Ministry of Legal Affairs buildings.

I am equally certain, that it must have been a source of concern for him to return to his beloved San Fernando, to see the dissembling of his vision for the Chancery Lane Complex, envisaged as a one-stop-shop for the decentralized Government in the southland, where the offices of the Attorney General, DPP, Ministry of Legal Affairs and a modern public library, among many other public service offices, would have been housed. This magnificent building in San Fernando was designed to bring public service delivery in our second city into the modern era.

Madam Speaker, many of the initiatives of Mr. Manning were not obvious in his time, but today, on behalf of those on this side, we publicly say thanks to him for his towering vision and foresight. Trinidad and Tobago would certainly not be the economic powerhouse that it is today without his leadership, particularly in the energy sector.

Countless examples of Mr. Manning's visionary and transformative leadership can be found throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago, its effects transcending class, ethnicity, gender, religion and geography. From CDAP

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to GATE, from CEPEP to UTT, to the managed flotation of the Trinidad and Tobago dollar in 1993, described as one of the best planned and executed policy interventions undertaken since independence.

Mr. Manning's foresight, meticulous attention to detail, an ability to see further than most, marks him as a leader way ahead of his time. Indeed, he was the embodiment of the term "statesman", someone who comes along once every few decades, to make an indelible mark on society and the world at large. He was associated with so many projects and innovations, far too numerous to mention.

When we were in Government, I recall his early morning calls—I am not an early riser—but I recall Mr. Manning's early morning calls, usually at 6.00 a.m. when I was fast asleep, when he would call for an update on new projects and programmes that we were working on in the various Ministries that he had appointed me to. I knew that there were others that he called at 5.00 a.m. every day. [*Laughter*]

His appetite for new ideas and concepts that would transform Trinidad and Tobago was almost insatiable. He was a prodigious taskmaster, always full of advice. He would always advise us to be open, to be attentive and firm, but above all, to be polite. It was this respect for the other person, which saw him treat the people of the Caribbean in a particular way. He was the epitome of the Caribbean man.

Caricom, its progress and its challenges, were always dear to his heart, and he counted amongst his personal friends, several of the region's Prime Ministers past and present. There is no doubt that the suddenness of his passing has allowed us to illuminate the abundance of his accomplishments, and particularly for us on this side, we know that we have lost a mentor and a hero of the People's National Movement.

It was his determination that rescued the PNM after the sound thrashing we received in 1991. It was his willingness to subject himself to criticism that allowed the PNM to claw its way back to power in 2001. Mr. Manning was unique. He made great demands first of himself and then of others. He refused to accept failures. He remained undaunted by the prospects that something had not been done before. When he spoke, he did so with authority, and many wondered how he came to possess such knowledge, but he knew every detail of projects being undertaken by his Government, and often took charge of the overall picture shaping the details one by one, willing to sacrifice popularity for the greater good of Trinidad and Tobago.

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Today, I see our people in shock, with tears in their eyes, but I suspect that none could experience the grief of this loss more than the Manning family. So on behalf of a grateful nation, I say thank you to Hazel, David and Brian, for sharing with us the gift of their husband and father, for the past 44 years. We knew it came at a tremendous cost to you as a family, and for that we are heavily indebted.

Today, I say to the citizens of this great Republic, that even in this hour of darkness, the indomitable spirit of Patrick Augustus Mervyn Manning lives on and therefore we must not lose his spirit. He left us a path on which we will continue to march with conviction and faith. The peak of political, economic and social development to which he led us, still remains open, and from it we can behold the landscape of the new tomorrow, which we, the administration of today, will lead our people.

1.45 p.m.

Madam Speaker, as the nation mourns Patrick Manning, on behalf of the PNM and the Government, the substantive Prime Minister and on my own behalf, I ask that there be prayers of unity and spiritual uplifting as we celebrate his life. To paraphrase one of his most famous election war cries, as he continues on his journey to a better place, one he thought about often, we must let him know that he was admired in the east, in the west, in the north, in the south and in Tobago.

May he rest in peace, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I rise to join the nation in mourning the death of former Prime Minister, Mr. Patrick Manning, who served in this honourable House for upwards of 44 unbroken years. No one in our country has served the people that long, and that alone is testament to the former Prime Minister's dedication first to the people of San Fernando East and to our country and, indeed, to the region.

There are some famous words from William Shakespeare which I would like to quote as follows:

“Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them.”

In Mr. Manning's case, only one of these apply to him. He was neither born great nor did he have greatness thrust upon him. He was born a simple, humble man

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who achieved greatness through dedication, hard work and a deep commitment to his party and to Trinidad and Tobago. Greatness, Madam Speaker, was what he achieved on his own.

He was one of three PNM members who survived the political tsunami of 1986, but he faced the challenges ahead with the strength of a true leader. Many people facing those circumstances would have given up and walked away, but Mr. Manning did neither. His party then needed his leadership, and that is what he provided. And too, I guess, to the surprise of many and, of course, to the pleasure of many, he rebuilt his battered party and triumphantly led his party back to office in 1991.

It took courage and a clear vision to achieve such a feat. And when circumstances sent him back to Opposition, he remained steadfast in his determination to guide his party along a path that he defined. That resilience is what caused him to return to Government with clear mandates in 2002 and, again, in 2007.

For us, Mr. Manning was indeed a very worthy opponent. We stood on different sides in the political battlefield. We crossed swords on many issues. We had different visions on how to take our country forward, but the common thread was that we were all committed to Trinidad and Tobago and that our respective visions were developed out of love for country and commitment to the enhancement of the life of the people of our land. That, Madam Speaker, is what leadership is about and that is what defined the life of the former Prime Minister, the hon. Mr. Patrick Manning.

Yes, for some he was a new kid on the block when he entered Parliament in 1971 as the Member for San Fernando East, the successor to Mr. Gerard Montano. From that beginning, Mr. Manning rose to become a respected leader at home, in the Caribbean region and internationally, not because greatness was thrust on him but because he was determined to learn and follow before leading. He learned well from his leader, the father of the nation, former Prime Minister, Dr. Eric Williams and, indeed, from his other political contemporaries and mentors. Perhaps the most important lessons to him were about loyalty and commitment. Indeed, when I sat on this side, in a time of great controversy and turmoil, he passed me a note, and in it he said—and this was in early 2010—in that note he said those who come to you first may be those who will leave you first. Very warning words from him, but to him loyalty and commitment were matters of great importance.

He faced many setbacks in his career. He had to wait 10 years before getting a full ministerial position, but he never lost patience or turned against his party. He used the time to learn and we think, Madam Speaker, he learned exceedingly well.

Mr. Patrick Manning was not just a true patriotic, he epitomized what the politician should be. He was one of the most dedicated members of his party, and he never lost hope or deserted his party even in some of his darkest hours. He sincerely believed in the greatness of his party and his motto that it would always prevail. I think and we do think that no PNM leader fought as hard as he did to make that happen and he took responsibility for his actions.

When his party faced humiliation on May 24, 2010, Mr. Manning took full responsibility. And though he was literally chased out of the leadership by some, his loyalty never waned. And I think that is a very striking characteristic of an outstanding leader, and that is who the former Prime Minister, the hon. Mr. Patrick Manning was.

Even though his health was failing, he was prepared to return to Parliament in 2015 to serve his constituents, but that was not to be. Very clear signals were sent that it was time for him to leave. And, you know, most people would have been bitter and resentful, not Mr. Patrick Manning. He put aside his differences and humiliation and he supported his party throughout. He sat in Opposition more than once, but his focus never shifted. His commitment remained unshaken and he achieved what no other leader of our country ever did.

Trinidad and Tobago will remember him as the only leader who has been in and out of office twice. In 1995, he could have returned to Government in a coalition—and, of course, we were at that time voted into Government—but he chose to remain. Instead of joining any coalition, he maintained the PNM's independence and preferred to walk away from office knowing that keeping focus would take him back to Government and it did, indeed it did.

Mr. Manning served his people with integrity and loyalty. He worked with a range of other people to achieve the greatest good for the general population, often with people who held conflicting political views. His strength of character defined him, as did his deep sense of humour, his laughter and his infectious charisma, and I think no one would forget the dimples that went along with that charisma. Even his harshest critics agree that Mr. Manning was an outstanding and charming gentleman. He was never afraid to stand up and say what he felt was needed to be said. Even though at times to some it may have seemed to be politically incorrect.

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And while many of us would continue to challenge some of the decisions he made, at least we know that he had a vision that charted the course for the decision he made. I have no doubt that in all sincerity he believed that whatever actions he took were in the best interest of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Manning inspired many young people to work hard and to stay focused in order to achieve success. His wife Hazel said what made her husband special, a special politician was his love, charisma and commitment to our youth. Mr. Manning demonstrated that commitment with the establishment of GATE, as our colleague mentioned earlier, building on what a previous Government started with the Dollar for Dollar Programme, but it did not matter where the idea originated. What mattered was that it was good and he improved it so future generations would benefit from education.

I endorse the sentiment of the sitting Prime Minister, Dr. Rowley, who said Mr. Manning “made development and the well-being of Trinidad and Tobago a priority and in doing so dedicated his life to serving our twin island State.”

We have lost a role model, a brother, a father and friend. Today, the nation is in grief for the loss of a true patriot and a great leader. The loss we have suffered would be felt for many months and years to come. Today we mourn his passing, but we also celebrate his life as a courageous leader who put country first.

Mr. Manning will remain immortal, because people die only when we forget them, and I say who in all honesty can forget Mr. Patrick Manning, who guided his party and this nation through some very difficult times. There comes a time for all of us when the body dies, but the soul lives on. In the words of poet John Donne:

“One short sleep past, we wake eternally,

And death shall be no more.”

Former Prime Minister, the hon. Mr. Patrick Manning’s voice will no longer be heard in this august Chamber, but he will continue to live and to occupy our thoughts. Let us remember the happy times, the laughter and everything that made Mr. Manning special to our nation.

Madam Speaker, I close with the words from Corinthians 5: 6-8:

“We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.”

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Madam Speaker, let us pray that while he is gone to be with our Father, he will continue to remain with us, continue to watch over us even as his soul finds eternal rest. I join with my colleagues and on behalf of the Opposition and, indeed, on my own behalf, we offer our condolences to his family, to his wife, Mrs. Hazel Manning, who herself served in a public capacity, to give them the strength and the peace in this hour of grief.

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

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, today we convene this parliamentary sitting with knowledge of the passing last Saturday 2nd July, 2016, of a former Member of Parliament for San Fernando East of our nation's longest serving legislator and a former Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Patrick Augustus Mervyn Manning.

As a nation, we were informed of Mr. Manning's hospitalization early last week, but little did we anticipate that his death would be so soon. This occasion should confront us with a deep sense of our own mortality, our own fragility and vulnerability in the face of an unknown future. Who am I? Where am I going?

These are the existential questions that probably arise in the shadows of our mind at this time. Those questions are usually in the shadows, because they are the ones that the majority of us rather not consider as they force us to be real with ourselves. They force us to be authentically honest and to realize that in contemplating our individual and collective experience of Mr. Manning, we are really contemplating our own attitudes towards life, death and dying.

Those of us who had the experience of working and interacting with Mr. Manning would bear testimony to the fact that one of his favoured statements of encouragement or motivation was of biblical origin: "To whom much is given much is expected". That statement aptly encapsulated Mr. Manning's gratitude for not only all that he had accomplished or acquired materially, but also for his God given talents and, additionally, coloured his approach to selfless service to this country.

Thus, as persons gifted with the responsibility for governance of this country, of this nation, much is also expected of us. It may be reasonable that the detached bystander may expect that the primary question for us here gathered in this time of national mourning must be: How can the passing of Mr. Manning help us to be better parliamentarians, better citizens and, above all, better humans?

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My ruminations have caused me to recall the words of Frantz Fanon and I quote:

“Death is always close by. And what’s important is not to know if you can avoid it, but to know that you have done the most possible to realize your ideas.”

No one in this honourable House can deny the array of ideas and dreams that Mr. Patrick Augustus Mervyn Manning realized for the well-being of this nation during his 44 years as a legislator in this Parliament in the service of not only his constituents of San Fernando East, but of the entire Trinidad and Tobago.

May his legacy be honoured with accuracy and truth. May his family find solace in the outpouring of local, regional and international tribute and may his soul rest in peace. Amen.

I shall now invite all Members to stand and observe a minute of respectful silence.

The House of Representatives stood.

Madam Speaker: Members, I have directed the Clerk of the House to convey, on our behalf, our condolences to the family of Mr. Patrick Manning.

2.00 p.m.

PAPERS LAID

1. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on a Special Audit of the Public Transport Service Corporation. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]

To be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.

2. Annual Audited Financial Statements of Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance Company Limited for the year ended December 31, 2015. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

To be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.

PRIME MINISTER’S QUESTIONS

Sandals Resort Hotel (Sites Considered in Tobago)

Mr. David Lee (Pointe-a-Pierre): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Acting Prime Minister: Would the Prime Minister inform the House which sites in

Tobago are being considered for the Sandals Resort Hotel as was recently announced?

The Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): A number of sites are being considered in north, south, east and west Tobago.

**National Flour Mills Limited
(Details of)**

Mr. David Lee (Pointe-a-Pierre): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Would the hon. Acting Prime Minister inform the House whether he is aware that products of National Flour Mills Limited have been virtually banned from Jamaica, and if so, what steps his Government intends to take to address this untenable situation which constitutes a violation of the Treaty of Chaguaramas?

Madam Speaker: Acting Prime Minister.

The Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Cannot stand up just so, you know. Madam Speaker, we are advised that the productions are not banned, per se. There is an issue with respect to testing before the productions can enter the Jamaican market. This is taking a long time, and we are hopeful that NFM will work with the regulatory agency in Jamaica to resolve this problem in the shortest possible time.

Madam Speaker: Member for Chaguanas West.

**Payment of Moneys to Contractors
(Instructions by the Prime Minister)**

Mr. Ganga Singh (Chaguanas West): Thank you, Madam Speaker, to the Acting Prime Minister: Can the Prime Minister state whether instructions were given by him to Permanent Secretaries and Chairmen of State Enterprises and Agencies, with regard to payment of moneys owed to contractors following his recent meeting at the Diplomatic Centre with these bodies?

Madam Speaker: Acting Prime Minister.

The Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, that responsibility actually falls to me wearing my other hat as Corporation Sole, and I am currently formulating the instructions to be given to state enterprises and other agencies with respect to payments of money owed to contractors to see how much money and how quickly we can get payments to contractors.

Madam Speaker: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. A supplemental to the hon. Acting Prime Minister, you indicated that you are working on the formula, how soon will that formula be completed so that action can take place so that persons can be prevented from becoming bankrupt?

Madam Speaker: Acting Prime Minister.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In the first instance I would like to correct something in the question. Permanent Secretaries were not present at the meeting at the Diplomatic Centre. I just thought it was necessary to put that on the record. As you are aware, wearing my other hat as Minister of Finance, I will be visiting the United States of America within the next three weeks to raise a US \$1 billion bond which would put us in funds to make payments to contractors.

Madam Speaker: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Singh: So, Madam Speaker, if I were to understand clearly the message of the hon. Acting Prime Minister to the contractors who have certified payments, it is “hold strain”?

Madam Speaker: Acting Prime Minister.

Hon. C. Imbert: I thought I answered the question that the Minister of Finance will be visiting the United States to go on a road show to raise US \$1 billion which will give us the necessary finance to start making some payments to contractors.

Madam Speaker: Member for Chaguanas West.

GATE Programme (Details of)

Mr. Ganga Singh (Chaguanas West): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Can the Prime Minister indicate whether the Government has reached a final decision regarding the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses, the GATE programme?

The Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Not yet, we expect to deliberate on the committee report shortly and make a decision shortly thereafter.

Madam Speaker: Member for Chaguanas East.

Mr. Karim: Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Acting Prime Minister, is it expected that the decision out of that report will be implemented for the new academic year 2016—2017?

Madam Speaker: Acting Prime Minister.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you. That is the plan as long as that is feasible. We have to see first what the committee of experts is recommending and see how quickly it can be implemented. So it all depends on the recommendations made to the Government and the feasibility of implementation of these recommendations.

Madam Speaker: Member for Tabaquite.

Dr. Rambachan: Acting Prime Minister, would the report that you are referring to, would the contents of that report be made public so that there will be some consultation with those who are involved and who may benefit or not benefit from GATE so that the wider public of stakeholders can have an input?

Madam Speaker: Acting Prime Minister.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I cannot make a firm commitment at this time, but I do not think there is anything of a national security nature in the report of that committee. So that I would think that if not the entire report, the salient elements and the important recommendations would be made available to Members.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Hon. Acting Prime Minister, would you be kind enough to indicate whether there were stakeholder consultations in relation to the formulation of the final policy by the members of this committee were brought out? And if there were consultations, who were the stakeholders who were involved?

Madam Speaker: Acting Prime Minister.

Hon. C. Imbert: I am not in a position to tell you the extent of consultations that were taking place, but you have to understand a committee was established under the stewardship of the Ministry of Education; that committee is now to report to the Government, and we will take appropriate action. I can assure you that the Government will not act whimsically or recklessly, and whatever consultation is required will be done.

Madam Speaker: Member for Chaguanas West.

Recruitment of a Commissioner of Police (Status of)

Mr. Ganga Singh (*Chaguanas West*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Hon. Acting Prime Minister, with regard to the recruitment of a Commissioner of

Police, can the Prime Minister inform the Parliament what is the status of this process?

Madam Speaker: Acting Prime Minister.

The Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Police Service Commission is currently pursuing the recruitment process, and only today at a subcommittee meeting of the Cabinet, we considered a request from the Commission for funding to complete the recruitment process, and a decision on that will be made shortly which would allow the process to continue.

Madam Speaker: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Could the hon. Acting Prime Minister indicate the extent of the funding requested?

Madam Speaker: Acting Prime Minister.

Hon. C. Imbert: I will prefer not to indicate the quantum at this time because it is under the active consideration of the Finance and General Purposes Subcommittee of the Cabinet, and we have asked for some additional information.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva North.

False National ID Cards and Bogus Pension Cheques (Information Received by Prime Minister)

Miss Ramona Ramdial (Couva North): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Acting Prime Minister: In light of reports in the public domain involving the use of false national identification cards and bogus pension cheques, could the Prime Minister state whether such information has come to his attention?

Madam Speaker: Acting Prime Minister.

The Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Not yet.

Madam Speaker: Is there a supplemental question? Okay. Member for Naparima.

Closure of High Commission in Kampala (Details of)

Mr. Rodney Charles (Naparima): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Acting Prime Minister: Could the Acting Prime Minister confirm whether the Government has taken a decision to close our High Commission in Kampala,

Uganda, and what, if any, are the implications of such a decision on future relations with Uganda, East Africa and other countries to which the High Commission is currently accredited?

Madam Speaker: Acting Prime Minister.

The Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Government has taken a decision to close the Trinidad and Tobago High Commission in Kampala, Uganda. It has been decided that Uganda and the other East African countries to which the Mission in Kampala was accredited will be accredited through the Trinidad and Tobago High Commission in Abuja, Nigeria, thereby continuing the bilateral relations that exist between Trinidad and Tobago and those African countries.

Madam Speaker: Member for Chaguanas East.

Mr. Karim: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Will the hon. Acting Prime Minister indicate that in view of the closure of the Kampala Mission, which had accredited status to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which will now be responsible for it?

Madam Speaker: Acting Prime Minister.

Hon. C. Imbert: I thank you for that question, and that in fact leads into another point. We have decided to establish a mission in the Middle East which would have jurisdiction over countries of the Middle East. So that we are splitting the responsibilities now, the Mission in Nigeria will handle African countries and the Mission in the Middle East will handle countries in the Middle East.

Madam Speaker: Member for Chaguanas East.

Mr. Karim: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Acting Prime Minister, will you be able to give us an idea as to when that new mission for the Middle East would be open and where?

Madam Speaker: Acting Prime Minister.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you. With respect to when, the decision was only recently taken by Cabinet so I cannot give you a firm time, but the location at this time is in the capital of the United Arab Emirates, and we are also considering another mission in the vicinity to serve other countries, other territories such as Dubai.

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

**Establishment of a CARICOM Review Commission
(Status of)**

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Could the Acting Prime Minister state whether he is aware of the recent announcement by Prime Minister Andrew Holness to establish a “Caricom Review Commission” to evaluate the effects of Jamaica’s participation in Caricom? And if yes, are we assessing its impact—possible impact—on our economic growth and development?

Madam Speaker: Acting Prime Minister.

The Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes, the Government is aware of the establishment of a Caricom Review Commission which was launched in Jamaica just last week on the 28th of June, 2016. The feedback so far from our High Commission in Kingston is that the aim of the Caricom Review Commission, established by the Government of Jamaica, is to strengthen Jamaica’s position within the regional integration process, which they consider to be critical for Jamaica’s economic growth and development over the next 50 years. The commission, as far as we are aware, has not yet met. It is thus somewhat premature to pronounce on the impact on economic growth and development, and the implication for this country’s economy. Be assured that we in Trinidad and Tobago are following this matter very closely.

2.15 p.m.

Dr. Gopeesingh: What is occurring at the moment? Does Trinidad and Tobago—have they discussed this and is there a position that Trinidad and Tobago will be taking in relation to the discussions and the issues that will arise when the Caricom countries meet to discuss this? Have you decided on a position as yet?

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, as I indicated, it is somewhat premature because this commission has not yet met. I am sure, however, that the substantive Prime Minister will have some discussion on this matter with his counterpart at the Caricom Heads of Government meeting which is scheduled to take place in Guyana. But the extent of any such discussion, I cannot say. We will have to wait for the Prime Minister’s return from Guyana in order for a further update on this matter.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Do you have any fears whether one from 10 leaves nought as happened with the dissolution of the West Indian Federation?

Hon. C. Imbert: Well that is really to ask me to give an opinion. And if you wish my opinion, the answer is no.

Mr. Charles: Is the Acting Prime Minister aware that one of the terms of reference of the Caricom Review Commission is to assess Jamaica's continued participation, the context of benefits or losses in relation to its participation? And do we have or given any assessment of the possible implication of a Jamaican exit from Caricom?

Hon. C. Imbert: The answer to the first part of that question is, yes, we are aware. And the answer to the second part is that the commission has not yet met and therefore it is premature to speculate on what will come out of the deliberations of that particular commission.

URGENT QUESTIONS

URP Workers (Payment of Salaries/Wages)

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (Couva South): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of Works and Transport: Can the Minister indicate whether there has been any delays in the payment of salaries/wages to the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) workers within the past month?

The Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam Speaker, as Acting Minister of Works and Transport, I have been advised that there may have been some delays, but I have also been advised that funds have been provided and all outstanding wages will be paid by the end of this week.

Mr. Indarsingh: Just for clarification, Madam Speaker, could the Acting Minister of Works and Transport and the Acting Prime Minister indicate how much outstanding wages are being owed to these workers?

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, I am not in a position to give details. What I do know that wearing my other hat as Minister of Finance, I signed the necessary warrant to release all the required funds to the Ministry of Works and Transport to pay the wages of URP workers. With respect to the actual quantum that may be outstanding, I am unable to say, but I want to give the assurance, based on the information I have received today from the Ministry of Works and Transport, that barring unforeseen circumstances, the outstanding wages should be paid by the end of this week.

Eid ul Fitr Celebrations 2016 (Funds Allocated)

Mr. Barry Padarath (Princes Town): Madam Speaker, through you to the Hon. Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts. In light of the

Government's announcement that funds have been allocated to assist the Islamic Community for Eid ul Fitr Celebrations 2016 and seeing that the holiday is two days away, can the hon. Minister indicate which organizations will receive funding and the corresponding amounts that will be received?

The Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The organizations carded to receive funding for the Eid 2016 thus far are:

The Anjuman Sunnat ul Jamaat Association (ASJA), \$550,000;

Trinidad Muslim League (TML), \$350,000;

Tackveeyatul Islamic Association, (TIA), \$250,000;

Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, \$220,000;

Anjuman Ahmadiyya Ishaat-e-Islam, \$220,000;

Islam Missionaries Guild (IMG), \$110,000;

Darul Uloom, \$120,000;

Islam Resource Centre, \$110,000;

Islamic Relief Centre, \$110,000;

Barrackpore Islamic Centre, \$110,000;

Ahlu Sunnai Wal Jama'ah Institute (ASWAMI), \$120,000;

Al Markaz Al Ihsaan, \$110,000;

Islamic Ladies Social and Cultural Association, \$70,000;

Islamic Dawah Movement, \$120,000;

Muslim Social and Cultural Foundation, \$415,000.

And just to note the Ministry is in receipt of other applications which are actively being considered.

Mr. Padarath: Madam Speaker, through you to the hon. Minister, can the hon. Minister indicate whether the Government considered assisting all individual Masjids, as small as it may be, for Eid celebrations 2016?

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The receipt of grants generally is triggered by the application for a grant and the Ministry

actively considers any application made to it for grant funding for any national day or festival.

Mr. Padarath: Madam Speaker, to the hon. Member. So in effect you are saying, no. No consideration was given to all Masjids?

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In effect I am saying that once an application is made, it is considered by the Ministry.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister for Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Madam Speaker, the questions before us 165, 178, 179, we are craving the indulgence of the House and asking for those questions, given the fact that we would be on recess, we are asking for those to be submitted in writing within a week's time.

Mr. Singh: The answers?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: The answers, yes.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 29(10), on the last occasion at the expiration of the time, there was an undertaking that several questions—because I remember the Member made a lot out of the fact that there were 29 questions, 29 questions to be answered out of 30. [*Crosstalk*] Let me complete. My memory is still good. And at the end of that period, Members undertook to submit in writing over 10 questions for the answers. We have not received those answers, so I do not know whether it will go the way of answers as these three questions. So perhaps the Member should renew that undertaking for us also.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. In keeping with the undertaking that we gave you, you will get those answers before the end of today's sitting. And again, I indicate that we are asking for a week to submit these answers in writing.

Mr. Singh: Madam Speaker, several written answers to questions, those too would be provided? Questions 101, 137, 144. Those too will be provided within the week? I am asking.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Yes, Madam Speaker, they will.

Madam Speaker: So that all questions for today, the answers will be deferred for one week and will be provided in writing?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Yes, Madam Speaker.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

**Rio Claro/Mayaro/Guayaguayare Tourism Projects
(Details of)**

101. Mr. Rushton Paray (*Mayaro*) asked the Minister of Tourism:

With reference to tourism projects and related initiatives earmarked in fiscal 2016, for the south-east region of Rio Claro/Mayaro/Guayaguayare, could the Minister provide a list of projects inclusive of:

- a) details of activity/initiative for each project;
- b) the cost for each project;
- c) the proposed commencement and completion dates for each project; and
- d) whether consultations will be held with the relevant stakeholders for the project?

**Special Branch Police Officers
(Assignment of)**

137. Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan (*Tabaquite*) asked the Minister of National Security:

Could the hon. Minister provide the number of Ministers who currently have Special Branch Police Officers assigned to them as part of their personal security detail and the number of hours per day such officers are so assigned?

**SSA Employees
(Termination of Employment)**

144. Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*) asked the Minister of National Security:

Could the hon. Minister provide the number of Strategic Services Agency employees terminated with effect from September 2015 to date, including the job title and reason(s) for dismissal?

Vide end of sitting for written answers.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO ORAL QUESTIONS

The following questions stood on the Order Paper:

**Miami to Bahamas Cruise
(Expected Benefits of)**

165. Miss Ramona Ramdial (*Couva North*) asked the hon. Minister of Tourism:

Could the Minister state the reasons for sponsoring \$450,000.00 for a cruise from Miami to Bahamas and the expected benefits to the people of Trinidad and Tobago?

**Contract Officers at Overseas Missions
(Payment of Termination Benefits)**

178. Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*) asked the Hon. Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs:

Could the Minister state whether termination benefits have been paid to all contract officers whose services were terminated at overseas missions since September 2015?

**Indian Arrival Day Celebrations
(Groups Funded)**

179. Miss Ramona Ramdial (*Couva North*) asked the Hon. Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts:

Could the Minister provide a list of all groups which received funding for Indian Arrival Day celebrations?

Vide end of sitting for written answers.

FINANCE (NO. 2) BILL, 2016

Order for second reading read.

The Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert):
[*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Bill before the House is 44 pages long, but the issues that are being addressed are simply the question of resolving an issue with: Visiting Forces and the Status of Forces Agreement between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Government of the United States of America; the new rates of national insurance; amendments to the Motor Vehicle and Road Traffic Act to deal with electric vehicles, hybrid vehicles

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and vehicles using compressed natural gas; an amnesty for corporations and individuals with respect to interests penalties and other liabilities with respect to income tax, corporation tax, petroleum tax, et cetera, and an amnesty with respect to the filing of annual earnings.

Madam Speaker, with respect to the visiting forces provisions, this provision did not form part of the fiscal measures announced in the 2016 budget. And I may say much of what we are dealing with today was already announced either in the 2016 budget or in the midterm review. But the Visiting Forces provisions did not form part of any fiscal measures previously announced.

It is, however, extremely important and it is necessary to treat with it now. It provides for the presence, activities, privileges and immunities of members of the visiting forces. The Act defines “visiting forces” as among other things:

“...any body, contingent or detachment of the forces of a designated state for the time being present in Trinidad and Tobago in connection with official duties...”

In this regard, Madam Speaker, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Government of the United States of the America entered into an agreement called the Status of Forces Agreement, SOFA for short, in 2009. SOFA was concluded in advance of the hosting by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago of the Fifth Summit of Americas. And if I may digress, another of the monumental achievements of Mr. Patrick Manning.

SOFA, Madam Speaker, was aimed at governing the presence of United States military personnel in Trinidad and Tobago for the purpose of performing mutually agreed activities in 2009 for the Summit of the Americas. The intention was that SOFA would last for the year 2009 only. It was however, subsequently decided to renew SOFA in order to govern the conduct in Trinidad and Tobago of other mutually agreed activities by the United States of America military personnel.

Part 6 of the Visiting Forces Act provides for matters of taxation and exemption to taxation. By way of example, section 24 of the Act allows that:

“A visiting force may import into Trinidad and Tobago free of customs duty and...tax, equipment for the visiting...force and such quantities of provisions, supplies and other goods for the exclusive use of the visiting force.”

It was recognized however, that the Act did not provide exemptions from the liability to pay any tax to contractors from a designated state. So it only dealt with

the question of the force itself, the military personnel and did not deal with the issue of contractors from a designated state such as the United States who might be associated with the visiting forces.

2.30 p.m.

The Act also does not allow for tax exemptions to contractors from the United States of America in connection with activities under SOFA. To correct this anomaly we have been advised that a new section 24A should be inserted in the existing Visiting Forces Act to provide that a Visiting Forces contractor be exempt from the liability to pay tax. A visiting forces contractor would be any person other than a resident of Trinidad and Tobago, who is contracted by a visiting force and approved by the Minister with responsibility for national security, for the purpose of providing contracted service to the visiting force. The immediate effect of this amendment is that contractors from the United States of America now present in Trinidad and Tobago and conducting activities in relation to the SOFA would be afforded exemptions from the liability to pay taxes and other charges in relation to such activities.

The Bill before the House also introduces some consequential amendments in clauses 3(a), (b), (c) and (d), and they are all necessary for the implementation of this recommendation. And I expect that the Attorney General will go into some more detail if required.

Madam Speaker, you would recall that when I presented the first Finance Bill in January of 2016, I gave some indication of the Ministry of Finance's legislative agenda for 2016. At that time, I said it was my intention to present to this House a Finance (No. 2) Bill, because the previous Finance Bill was Finance (No. 1). I indicated then that this Bill, (No. 2), would deal with among other things incentives to stimulate the construction industry, particularly to facilitate the participation of the private sector in the construction sector including the housing sector. I also signalled that the closing of accounts for 2015, the midyear review, the Gambling, Gaming and Betting Control Bill, and the Insurance Bill would form part of the Ministry of Finance's legislative agenda for 2016.

As you will be aware, Madam Speaker, the closing of accounts for 2015 has already been completed. It was done in January of this year. The midyear review was brought to this House on April 08, 2016, and the Gambling and Insurance Bill, as is, where is, without changing a full stop, semicolon, apostrophe, or exclamation mark in the—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: It is not static.

Hon. C. Imbert: I know—Bills that were laid in this House by the previous administration were laid in this House just a few days ago, on Friday, July 01, 2016. And may I say, having laid those Bills, it is my intention to collaborate, meet and discuss these Bills with the official Opposition to see whether we can have a meeting of the minds and move forward on these two pieces of legislation which I wish to stress were sent to a joint select committee during the last term of the previous Government, and in one case one Bill was debated in the Senate, in the other place the Bill was debated in the House, and what we have done is faithfully reproduce what was placed on the table by the former administration. These Bills are in my view very, very important. We may not be able, and I want to signal—yes, sorry.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you very much, hon. Minister. You have indicated your willingness for meetings and consultations on these Bills which require a special majority. We would be very willing, with an open mind, to meet with you, unlike the attitude taken by someone else in respect of another debate, and we trust that given that things I have said, things are not static and would have changed that you would be willing to accommodate discussions with a view to any amendments that may be necessary. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, I want to give the Leader of the Opposition a personal undertaking that we will be accommodating proposals, amendments, suggestions coming from the other side. [*Desk thumping*] These two bits of legislation are important, and we need to get them into the law books and move on with the administration of insurance and the administration of gambling and gaming. And I was going to make the point before I gave way that I do not think we will have enough time to debate or conclude a debate before on these two bits of legislation before the session ends on September 22nd. But what I am sure we can do is have our discussions and our meetings so that when we return in the new session we would have resolved all of the issues, hopefully, so we can move straight into the debate and passage of these two pieces of legislation as we re-table them.

Now, Madam Speaker, this Finance (No. 2) Bill, as I indicated previously, deals with a number of issues announced before, announced in the national budget, announced in various policy statements, announced in the midyear review, and so on. The measures are of two types. Some of them are very specific, dealing with specific issues such as the need for conservation of energy, the need

to encourage people to switch from using fossil fuels towards forms of renewable energy and to forms of energy that have a smaller carbon footprint, which is the case with the electric vehicles, hybrid vehicles, and CNG-powered vehicles, and also incentives to stimulate the construction sector, and also measures that are necessary to ensure that the National Insurance Board is in funds to continue paying national insurance pensions. In other words, necessary to ensure the integrity and stability of the national insurance fund.

If you will permit me, Madam Speaker, let me go straight into the Bill itself. Clause 1, simply the title. Clause 2, is a commencement section, and clause 2 refers specifically to national insurance. It was my original intention to introduce the new contribution rates on July 4th. That was the timetable that was given to us by the National Insurance Board in accordance with the actuarial report as to when we need to start supplementing the income to the fund to ensure that the fund can continue to pay its obligations in terms of pension and survivors benefit and so on into the foreseeable future. But in discussions with the National Insurance Board last week, the board informed me it needed a little more time to consult with stakeholders, to consult with employers, to consult with persons involved in the national insurance system, and they have asked me to defer the implementation of the new contribution rates to September 05, 2016, and that is what clause 2 is intended to do, to give the National Insurance Board the time necessary to engage in consultation with employers and employees, to make sure that everybody understands the context of the new contribution rates.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Hon. Minister, could you kindly give way?

Hon. C. Imbert: Sure.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: As you know we were somewhat ambushed receiving this Bill on Friday and therefore we have not had the opportunity for much consultation. But, as you mentioned that you have a concern with the areas dealing with the national insurance, it has been brought to our attention that these changes to the regulations—to the Act and the regulations—amending rates of benefits for employment, injury, death benefit, survivors, retirement, invalids, sickness, maternity, and so on, with contributions payable from September 5th, which is the date that you have indicated that it would discriminate against current recipients of these benefits. And perhaps I can share what we have here and ask if you may want to reconsider what is happening with respect to these changes.

What I am being told is that new persons coming on stream after the passage of this, they would get a different rate of benefit as versus those already in the system. I am being told this has never happened in the history of the NIB

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regulations and Act, and some 3,000 persons are likely to be affected by this measure, and we will want you to look at it. I will pass you the little note I have that we received from someone who deals in national insurance law, with respect to the regulations, but it is unprecedented, it has never happened, and whenever there were increases in benefits in the past, those in the existing stream already in receipt of these benefits as well as those coming in they would have had it increased. So, everybody would be across the board on an equitable basis.

So, I will pass the note through you, Madam Speaker, and ask you to reconsider this. Perhaps you may want to hold that particular section. When we come back we can quickly deal with it in the first sitting of the next session. We would not want these people to be in any way disadvantaged or discriminated against. I thank you very much hon. Minister. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Imbert: Okay, what I prefer to do, Madam Speaker, is I understand what the hon. Member is saying. I will give an undertaking now, and as Members should appreciate by now, so far I keep my undertakings, so that what I would like to do is to pass this Bill today, but I give an undertaking we would carefully study this measure. This was not brought to my attention. This is not something that has happened overnight. The changes have been in the making for a couple years. It is something that has transcended administrations; in other words I did not get up yesterday morning and dream this up. So, these amendments have been in the making for quite some time, and I have not been told, up to today, as to whether this anomaly exists. I can assure you I will treat it very, very, seriously, and we will take appropriate action. But, I would like to get this system through and, of course, in September we can sort out any amendment that is required.

So, if I can move into the national insurance now. Clause 4—and I have passed the note on to the Attorney General so they can take a look at it. We have no wish to disadvantage anybody. Madam Speaker, clause 4 of the Bill deals with amendments to the National Insurance Act. Section 70 of the National Insurance Act provides for an actuarial review to be conducted of the national insurance system at five yearly or shorter intervals. To assess the balance between contributions and rates of benefits, in accordance with the Act, an actuarial review was conducted over the three-year period from July 01, 2010 to June 30, 2013. And, Madam Speaker, let me just repeat that, an actuarial review was conducted over the three-year period from July 01, 2010 to June 30, 2013. So, this is something that preceded this administration. This is why I am a little surprised at the issue, but it is no problem. We will look into it and we take appropriate action.

The main objectives of the review were to assess the long-term financial condition of the national insurance fund, and to look at possible ways to improve contributions and benefits. The Act at section 70(3) provides that the actuarial review be laid in Parliament. In fulfilment of this requirement, Madam Speaker, you may recall that the actuarial review was laid in this House by my good self on November 27, 2015 in accordance with the Act. I am also told that the actuarial review was laid in the Senate on December 08, 2015. So, the legal requirements with respect to laying the actuarial review in Parliament were met.

Coming out of this actuarial review it is obvious that there is a need to plan for a combination of future contribution rate increases and measures to reduce the cost of the system. The present contribution rate of 12 per cent is not sufficient to support the present level of benefits in the long run. The recommendation coming out of the actuarial review therefore is that the contribution rate should be gradually increased, and a recommendation was made to increase the rate to 13.2 per cent, which we accepted.

Madam Speaker, the actuarial review also highlighted that different elements of the national insurance system need to be adjusted to maintain value over time. One of these elements is the maximum insurable earnings. The recommendation is that the maximum insurable earnings be increased to \$13,600, and this corresponds to the increase of the average national wage over the period July 01, 2010 to June 30, 2013. Another element of the national insurance system is the earning class limits. It is recommended that these limits be increased by the lesser of the inflation rate, and the average salary increase which would result in a 13.3 increase in all earning class bands.

2.45 p.m.

You should note, Madam Speaker, that the proposed increases in the maximum insurable earnings and the earnings class band will cause the entire contribution rate table to shift upward, with the result being an increase in the minimum insurable earnings from \$180 to \$200 weekly, \$780 to \$867 monthly. The amendments to the Act will impact the following: the earnings classes, the contribution amounts, the conversion rates and the benefit table for the basic earned pension rate, increments for retirement and invalidity, survivor benefit, increment rates, sickness and maternity benefit rates, employment injury and death benefit rates.

As I indicated previously, it is proposed that these amendments take effect on September 5th and I have given the undertaking that if we need to make adjustments, we will do so in September.

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With respect to revenue raising and compliance, Madam Speaker, this takes me now to the next section of the Bill. I will deal with this section now and I will come back to what we are doing with vehicles. With respect to revenue raising, there have been several amnesties in the past. I remember one being done by Minister Dookeran, which to my amazement netted \$2 billion in that year. I believe it was either 2012 or 2013, but it was a significant sum of money. There are quite a few taxpayers who have not agreed with the assessment of the Board of Inland Revenue and are quite prepared to take the matter to court or are contemplating taking the matter to court.

The amnesty measure—while it is not desirable that you have amnesties forever and ever—the amnesty measure has proven to be successful in the past and in our present economic situation, we thought it necessary to give taxpayers a one off opportunity to file their tax returns and bring their tax status up-to-date. Because of the success of previous amnesties, it is believed that the taxes which the State stands to collect far outweigh the penalties to be collected. The amnesty is also expected to encourage taxpayers' compliance. This particular amnesty is applicable to Income Tax, Corporation Tax, Business Levy, Green Fund Levy, Value Added Tax and Petroleum Tax.

Now in the Bill, Madam Speaker, you will see and Members will see that in order to benefit from the concession, the taxpayer must have filed outstanding returns and paid all outstanding taxes on or before August 31st. But based on representations made from Members on both sides of the House I am seriously considering extending the deadline date for the amnesty to September 16th, because it is a short time period and I think the longer we have an amnesty for, the more tax we can collect.

So that one of the amendments, as I said, based on representations from both sides of the House, in front of me and at the side of me—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you.

Hon. C. Imbert: I thought—and probably behind me to, I thought, it could now—one of the reasons why I had set it at August 31 as the deadline for the amnesty was that the Board of Inland Revenue had told me to be careful about putting the expiry date for the amnesty too close to a tax collection period.

Now, hon. Members may not know that—Hon. Members are probably aware, that the bulk of our taxes comes in on a quarterly basis. So September 30th is an important date for the collection of taxes. In fact, for many companies, September 30th is the end of their financial year and a lot of companies wait until the end of

September to pay their taxes. So we did not want to interfere with the tax collection that will normally take place at the end of September and thereby confuse taxpayers. But based on consultations with the Board of Inland Revenue, today, after the representation made from Members on that side and on this side, I have consulted with the Board of Inland Revenue and they see no problem with extending—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Good sense—

Hon. C. Imbert: Yes, sense. I will say sense has prevailed. They have told me they have no problem with extending the amnesty to September 16th. That is a Friday, by the way. Okay?

Mr. Singh: I think you are very good in this new incarnation.

Hon. C. Imbert: I am sorry to hear that. [*Laughter*] The following measures are therefore proposed, and as I said we will be amending the date and I will ask the Attorney General if he could speak to the CPC as we are here, as I am on my feet, and prepare the amendment to change the deadline to September 16th.

The amnesty will be offered to all residents, individuals and companies who have not filed returns of income for any year, up to and including the year 2015. We are going to waive all interest on outstanding taxes including Business Levy and Green Fund Levy, due and payable as at December 31, 2015. Once these taxes and levy are paid—and this will now be by September 16, 2016. We would also waive all interest charged on any payment prior to the July 01, 2016 in respect of any tax of Business Levy and Green Fund Levy due and payable as at December 31, 2015.

All penalties, further tax and additional tax due and payable on outstanding taxes including Business Levy and Green Fund Levy as at December 31, 2016, will be waived. Where such taxes or levy are paid during the period July 01st, that has already past, and September 16, 2016. Penalties, further tax and additional tax in respect of taxes, Business Levy and Green Fund Levy due and payable as at December 31, 2015 and paid prior to July 01, 2016 will be waived with such penalties, further tax and additional tax have not been paid. Penalties on outstanding returns for the years of income up to and including the year 2015 will be waived, where such returns are filed by September 16, 2016. Penalties with respect to returns for the years of income up to and including the year 2015 and filed prior to January 01, 2016 will be waived where such penalties have not been paid. And for the avoidance of doubt, the concessions will not apply to taxes, levy, interest penalty, further tax and additional tax paid prior to July 01, 2016.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Minister, would you give way?

Hon. C. Imbert: Sure, sure.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Through you, do you have any idea of how much money is outstanding and how much you think you may recover or receive from this measure?

Hon. C. Imbert: Yes. I have been speaking to the Board of Inland Revenue about this matter for some months now and the latest estimate given to me is about \$500 million. That is what they told me. Of course, the proof for the pudding is in the eating and we will see.

Where any returns, taxes and levy remain outstanding after September 16, 2016, the penalties, interest, further taxes and additional taxes which would have been payable will be revived and become payable as if the waiver have not been granted. I want to repeat this, after September 16th, that is it, all applicable penalties and interest will be revived and will become due and payable. So all those business people outside there and individuals, please, make your best effort. If you have outstanding taxes, pay them by September 16th. If you have annual returns to be filed for your companies, do so by September 16th.

This amnesty is meant to give the citizens the opportunity to honour their tax obligations to the State without penalties and interest accrued over the years. After the period, the State will utilize the full extent of its authority to ensure that compliance with the relevant legislation is followed as we seek to make good on our receivables and our tax base.

As I indicated, we are also assisting with an amnesty with respect to the filing of returns. This allows companies to be compliant with section 516A of the Companies Act. The Companies Act provides that a person or company deliver to or file with the registrar certain documents. Any failure to comply with the Act, in this regard entitles the registrar to collect from that person or company a penalty of \$300 for every month or part thereof that the person fails to deliver or file a document.

Madam Speaker, I have received many letters from NGOs, charitable organizations, who did not know that I was going to come with an amnesty because I could not tell them, and it seems that a lot of NGOs and charitable organizations have no understanding of the requirement of filing annual returns. And I want to make an appeal to all NGOs, charitable organizations, not for profit organizations and so on, please file your annual return. Because when I look at the

correspondence that I have received some of these NGOs owe penalties in excess of \$20,000. Some of them have never filed their returns after their first incorporation.

So all of us as Members of Parliament, I appeal to Members on both sides of the House, if you are familiar with any charitable, not for profit or non-governmental organization in your constituencies, please get the message out, they must file their annual returns. There are many of them now who are not compliant. They now have a window of opportunity of just over two months to file the returns. It is a simple procedure, please try and educate your constituents. I am amazed at some of the correspondence I have got from religious organizations in particular, who have said they did not know they have to file annual returns, but they have incorporated themselves as limited liability companies and so on.

So really we need to get that message out. And the filing of these returns is essential for investigations and information on returns provide a snap shot of key company information available to the public in the verification of details, very important details, like the directors of these entities, their registered office, their shareholders and so on. These are very, very important pieces of information the public has a right to know. I want to stress that the waiver of the penalties for not filing returns is subject to the companies' fulfilling their obligation to file and deliver all necessary documents by September 16th.

And now, Madam Speaker—how much time do I have left?

Hon. Member: Twelve minutes.

Hon. C. Imbert: That is plenty time. I wish to turn to two key measures. One is, renewable energy. I have spoken to this at length. The measures in the Bill, I believe, are self-explanatory, but what we are seeking to do is to waive all taxes on electric vehicles, CNG powered vehicles and hybrid vehicles of a certain size and a certain power. We will adjust the size of the engine, the power of the engine and so on, as time goes by. It is an improvement on what was there previously. We have increased the capacity of the engines of the cars that will be eligible for this incentive and I really would like to urge all citizens to now take advantage of these incentives with respect to electric powered vehicles, hybrid vehicles and CNG powered vehicles. It will allow us to reduce our fuel subsidy; it will allow us to reduce emissions; it will allow us to conserve, Madam Speaker, and it will bring Trinidad and Tobago into the modern era.

I saw an advertisement today—I do not want to promote any company, but I saw an ad with a car, I think it is an electric car, in the newspapers today. It is a

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midsize sedan and in researching this topic, while in the past, I am aware that several years ago the only hybrid vehicles that were available were either very small or very large. So you had like the Toyota Prius, which is a small vehicle and then you had very large sophisticated SUVs and large engine vehicles, but the manufacturers have adjusted the type of vehicles that they manufacture and they now offer midsize vehicles and vehicles that are quite suitable for families.

So I do not think I need to—I would answer any questions anybody has about these issues, but I do not think I need to go into more detail about the removal of Customs Duty, Value Added Tax and Motor Vehicle Tax on electric vehicles, hybrid vehicles and CNG vehicles. I do not think I need to explain why and I do not think there is anybody in this Parliament, unless I am mistaken, who will object to this measure. If you have any questions, I will be happy to deal with them when I am responding in my winding up.

Dr. Gopeesingh: You want to give way—

Hon. C. Imbert: Sure.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Is this vehicle 1799 ccs or less or 1999?

Mr. Al-Rawi: 1999.

3.00 p.m.

Hon. C. Imbert: 1999.

Dr. Gopeesingh: All right. Okay.

Hon. C. Imbert: That is why I said I adjusted—it used to be 1799 and I thought that was a little bit too small. That sort of left a lot of vehicles out of the loop. So I brought it up to 1999, and there are many vehicles outside there that are 1999 ccs or below, and the power of the engine that I put in there is quite adequate in terms of electric powered vehicles.

With respect to the construction sector, there is a current incentive for the exemption from income tax, gains or profits, derived from the initial sale of a residential house site being part of a land development. The incentive is available where the proceeds of the initial sale of a residential house site were received on or before December 31, 2018. As I have said in a previous speech before this Parliament, I do not think when this measure was introduced there was a proper understanding of how long it takes to get a project going. It could take you four years to get the approvals, one year to get the bank loan and then you just have

two years after that to build it. This is with respect to the previous exemptions. So that in order to allow developers, such as the Member for Tabaquite—nobody “ain’t” fighting with you. And let me just say at the outset, Madam Speaker, let me declare my interest, I have been a property developer before and I intend to be a property developer in the future. And let me declare my interest, I may benefit as an individual, as will the Member for Tabaquite and—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: And me.

Hon. C. Imbert: Well, you have to declare your own interest *[Laughter]* from the measures in this legislation. I just want to say that upfront. Okay? But I am sure that there are hundreds—*[Interruption]*

Dr. Gopeesingh: You cannot cut off business when you are with others.

Hon. C. Imbert: I said in the future. I said in the past—*[Interruption]*

Dr. Gopeesingh: After 2017?

Hon. C. Imbert: 2025. That is what I am going to explain now, that the exemptions are being extended for land developments, residential house sites, commercial buildings and multi-storey car parks, which commenced on or after October 01, 2012, which are currently due to expire in 2018, these exemptions will now remain in effect until December 31, 2025. So it is a long time from now, Member for Caroni East. This is why I said I have benefited in the past and I might benefit in the future. And as I said, the reason is because of the length of time that the construction of buildings takes including approval process.

Madam Speaker, we have also introduced a new measure, which was not included in the previous measure, which is the exemption from tax, premiums and rents derived from the letting of a newly constructed multi-family dwelling unit. So we had commercial buildings before, car parks and residential house sites. We are now including multi-family dwelling units, and there will also be an exemption from income tax, just like the current measures, gains of profits from the sale of such newly constructed multi-family dwellings. Again, the construction of the multi-family dwelling unit must have commenced on or after the coming into force of the Finance (No. 2) Act, 2016, but I will entertain suggestions on that.

Similarly, as the measures for residential house sites and commercial buildings, it is proposed that this new incentive for multi-family dwelling buildings remain in effect until December 31, 2025. And, Madam Speaker, without going into any more detail, I think I have covered everything and I

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welcome any suggestions from Members on this side. I get the feeling that the House is in a collaborative mood today. Please prove me right. Do not prove me wrong. I hope if there is any issue that we need to resolve we can resolve it, and I give the undertaking if there is any suggestion that hon. Members wish to make that make sense and is in the interest of all concerned and the national population at large, that we will deal with it when we return in September and make any necessary amendments.

I might also say, there were some typographical errors because we did this legislation in a bit of a rush. I think Members have been circulated with a copy of the Bill that has some yellow shading in it where we have been tightening up a few—it is not many—typographical errors, and we will deal with this at the committee stage, or at some appropriate interval during this debate.

So with those few words, Madam Speaker, I beg to move:

That a Bill to provide for the variation of certain duties and taxes and to introduce provisions of a fiscal nature and for related matters, be now read a second time. [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Madam Speaker: Sorry. Member for Caroni Central.

Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie (*Caroni Central*): Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute on this Finance (No. 2) Bill, 2016. I must say that I welcome the disposition and approach of the Minister of Finance, and I think that not only is his approach and his tone and disposition welcome, but I think perhaps it—I do not know if it quite makes up, but it does soften the fact that this Bill was brought before this House on Friday while we were engaged in the debate on another Bill, and we are now debating this Bill here today. So in spite of that, I want to lodge what you might call a quiet protest on behalf of Members on this side of the House, because I do feel a Bill like this, which is a money Bill and which has important consequences, is something that we should be given some more time to address and study.

I listened to the Minister, his flexibility of approach and the fact that he is willing to accommodate any ideas, amendments, et cetera, I do think that that is a worthwhile progressive step in the life of this stage of the Tenth Parliament of the Trinidad and Tobago. Now this Finance Bill (No. 2) for 2016, we must not, or we must recall, comes as the second Finance Bill for this year. We had a tentative budget in September 2015, and then we had Finance Bill (No. 1). I think it will be

reasonable to ask, Madam Speaker, if anyone today remembers what was in that Finance Bill (No.1), or whether anyone can in fact recall any action that flowed from Finance Bill (No. 1).

Then we had the budget review in April of 2016. To many it was a sort of a let-down, even bigger than the September budget, I think on which most people in the country were charitable, and the end result now is that we have this Finance (No. 2) Bill of 2016. Now I want to say that we are now entering a period when the Parliament will be in recess and we will come back in September, and Ministry of Finance will bring another budget in September 2016. So we wait to see at that point what the Minister of Finance will bring for us, and we also look no matter the change in disposition today at whether any kinds of tricks will be played between now and September in the period in which the Parliament is not in session.

Now, let us look at the Finance (No. 2) Bill, what is it about really? It really is about variations and taxes having to do with, as the Minister himself outlined, in the first instance the visiting forces, and he specifically mentioned—but I suspect that if we were ever engaged with any other countries it would also relate to them, visiting forces from the United States based on legislation that was enacted in 2007. But in this instance, an amendment is being made to include visiting forces contractors who are not covered in the existing legislation. He said the Attorney General would explain perhaps if he needs to, and I really would like to understand it a little bit because it is not so clear here what covering contractors in this Bill is going mean, and I think citizens need to understand much more clearly what the fact that you are going to introduce contractors to be covered in this Bill actually means.

The reason I asked is because originally it was meant to cover representatives as I understand it of the armed forces. So that what you now have are contractors and contracted services to these armed forces, another appendage to what is covered under the existing parent legislation, the question that arises if all of these benefits are going to be transferred to these new entities that are going to be covered—remember we have passed an amended procurement law and I wanted to understand much more clearly what kind of services are going to be covered, what kind of contractors are going to be involved and what do we envisage in this mutually agreed relationship between forces from another country and a resident brought to Trinidad and Tobago for a mutually agreed purpose. So I think it is important to understand this and I need some clarity on this.

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First of all, what is the nature of the activity covered by the Bill in the first place, because it was meant to be temporary and it was extended? Secondly, that it now being amended to include not just the armed forces that were originally conceived as being covered in this Bill, but also the contractors, people whom they might contract. So the first parent Act that is being amended is the Visiting Forces Act, which is Act No. 8 of 2007, Chap. 14:04.

The Bill before us, the Finance (No. 2) Bill of 2016 also addresses another parent Act, and that is the National Insurance Act, Chap. 32:01, together with the National Insurance Contribution Regulations. Now what is being varied are both voluntary contributions, and the Minister explained that to us and the rate of benefits under the system. Now this Act, No 35 of 1971, has been amended 16 times so far as I look at the history of the Bill, and this is the 17th amendment that is going to be made, and in this particular instance the commencement dates for these improved benefits is now September 05, 2016.

3.15 p.m.

Now, we, on this side, would have no quarrel with the benefits for citizens who have worked hard and contributed to national development and contributed to the scheme and to employers who have also contributed to the welfare of their employees. But, I want to say, as the Minister himself hinted and as the actuarial report which he laid before the House some time ago indicates, that the national insurance system in the country presents a challenge for the country—he knows that—and we on this side have been aware for some time since, I would say, around 2013 or so. But the National Insurance Act was for a good—you might say it has been good for a time but in a real sense what is happening is that it is becoming inadequate to the needs of citizens in our time because citizens will be living longer, and in this context they will have more health challenges to attend to.

So if our approach as a Government in the last five years and our approach, had we been given a second term—and I am quite aware that we did not get a second term and that the Government consists of the Members on the other side—our approach would have been not just to deal with the national insurance issue but also to establish a comprehensive health insurance system in collaboration with the private sector. It is something that we committed to in 2015 publicly and it exists in documents and that would have been our approach. And we would have also addressed the issue of reform and refinancing of the national insurance system. This would have been part of a comprehensive strategy to establish a number of people-centred initiatives that are integrated.

Now, the reason I am making this point is that I am not denying that what the Minister is bringing before this House are a set of measures that really sort of derived out of the budget and review that he presented to the country but I do want to give the sense of how we think when we think of the business of people-centred development. So that we see a national health insurance scheme and a national—a comprehensive health insurance scheme in collaboration with the private sector and we see national insurance as something in which many other elements constitute a part. For instance, the widespread landownership on the basis of land for the landless policy; the widespread homeownership on the basis of a philosophical commitment to a home-owning democracy; the creation of a shareholder democracy starting with the state sector and encouraging the private sector to follow suit.

So that in the end, what you would have is a home-owning, landowning, shareholder democracy in which all citizens would have a stake. All citizens will have the opportunity to acquire equity and in which inequity would be managed for the peace, stability and good order that would become the norm in Trinidad and Tobago, and together with that, you have a health insurance scheme, very comprehensive, covering all people and a national insurance scheme that addresses the question of life after work or life in a situation in which one is no longer able to work for whatever reason. We put people at the centre when we were in Government and all our policies were integrated to serve them, and if we were to ever get another opportunity—and I am sure that the population will consider this—we will integrate our policies to serve the people whenever they should give us an opportunity again.

So the increasing contributions and benefits that the Minister of Finance is presenting, in a sense, is simply one aspect of a policy of any kind of people-centred strategy from our point of view. And I want to say that many of the—the proposal that he is making and I give a sense of fairness to the Minister in that he did say that these were things that we had, in fact, addressed and considered in 2013. So the NIS charges were initiated in the 2013 budget. I am sure the Minister would be aware of that. But for whatever reason, the NIB failed to implement the annual amendments. The series of increases in contributions coupled with increased benefits from our point of view and offered here by the Minister, in this Bill, is a good move, which we also would have implemented.

And we would have done this, increasing both the benefits and the contribution as a means of salvaging the NIS as an institution as the population ages and as people live longer and as the flow of funds now remains too small to

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sustain the kind of NIS system that we need in the country. But I want to add, again, that we would also have considered a national health system that would, in fact, make it possible for all people in Trinidad and Tobago to benefit in a significant way were they ever in need of health services in the country. This is not to deny that most of the public health services in this country are free by and large in Trinidad and Tobago.

Now, what do we need from the Minister of Finance given what he has already told us? I think what we would need from the Minister of Finance—and I hope he will tell us something about this in his winding-up—is an update on what the projected status of the fund will be by the next tri-annual review. Okay? So you had your 2013 and I think we need to have an understanding of what is likely to be by the next tri-annual valuation—if these charges, as they will be passed today, will be implemented as proposed. So what difference will it make three years hence? Now, that is what the Parliament and the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago need to know. We need to assess, therefore, the sustainability going forward of the NIS.

The Minister of Finance also needs to tell citizens and this honourable House, Madam Speaker, what he will be doing with regard to NIS for the self-employed? Now, he did not consider this during this year and it is possible that he may consider it at some point in the future. Our Government had started work on this and I am sure he will find some documentation on that in the Ministry of Finance. There is a challenge that any Minister of Finance would have to consider because the NIS for the self-employed can put a strain on the system. We learnt that as we tried to implement this measure and tried to take it into consideration. But if it is well thought through and changes are made in the contribution rate, a sustainable NIS system would be very well established and we will be able to manage it properly in the best interest of all of all our people. Right now, self-employed people are not covered by the system. It is something that we have always been concerned about and we would like the Minister to take that matter into account as well.

Now, the third piece of legislation—and the Minister did not mention this too much—was the issue of the motor vehicles. I do not think you mentioned too much about that. He did talk about the hybrid cars and the electric cars. But the third piece of legislation is the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, Chap. 48:50, Act No. 42 of 1934. Now, this has been amended 92 times. I again looked at the background. So it is a piece of legislation that has been with us from colonial times and which we have amended on several occasions. This time, the

amendment is to exempt from taxes: vehicles manufactured to use compressed natural gas; new and used electric vehicles of certain engine size and in this particular case, he has taken it up to 1999, and also, he has included in the system for tax exemption, new and used hybrid vehicles. This is to give effect to fiscal measures outlined in the April 8th budget review. Now, the expiry date for this is December 31, 2020.

So if this is conceived as a measure to reduce carbon emissions and to change human behaviour in terms of the motor vehicle marketplace and in fact the Minister outlined both of these two as objectives, and it is also meant to reduce the proportion of gas and diesel used by guzzling cars on the road—and the Minister also mentioned this because he mentioned affecting the fuel subsidy—and knowing that we have about 700,000 vehicles now on the road, we, therefore, need to establish a monitoring system that would let us know if what we are doing is working and by how much the patterns are changing and the level by which carbon emissions are reduced as we travel to 2020, which is the closing date for this particular measure.

Now, if we were—[*Electronic device vibrates*] Madam Speaker, my apologies. If we were the Government today and, again, I acknowledge that many people decided in 2015 that you should be the Government. But if we were the Government, action would already have been taken within the first 120 days to initiate energy conservation measures in all Ministries. We have that in our first 120-day plan in our manifesto and also in government buildings. And the objective would have been to achieve a 20 per cent reduction in energy use by 2020 and that is on page 21 of our manifesto.

We would have initiated action to actualize our commitment to a green economy, something which we committed to. What is a green economy? Well, in a green economy, growth in employment and income should be driven by public and private investment that reduced carbon emissions and pollution and enhanced energy and resource efficiency and prevent the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services. So some of the industries, the industrial areas that would have been affected by this are the energy industries, agriculture, tourism, manufacturing, forestry, fishery, water management sectors and sub-sectors. All of these providing viable options for diversification with green economic potential.

We, the People's Partnership, had targeted knowledge-based industries, food production and processing, ethnic products, services industries, maritime industry, biotechnology, information technology, high-tech manufacturing, alternative energy and third and fourth generation renewable energy industries.

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3.30 p.m.

The green economy concept, therefore, embraces social, economic, environmental alignment and harmony. The paradigm of the green economy lends itself, therefore, to a promise of survival, growth and sustainability, while protecting ecosystem, value and which subsequently contributes to poverty eradication.

The reason I am raising these issues is because, again, I understand that the Minister is limited by the fact that what he is bringing here are fiscal measures that have to do with presentation made for the budget and for the budget review and commitments made to the Parliament and the population. But the reason I am outlining these is that these fiscal measures, all, when they relate to individual things, also have implications for wider and grander policy. And, therefore, if carbon emissions reduction is an issue, if making the economy sustainable and green is an issue, then the policy approach to these things have to be much more comprehensive and much better integrated than we have seen so far from the Government.

So green policies, for instance, would include land use policy and building approval policies. They would include investment promotion policies in clusters identified, and in our sense, in the sense that we understood it, the growth pole concept for spreading development throughout the country.

There would also be zones of economic development committed to green industry development. A dedicated thrust to greening the entire existing manufacturing sector to the extent that it could be done; energy conservation policies in all Government and state-owned facilities, I mentioned that; conversion to CNG of the transportation sector on a phased basis, beginning with state-owned vehicles and public transportation and enlightened procurement policy to support green industry practices. All of these things would form part of a policy. And that would include also the establishment of national parks, the establishment of protected areas, of special development zones to stimulate green practices. It would include active promotion of ICT-based services sector for export expansion and we would be setting into motion now our comprehensive transportation and traffic management initiatives.

Now, what would these have included? They would have included transit hubs for population concentrated areas. It would have included dedicated school bus transportation. It would have included dedicated bus services for industrial estate workers. It would have included a predictable north-south/east-west rapid bus

systems. So our approach was not rapid rail at all, it was in fact to use the modes of transport best known, best appreciated, best understood by our population, and we would have established in fact a rapid bus transportation, which I hope, perhaps, the Government might consider.

It would have included park and ride facilities in Arima, Tunapuna, Sangre Grande, Chaguanas, San Fernando and Port of Spain. And I see that the Minister mentioned today the park and ride facilities, the construction of these facilities with incentives, and I commend him on that because that is something that can actually work and make a difference, with private sector and public sector involvement.

It would have included as well decentralization and the relocation of Government Ministries and facilities. Because remember I mentioned the 700 cars? So the issue is not just to get people into buses that work. It is not only to get them to park their cars and ride the buses and other modes of transportation to work. It is also to decentralize, so all the traffic is not coming to Port of Spain from both east and south and west, you know, and that is part of the problem. So the decentralization was a very important part of that.

What this would have meant for us also, in terms of policy, is expanded networks of solar lighting. It would have involved security, for instance, for maxi-taxi centres. All of these things would have been part of a comprehensive and very, very integrated, planned strategy for development of a country in a sustainable way, but also a recognition that we had to move away, not only in diversification terms from oil and natural gas only, fossil fuels especially, but that we also had to green the economy in a certain way in order to create jobs that were connected to a new economy that was not energy dependent.

Now, with regard to the tax break specifically, in this particular Bill, for hybrid and electric vehicles, if you look at the Finance Act of 2015, that is to say, when we were in Government, you will see that we removed MVT, the motor vehicle tax and we also removed VAT, value added tax. We removed those in 2015, from hybrid and electric cars one year ago. We did this for cars at the level of 1599 ccs engine.

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

Dr. B. Tewarie: Yes.

Madam Speaker: You may proceed.

Dr. B. Tewarie: I would try to complete within that time and, perhaps, before Madam Speaker. So what the Minister of Finance has done today is that he is continuing our policy by extending the policy, and I hope that he will admit that, and he is also sweetening the deal a little bit, with an increase in engine size to 1999 ccs, in the case of hybrid and electric cars.

Indeed, a number of initiatives before the House today, in this particular Bill, had their genesis in our time, and what the Government is now doing is basically carrying on with good and enlightened policies of the People's Partnership Government [*Desk thumping*] in the instances in which the main beneficiaries are the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

But I want to shift gears a little bit and I want to say that, so the main point that I am making is that some of the measures continue our policy. Secondly, that you have to see our policy in terms of a more integrated and comprehensive policy framework in all the things that he is doing. Thirdly, I want to shift gears a little bit, because you cannot do what the Government is doing forever, simply tinkering with the system at this time. Because this Government, because of the situation in which we find ourselves, must address the issue of balance. They must address the issue of adjustment. They must address the issue of expenditure management. They must address the issue of revenue management. They must address the issue of stimulating growth. All of these things are required now.

So, I will talk to that particular issue in a minute. But I do want to deal with the income tax issue where a tax amnesty is given to delinquent individuals and corporations, where a 25 per cent tax credit is given for the conversion of CNG and the tax waivers related to renting or selling of a multi-family dwelling until December 2025.

Now, let me mention that the 2014/2015 incentives for the purchase of new and used hybrid and electric vehicles were provided as I mentioned before. In 2016, we intended to apply these initiatives to larger engine hybrid vehicles, and the Minister has done that. You are getting there. And in 2015, we did it for a certain size. You have increased the size. We support that.

I want to say though that in 2015, 10 per cent of the PTSC fleet was converted to CNG. Just so you know, and the population knows, Madam Speaker, our commitment was to convert the entire PTSC fleet to CNG by 2018. I do not know if the Government will pursue that policy but I would think that it is a desirable policy. It has already started. It is a question of continuity. What is your plan for this? Our commitment was also to mandate large fleets in the governmental sector

like WASA, TSTT, Petrotrin, and we had already begun in Petrotrin and WASA, to fully migrate to CNG by 2020, and it had begun. What is your plan? Are you going to pursue that?

The new network of CNG stations to support this began a roll out in 2015, and your Government is continuing the roll out. I know the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries is very keen on this and I want to offer congratulations in this regard, because the objective was also to facilitate by a collaboration, the maxi-taxi fleet on the road. So that we could get the conversion in the private sector. If the Government pursues this policy I think the country will benefit. I think the citizens will benefit. I think we would benefit internationally by carbon emissions reduction and I think that we will move into an era of much more enlightened sustainable development.

I want to remind the Minister of Finance though and this honourable House and citizens of this country that we put in place benefits for construction that are being extended here today and the Minister did mention that. He said we ended it at 2018. His interpretation was that we did not understand how long it takes to get a building started, to get the construction to begin. It was really that we were trying to, you might say, force or put the pressure on, in terms of time, so that we would get the economy moving on the construction sector, so to speak, and, therefore, we put a limited time. We lobbied very heavily in 2015, to extend the time and we had every intention of extending the time and had we been in Government we would do it as we you are doing it now. So, we have no problem now. We have no problem with the extension. We think all of this thing is good for the country. It is good that construction creates jobs, that investors and entrepreneurs are given incentives to engage the economy positively.

Now, I said I would get back to this issue of the changed circumstances in which we find ourselves. The IMF in their report on Trinidad and Tobago actually suggests and forecasts that we could have a growth of 2.3 per cent, in 2017 and a growth of 3.2 per cent in 2018. The reason that they can make these projections is because bp Juniper exists. It is because bp and EOG Resources Sercan exists. It is because bp Onshore Compression exists. These three projects, together, have the potential of increasing natural gas production by about 28 per cent more than it is now in Trinidad and Tobago.

By October next year, Juniper will begin to feed into the system. How is this possible, when in the last 10 months all the Minister of Finance has been doing is criticizing and condemning the incentives which the People's Partnership

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Government gave [*Desk thumping*] and crying down the energy companies which are investing in our country and basically making statements to intimidate and frighten long-term investors in our energy industry?

So, how can IMF predict growth on the basis of increased natural gas production and energy sector growth? It is because the People's Partnership Government gave the incentives necessary, Madam Speaker, to make drilling and new production possible. So, now we will receive in 2017, the benefits of the People's Partnership policy. Gas from bp Juniper, more gas from bp EOG Resources Sercan, more gas from bp Onshore Compression.

3.45 p.m.

For a decade because of PNM policies of short sightedness, there was no new drilling or investment for either oil or gas exploration in this country. Drilling started after this decade of drought, when the People's Partnership introduced incentives to stimulate exploration. Trinidad and Tobago, if you look at the energy map of the world, is one of few places in the world where bp is actively drilling, because of what our Government did in 2010 and after. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, having said that, I want say that I have a little concern about something. I have a little concern about something, well, because part of the Bill has to do with the amnesty on taxes, part of which is, in fact, petroleum taxes. I want to talk a little bit about the fact that—I wonder if the Minister of Finance would use this opportunity to explain something for me, which is that we have said in this Parliament and in different places, that we expected that on the basis of taxes, dividends, TGU payments, the IPO from Phoenix Gas, and a bank loan of \$1 billion entered into in 2015, that we were set in motion to bring in \$13 billion by the end of October 2015.

Now, this was more than sufficient to wipe out what the Minister likes to talk about, this \$9 billion Central Bank overdraft and so on. Now, what I want to know is, did he collect that money, and what did he do with it? If my calculations are right, by the end of the third-quarter this year, the Minister of Finance and this government will have collected—as the Minister correctly said—the quarterly payment of taxes to the tune of about \$27 billion, at a quarterly cash-flow rate of about \$9 billion. So at least \$18 billion should be in already. So \$18 billion and \$13 billion, which was meant to be collected by the end of October 2015, would make a total of \$31 billion, and the other \$9 billion from the third quarter would make it \$40 billion.

So, since September 07th, 2015, the Minister of Finance and his Government would have collected \$40 billion up to the end of the third quarter this year. If

funding is late, at the very minimum, you would have about \$31 billion. I am not saying this in a contentious way, and I am not asking this as a wicked question. I simply want an explanation. Did you collect \$13 billion as we indicated? Are you going to collect \$27 billion based on three quarters of receipts? And what has this money been used for? And what is it being used for by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago? I also see no mention in this document, of cigarette taxes in the Bill, which he announced in April. I also see no mention of alcohol taxes which were mentioned in April. I also see no mention of online sales tax, which he also mentioned in April. So where is the income generation plan and revenue generation plan in this Finance Bill for 2016? So I want the Minister to answer a little bit about what is happening on the revenue side. Where is the plan of the Government to stimulate investment and growth? Do you have any plan for that? [*Desk thumping*] Do you have any plan for anything except the fiscal measures that you have brought here today?

Now, if you listen to the population and you treat with the population outside, you realise that the population is seeing and feeling that nothing, absolutely nothing is happening in our country. The business and consumers alike cannot see or feel that the Government is getting off the block; they feel that governance is at a standstill, they feel that the economy has been put on hold. People can feel that, people can see that. People are talking about it. Do you not think, Minister of Finance—and I raise this to you, because of the road-show issue that you mentioned. Do you not think, Minister of Finance, through you, Madam Speaker, that the rating agencies will see through all of this? Do you not think that the rating agencies will behave as rating agencies generally behave, and look through the veil to see exactly what is happening in terms of fiscal, monetary and economic policy? Look at how you, Minister of Finance, had been mismanaging the process, in my view, of raising new loans?

Moody's downgraded us at the end of March. The borrowing limits were approved by this Parliament at the end of December. Do you think our rating is going to be headed upwards or downwards? What do you think will happen to our projects going forward if you proceed with the policy that you have now, which reflects on the population as doing nothing? What do you think the market will be like now, after Brexit? Look at the fall in commodity prices, urea, methanol, ammonia. Why did you not phase your local borrowing to keep capital expenditure going, instead of guiding the country into a standstill? Why did you not use local banks to meet local payment obligations? [*Desk thumping*] Why are you going to the US to raise money?

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, your additional time has expired.

The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I thank you for the opportunity to join in this debate, in relation to the Finance (No. 2) Bill, 2016. Before us is a Bill which is 11 clauses long, including short title commencement. We seek to amend nine laws in particular.

Madam Speaker, one would normally start by responding to the contribution of the previous speaker, and perhaps I ought to do that at the start. I do appreciate that there was a lot that could have been done by the last Government, a lot that should have been done by the last Government, and that there was a lot of trajectory and planning that goes into the mix, but regrettably and quite simply, it was not done. We are here to deal with a Finance (No. 2) Bill, 2016. It is essentially to convert certain promises and undertakings provided for in the budget, into law, mainly with the purpose of ensuring that either taxes are collected, or benefits are applied.

We seek to traverse a few laws only. However, some of them stand out quite starkly. I would leave for the hon. Minister of Finance, the many questions posited by the last speaker. Obviously, suffice it to say, the Minister of Finance has been on record in explaining a host of issues, be it the need to borrow US dollars, because of the deficit in the economy, in terms of the receipt of US dollars, as a result of the collapse of oil prices, and as a result of the provision of tax holidays, which were given, one would think it axiomatic that it would be more prudent to search for US dollars—\$1 billion into the economy, is certainly something which is required by the economy right now. So the hon. Member having ask, why not borrow from local banks and local dollars, in certain senses, in one sense, that can be taken in a different point.

Madam Speaker, the laws which I propose to focus upon in particular, in this Bill, have to deal with three areas of the Bill. The first one would be, to touch upon the questions asked by the hon. Member, with respect to the Visiting Forces Act, that is SOFA Agreement as it is referred to. The second area which I propose to focus upon, would be the Companies Act, and the third area which I propose to focus upon, would be the benefits which are being given, if I could just simply categorise it in the construction sector.

May I start first with the SOFA or the Visiting Forces Act? The hon. Member asked for an explanation, as to what is being given in terms of benefits to entities, what kind of services, what kind of contractors? He asked about the mutual

relationship, and he focused upon the fact that this is being dealt with in the law is we do now, in seeking to amend the Visiting Forces Act, Chap. 14:04.

Permit me to offer an explanation as follows, Madam Speaker. The background behind this amendment is to be found in international obligations, between Trinidad and Tobago and the United States of America. Specifically, we are looking at the Status of Forces Agreement, between the Government of the Republic Trinidad and Tobago and the Government of the United States of America, and there is some history to this particular point which I think I am obliged to put on record now.

The first thing is that this SOFA, as it is referred to, is not the first of its kind. What, in fact, stands as a springboard for this particular amendment now, started in 2009, when the Summit of the Americas was being held, and the United States of America entered into treaty obligation with Trinidad and Tobago, specifically in/or around April 2009, I believe it was April 01st. The agreement then was specifically to allow visiting forces from the United States of America, to attend into Trinidad and Tobago for the purpose of the engagement of the Fifth Summit of the Americas; that came with associated benefits.

Coming out of that relationship with the US, we saw the birth of technical assistance and certain aspects of training. I am putting it in very simple terms. Of course, there was a significant amount of work done for the Summit of the Americas, but suffice it to say, that agreement proved to be so useful that it was, in fact, extended in April 2009 for one year, and that came to expire in September 2009. It was then agreed by the last Government to be extended in 2011 and in 2013, and it expired in September 2015.

So the last Government would have had the experience of having had the SOFA operate by way of two extensions of time. There was the obvious benefit of training that was passing to and fro, specifically Members opposite would have had the agreement—and I wish put on the record—there would have been a note from the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, the actually agreement itself would have been tabled at the last Cabinet, and that agreement, in fact, is almost in identical terms, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2015.

So what is being put into law now springboards from a form of agreement which both the last Government, now Opposition, has had, and which this Government has seen benefit in. What we treat with in terms of the legislation right now is specifically amendments to the definitions clauses, so that we can get

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some clarity requested by the Customs and Excise Division. Specifically, the term “visiting forces contractors”, is being defined right now, because we are moving away from the limited definition, where there was an association only to police, visiting police forces and going to the broader contracting forces.

But the contracting forces is one which is carefully applied. First of all, there are two safeguards. One, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago must agree to that which is being requested. Secondly, the Minister must certify that as a subset of point one. But the second caution is that it is not on a reciprocal basis, meaning Trinidad and Tobago is not obliged to deal with this from a demand perspective. It is subject to Trinidad and Tobago’s agreement, and it is specifically intended to allow for the hiring of contractors, be they local or be they foreign, when visiting forces are here, to allow them to actually carry out work and to provide the concession which is a comity between states. So there is nothing sinister behind this. It is formalizing the difficulties which were observed by the Customs and Excise Division, in all of the previous SOFAs that stood in existence in the period 2009 come to date.

4.00 p.m.

Dr. Tewarie: To clarify two things. Am I hearing you correctly in saying that the request must come from the United States and we must agree and it is not the other way around, first of all? And, secondly, that the extension involves these contracting services; in this particular instance, it will only be foreign contractors according to the Bill. Can you explain to me what is the range of these contracted services that are foreign which accompany anybody else that comes militarily from the US?

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Sure, thank you hon. Member. Yes, in answer to your first question. It is not only a statement which I now make, but it is contained in the parent law. And with respect to the second position, the type of services, it is perhaps a matter of public record that the United States military has contracted out a vast number of their services. For instance, in many jurisdictions around the world, they use contracting entities together with them.

The Minister, of course, must be requested and the Minister makes the recommendations to His Excellency the President or instructs accordingly, because it is by Cabinet decision, and His Excellency the President prescribes. So it is to take account of the actual operationality by the United States of America. I want to stress something on this point.

I wish to press pause for a moment on a very important but related matter to this to say, I salute most profusely and offer warmest and greatest congratulations

to the Coast Guard of Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] who, having been trained by certain foreign entities, including the United States of America, conducted the largest drug bust in Trinidad and Tobago, \$39.5-odd million in pure cocaine intercepted on the seas in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Singh: That is not bigger than the Monos Island.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: I said the largest most recently. The Monos Island bust was 720, it was quite some time ago. But on this occasion people were caught red-handed, and the fact is this came about:

(a) by way of training;

(b) by way of coordinated information management between foreign entities, et cetera.

There have, in fact, been some other activities which I cannot speak about publicly, which have made a significant dent in the drug-trafficking trade as a result of intelligence-driven activity where major cartel members have been secured. What I can tell you, the message which came out from the coast guard—and I say this most sincerely, imagine what we could have done if we had offshore patrol vessels for the last five years. [*Crosstalk*] No, no, no. This has been said by the coast guard. [*Crosstalk*]

I say this because coming out of the SOFA arrangement and the intelligence-driven policing that we have now and the training which has been given, Trinidad and Tobago has had the benefit of a Government coming into tow, taking vessels procured by the last Government, putting it to work, but not sending them back because we have some disagreement or not. I have not been pejorative. I am just stating a point. [*Crosstalk*]

Now, I am hearing the hon. Member for Tabaquite talk about the OPVs being lemons. In the SOFA arrangement conducted by the College of Defence—is that what we call it?—most recently in Trinidad carried out by the United States themselves—here in Trinidad and Tobago, they brought their training in—it was at that very conference that the so-called lemons came up for discussion. I am only dealing with the talk from the Member for Tabaquite, because it was the British vessels that went to Brazil, and it was the Brazilian admiral who said: “How could you ever have given them up, your Trinidad class vessels?” So I do not accept that they were lemons, but let me not get derailed on this point. In fact, I believe there are 10 more on order.

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Madam Speaker, I want to turn to a very important area that this law treats with, and I would like to explain the connectivity of the plan which is afoot. We will see in this Bill there is a specific amendment to the Companies Act, Chap. 81:01. People simply latch on to the fact that we are talking about a tax amnesty, an amnesty with respect to the filings for company returns. I want to unveil today exactly how important a measure we have on the table right now and to connect the dots on what the Government is doing.

Perhaps I should start by putting onto the record some critical information in a different way, because it has never been done before. We have actually had amnesties with respect to the filing of companies' documents. In the period 10th October, 2011 to 31st December, 2012, one amnesty, and then again on the 1st of October 2014 to 31st of March 2015. But let me put the statistics out into the public domain now.

In terms of entities that are registered at the Companies Registry, we have two types: we have businesses and companies. Businesses are registered under the business names Act, the Registration of Business Names Act, Chap. 82:85, and then we have companies that are registered under the Companies Act, Chap. 81:01. Businesses, obviously, in this context, do not fall for the amnesty, but I just want to put the numbers onto the record.

Of businesses, meaning firms, partnerships, et cetera, and individuals, we should note: of firms under the Registration of Business Names Act, we have of firms, 22,585 firms on the register. Individuals who are trading as John Brown trading as X, we have 101,822 individuals, [*Interruption*] sole traders, et cetera. Companies, the current record shows as at 14th June, 2016, of the three classes of companies—that is non-profit, private-profit and public-profit—non-profit companies number 6,474; private-profit number 68,494; public-profit 82. Add businesses and companies, we have in terms of entities, 199,457; 75,050 of which are companies non-profit, private-profit, public-profit which fall under this particular Finance Bill which we are dealing with.

Now, I put those numbers into the record because Trinidad and Tobago is wrestling with criminality. In wrestling with criminality, this Government has said the Proceeds of Crime Act is not yielding the fruit that it should yield. Assets are not being forfeited. Why? Because the Proceeds of Crime Act is pegged to a conviction, a predicate offence. You must be convicted for a crime to go through the Proceeds of Crime Act to have the assets forfeited. We have had next to none in terms of efficiency. There are a couple of them.

The most famous case right now involves someone who is now at St. Ann's for medical observation, but we have not seen the efficacy and that has been observed in two very important places: one, in the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force Fourth Round Mutual Evaluation for Trinidad and Tobago, which has said—27 countries examining Trinidad and Tobago, they said: Look, you are going to be put into enhanced follow-up and required to significantly deliver on what you show your efficiency to be in terms of dealing with crime and money laundering, in particular, financing of terrorism in particular. They said: look, that is a poor score for your country.

But the second area which has come to observe this is the World Bank's National Risk Assessment which we met as a country, we met as a Government, and that national risk assessment which would be published very shortly, I can tell you, does not speak positively to an area of efficiency there. What we have right now in Trinidad and Tobago coming back to statistics, in companies of the 75,000-odd companies, 28,077 have not filed all of their annual returns; 29,912 have filed no annual returns at all, whatever. That is roughly 58,000 close to 68,000 entities.

Now, connecting the dots, if you look to the legislative agenda of the Government, you will notice if the Proceeds of Crime Act is not working, if you are not biting the big fish. Look, we have caught the drugs on the boat this weekend, the coast guard, \$39 million. Some people made the observation: "Well, is small fries yuh ketch. The fellas who driving the boat." Where was it going? Who sent it? Who gets the profit of crime? Very good concerns. The proverbial, Mr. Big—big fish, small fish, middle fish—people want to know where they are. This Government has committed, Madam Speaker, to taking the profit out of crime.

I want to say today when we seek to give the amnesty to cause the filing of companies' returns for nearly 60,000 companies odd—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: What?

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Yes. What we are doing—I am putting Trinidad and Tobago on notice—is that we are going to aggressively move behind all those defaulting companies in a very tight matrixed approach which I will explain in a moment. [*Crosstalk*] No, no, this is fine and I will tell you why. If you do not bring your annual returns up-to-date: one, the penalties are going to revert.

Let me give you the statistics behind the penalties. For the period 1998 to 2016, the total sum of penalties that can be applied—that is the \$300 per month

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per entity—hear what the figure actually is: 1998 to 2016, it is \$347,492,780 in penalties. One could argue that there could be a prescriptive period for the levying of taxation or penalties. If you were to take a six-year limitation period, the figure is actually \$88,343,000, just for filing returns. In fact, in 2011, 2012, come to date, total penalties collected for 2010, for example, \$15,700,000-odd; 2011, \$12,844,000-odd; 2012 it was \$2, because there was an amnesty; 2013, \$12 million-odd; 2014, roughly \$10 million, \$9,948,000-odd; 2015, \$9,556,000. So even though an amnesty was applied in 2014 there was still \$9 million in penalties collected. So point number one, if you do not file your annual returns, you are going to have the penalties brought back to you. You can see even after the provision of an amnesty in 2014 that is \$10 million-odd to the revenue.

Position number two: if you do not file, you will be struck off the register and when you are struck off the register, I want to put on to the record now, that we are looking in terms of strike-offs. We are looking at total number of non-profit companies struck off in 2011, seven; 2012, 31; 2013, 33; 2014, 117; 2015, 38. Total number of profit companies struck off: 2011, 298; 2012, 2,189; 2013, 1,034; 2014, 2,701; 2015, 523. For the total number of companies struck off each year then: 305 for 2011; 2,220 for 2012; 2013, we saw 1,067 companies; 2014, 2,818; 2015, 561.

Dr. Gopeesingh: What is the criteria?

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Pardon.

Dr. Gopeesingh: What is the criteria and the basis?

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Criteria for strike-off is if you have not met the annual returns filings, other documents filings, et cetera.

Now, I want to put on record, we heard the hon. Member for Caroni Central talk about continuation and what the last Government did, et cetera. I want to put on record the Compliance Unit that procured the figures and application of arrears which caused the strike-off, et cetera, that started in January 2010 under a PNM administration and commendably the last Government continued with the approach. We are now about, if I could use this phrase, to put it “on steroids”, and I would tell you why. The second point that I was making is strike-off, but the third point that I am making is a huge point. You will see on the legislative agenda that we are making amendments to the Companies Act, Financial Intelligence Unit Act, we are asking for consideration there, the Board of Inland Revenue; but in the Companies Registry, let me flag right now, we intend to unmask the beneficial owners.

4.15 p.m.

We intend to have equitable owners produced to the public so that you can no longer sequester assets using a legal nominee to hide a beneficial ownership. But let me connect the dots even further, the reason for all of this is that it ties into what has been recommended as a requirement for Trinidad and Tobago by the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force, and coming out of the national risk assessment, but it ties into our Government's agenda which is that we are going behind the profit of crime by hitting the hardest zone possible, explain your wealth legislation, civil asset forfeiture. You see, it is only after you clean up a company's register, it is only after you make beneficial ownerships known, it is only after you amend the laws of trust, and you will see it on the legislative agenda, so that you have declarations that you are going to be in a position to say, we know who you are. We are now going to say, if you cannot explain your wealth, you will lose your wealth.

So every drug man who owns a massive mansion, every person who is involved in corruption, who on paper earning \$5 a month, \$2,000 a month, and has assets coming through their nose that they cannot explain how they acquired, all of those people now unmasking the beneficial ownership are going to be called upon under the civil asset forfeiture regime, for which one can find precedent in Jamaica and in the Cayman Islands, under that regime you are going to be at risk of losing your wealth. Imagine, hon. Members, through you, Madam Speaker, if six speed guns could change the culture of Trinidad and Tobago, to cause this country to slow down overnight, imagine what the spectre of civil asset forfeiture, properly laid out on clean records, would look like.

You see, the last opportunities that we engaged in, twice under the last Government, nobody put forward the statistics. Nobody explained how many companies were in the mix. Nobody explained how much money was at risk. Nobody tied it into a larger objective. I am unveiling it today, this is how we will change our country. This is how we will grapple with corruption. This is how we will tell people, you better be able to explain how you have acquired this, because in our country if people are too afraid to step forward and give evidence, if everybody can say, this one corrupt, that one corrupt, so and so knows this. You know, that is a double-edged sword, because they label politicians, for instance, as corrupt people. Lots of people say, this one and that one, well, by this mechanism you do not have to label anybody again, you know, you will know, either you can explain or you cannot explain, either you have filed your taxes on time and paid what you have, or you have not, and you will have to explain.

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You see, tightening the net is the critical thing, and if the system did not work before, if proceeds of crime legislation did not work, if predicate offences did not work, you cannot get a conviction in court because, for instance, you have an enquiry—let us look at the Piarco Airport enquiry, no stones cast, but, look, as a country—[*Interruption*] No, I understand, I am talking about as a country—both persons who are accused who are under the gun and for the country, there is a balancing act. Surely the people who are accused want to clear their names, and deserve the right to do so in the shortest time possible, but the country also wants some resolution as well. There is a sense of frustration or hopelessness in our citizenry that says, well, look, John Brown could do anything they want because there is no consequence.

So let us look at that balancing act. Is it appropriate that we as a country—when was the airport built? 1999? 1999, we are now in 2016, there has been no resolution, we are still in the Magistrates' Court there. Seventeen years later we are in the Magistracy still, we have not reached High Court, Court of Appeal, Privy Council—seventeen years later. So if that is what is happening in Trinidad and Tobago, understand how nuclear a device civil asset forfeiture is. Understand what we can do if we come together, taking avail of simple techniques as we put forward in this Finance Bill now and clean up the register, bring 60,000 people into the daylight, and if they do not come into the daylight they will be treated as well, because we know where to go as well. Bring the revenue onto the table, but, importantly, when we come as a country to say, enough is enough, time to take the profit out of crime, that is where we will be doing this country a service.

Now let me add that further, my learned colleague, Minister Young, together with Sen. Franklin Khan, is championing campaign finance reform. We have seen the hon. Minister of Finance take the procurement legislation, brought by the last Government, supported, some fighting over the issues, but add public procurement, campaign finance reform, civil asset forfeiture, and understand how you tighten the net now. So that there are no longer any unknown beneficiaries behind political parties, so that procurement is brought into the light, because, let us face it, politicians come, politicians go. You would faster find dark spaces of corruption in those people that work in contracts with state enterprises or with Ministries, hardly ever you will find anybody in this country able to point with evidence to people who may sit in public life. That situation will change, however, if we as a country say, look, let us take a different approach, and it all starts with cleaning up your Companies Registry.

I want to say this, you would have heard that the Government is operationalizing the Government Campus project, the Legal Affairs Tower, now

the Attorney General and Legal Affairs Tower, et cetera, but in doing that what we have been doing is to go into the vaults, particularly at Legal Affairs division, cleaning the register one by one, book by book, and I wish to pay a compliment to the hard-working staff at the registry who work in intolerable conditions and circumstances, but migrating that data into the official record is so critical. I wish to also pay compliment to the Minister of Finance, not for this Bill today but for another very important mechanism. The Minister of Finance—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, your 30 minutes have expired, you are entitled to 15 more minutes, so you can proceed and we will take the break at 4.30.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: I will try to end before the break. Much obliged, Ma'am.

I wish to pay compliment to the Minister of Finance for balancing the accounts of Trinidad and Tobago, particularly from an information management perspective. In short, the hon. Minister of Finance is taking the data, putting it into a system where we can actually track receipts and revenue. And to Trinidad and Tobago, what that means when you bring your financial management system into the modern era is that you can have faster payments to contractors, you can deal with VAT returns, you can deal with set-off mechanisms perhaps, not speaking for the Minister of Finance, but inside of modernizing your data management at the Ministry of Finance you are moving to a whole-of-government accounting arrangement, and that has been the problem for us as a country.

So, what we have in our small neck of the woods is not a contest to see how many pieces of law you could pass, how many tick the boxes equations you can go through, what you really want to focus on as a country is in making sure you have operationalized these systems in a sensible approach as possible. And I have just given you some of the ideology and connectivity behind the Attorney General's mission, our mission, our office's mission, ably assisted by the hon. Minister in the Ministry of the Attorney General and Office of the Prime Minister, and many other hats that he is called upon to wear, Minister Young, in the pursuit of connecting the dots. I am also pleased to say that has taken us, for instance, in the AGLAs office to drive the very important amendments which the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee has set out for us, and the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee is one which is an extremely efficient Cabinet-appointed committee in a combination of manoeuvres, and we are progressing mutual assistance in criminal matters, amendments to the Proceeds of Crime Act, legislation for beneficial ownership, BIR and FIU amendments, money

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remittances, non-profit sector, civil asset forfeiture, of course assisted by whistle-blowing and anti-terrorism, because there is financing in anti-terrorism.

Companies that remain unclean—let me point out this, the drugs in the juice can, those transactions that allow the shipment of the juice cans to the United States of America happened via a defunct company on the register. The company had stopped filing returns, whoever perpetrated the crime noticed that the company was defunct, picked up the documentation for the company and simply shipped it under that end; that is the danger of not cleaning your Companies Registry. And that is why we have taken this opportunity, not only from a revenue perspective but, importantly, from a crime-fighting perspective to clean that register, tie it in with civil asset forfeiture, tie it in with unmasking beneficial ownership so that the country can see results, and I give an undertaking that best efforts are afoot, that if six speed guns could change our culture so significantly imagine what laws of this type will do. Go and read the jurisprudence in Ireland, which is a more draconian standard of civil asset forfeiture, and see what can happen in your country.

Hon. Members, there is perhaps reflection on the last point, in the four minutes I have committed myself to speak again—[*Interruption*] Oh, yes, and it is on this point as well. There are concessions given for developers in this Bill. It started commendably under the last Government. I remember when Sen. Bharath piloted it, but, unfortunately, there was not the mechanism to make it happen, or an appreciation of the time frame. So I believe only two people have applied, in that entire time since it came out, because the process and forms to get it done, what is to be supplied, who is to process it, how is it to be dealt with; none of the minutiae, the important minutiae was put onto the table, you needed the details. Now I must, of course, declare openly that I have an interest in this. I am, of course, in another incarnation, and wearing a different hat, I have developed many a property and site, and I have done so within the period of time since Sen. Bharath first piloted that, and I would be eligible, and I am eligible to make application under this law, as it exists right now even before it is extended, so I declare my interest openly.

But the fact is this, what we have before us now is a significant development, because I would like hon. Members to focus upon the fact that it involves concessions for sale of homes and leasing of homes, so that the initiative to the private sector is so significant that this is what can jumpstart your economy. The first thing that was required was to settle the economy, get the discipline back into Trinidad and Tobago, that, look, it is not every bill that you present that is going to get paid; it must be measured, there must be value for money, the cycles must

be clean and clear. The second aspect, of course, now that you have got your dust settled, find the money, find the balancing, and that must now be tied into the incentives to the business development. San Fernando West, San Fernando as a city can look forward to significant development as our waterfront project, as a commitment that has been given by the committee, and those that have spoken to this quite publicly, it is a priority item, as the Minister of Housing will attest in the arrangements that are afoot right now to better the public-private partnership arrangements so that the economy can be stimulated.

Find the money, settle the economy, create the incentives in a reasonable rational fashion in an adequate time frame and then you have got your economy kicking. So I am absolutely confident that in the months ahead of us, moving to the next budget, there are no surprises, there will just be smiles. And the smiles are the incentives that are there, palatable incentives, incentives which can be operationalized so that we as a country can now purchase the benefit of discipline, production and tolerance in a clean atmosphere.

Madam Speaker, I undertook to finish at the break, I am just about 10 seconds away, may I simply thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this Bill. I look forward to hon. Members contribution. We are looking at the point raised by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, and I am sure the Minister of Finance will assist with that in short measure. I thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Members, we shall take the suspension now. We will resume at five o'clock.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay. Members, we can resume for the additional three minutes of extra tea. Hon. Member for Tabaquite, you have the floor.

Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan (Tabaquite): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In beginning my contribution, let me also take the opportunity to extend my sincere condolences to the family of the late Prime Minister, Mr. Patrick Manning, and I do so on behalf of my wife and myself.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, just permitting me, but one of the things that I remember about Mr. Manning is his respect for protocol. When I was Mayor of Chaguanas, he came to Chaguanas on many occasions and if I may say this, almost on every occasion when he came to Chaguanas, some member of his security detail would

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contact me or even come to the office to notify me that Mr. Manning is coming to Chaguanas, and even asked whether I was attending the function and what have you. And sometimes he even made arrangements that I will be there before he arrives so that, as the first citizen of the Borough of Chaguanas, to be able to receive him. And, you know, that is one of the qualities that I really admired about the gentleman. May his soul rest in peace.

As I begin my contribution to this the Finance (No. 2) Bill, 2016, there are a couple points I want to make in relation to what the hon. Minister of Finance and Acting Prime Minister, Mr. Imbert, said this afternoon. He spoke about tax amnesty and the fact that people have an opportunity to file their tax returns and you save on interest payments and what have you. But I would like to raise for the notice of the Minister of Finance and for the Board of Inland Revenue, the other side of it, where so many persons have tax refunds to get for a number of years, but they have not been getting those tax refunds. And it is very disconcerting that you have paid up all your taxes, you have taken advantage of the benefits you were supposed to get whether it was the education of your child or your mortgage interest payments and so on, and now you have a refund to get and for many, many years these refunds have not been given and some are now exceeding six years. And I hope that this so-called limitation of six years does not apply and that people will, in fact, receive their tax refunds as due to them. And it might be interesting—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Imbert: Could you explain?

Dr. S. Rambachan: People have filed their tax returns and they have refunds to get and although the refund is showing up there, you know, you have a cheque to get, the cheques are not coming to you and you are not getting the refunds and it has been outstanding for a number of years for persons. So I think that is something, you know, I just wanted to draw to your attention.

The other thing that is interesting to me is with respect to the national insurance benefits that you spoke about and that section of this Bill. Now, what is being done there is laudable except for the matter raised by the Leader of the Opposition, where you do not want any unfair or any disadvantage to any particular person. And I am heartened by your promise to have this fixed in September.

But however, again, I want to take the other side of it. There are very serious issues with persons who go to get their final benefits from NIB and they find that

the record-keeping is not up to date. It takes a very long time for the processing to be done, and in some cases people die and do not end up getting the benefits due to them.

And then there is the whole issue of the way employers behave. We know of employers who keep collecting people's—deducting people's national insurance payments and then they do not submit those national insurance payments and people end up losing. And I wonder to what extent you should move as the Minister of Finance to ensure that there are some very harsh and tough penalties for people with respect—because if you are moving national insurance from 12 per cent to 13.2 per cent, and if you look at the table, you will see that it is not amounting to a small penny at all. For some persons it is going to be quite a large amount. For example, a person getting \$13,600 and over, the monthly contribution here in table D7 is now \$1,795 a month which amounts to \$5,385 a quarter or about \$22,000 a year.

And it is very disheartening that somebody is paying all of this national insurance and then they have problems with record-keeping. They have problems with this money being deducted and not sent in to the insurance company and what have you. I wondered whether we should not be looking at some very tough penalties for people who are delinquent in deducting people's national insurance payments. Because I do not think we understand the extent of this unless you really look at the amount of money that is payable by a person and the different salary ranges.

And when you think about it, you know, a person earning if you take—I am looking at “Voluntary Contributions” there, but if you take any, one of those dollars you will see that the rates are fairly high and, as a result of that, you do not people—Okay. If you take Table A9, \$13,600 and over per month or an average \$3,138 per week, you are looking at \$414 total contribution. Although the employee's contribution is \$138, employer's is \$270, but it is \$414. So it is still a lot of money that is involved. So I just simply want to know what you are going to be doing in order to ensure that people who are deducting people's money for national insurance are actually submitting these moneys, and when people get to the age of retirement or what have you, that people are not unfairly disadvantaged.

And finally, I would like you to look at the quality of service as a whole at the national insurance offices and some of the difficulties that people have. The way they are treated, the way they are spoken to, especially people who have served the country and have reached the age where they go there for their benefits and

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they are treated in a less than dignified and respectful manner. You see them lining up outside in the sun. You see the guards roughing them up, as I have seen it in Chaguanas and I think it is very bad. No public servant has the right or should be roughing up anybody at all coming for service. We have just raised the pay scales for public servants in this country and one expects that they will give service and that service will be underlined with the fact of respect for the people who go to those offices for service. And I make that point very, very strongly.

The other matter that you raised is the matter of hybrid vehicles and I thoroughly agree with you about the 1999 cc and engine size and so on. And now you are right. There are lots of vehicles. But you know what, Mr. Minister, is interesting? Last night I was trying to look at what are the prices of these vehicles in the foreign markets, new brand. And a Honda Accord hybrid is selling for US \$29,600 in the United States, \$29,600. If you multiply that by seven for the sake of argument, that is TT \$210,000; TT \$210,000. You are offering that vehicle in this country for no taxes. Right? What is that vehicle going to be sold for by Classic Motors when it comes to Trinidad? Would Classic Motors be selling that vehicle for the equivalent in the United States which is a market price? Or would we be paying \$400,000 for a \$210,000 vehicle? And I am very serious about that point I am making.

And therefore, the customer must exercise choice. And I am wondering if it is that firms in Trinidad—motor car firms—are going to exploit the consumers, whether the Government should not consider giving licences to individuals so they could import their own hybrid vehicles into Trinidad on an individual basis and not be exploited to that extent.

The idea behind it is for the Government to reduce the number of gas guzzling and diesel guzzling vehicles in Trinidad, and I agree with that thoroughly. I really, really agree with that. Then we must also find a way to protect the consumer. And the consumer must have choice and we must facilitate that choice so that that exploitation is not facilitated in the country. So that is something that you will have to look at. Because a Honda City CNG vehicle is \$150,000 in Trinidad. Right? And a Honda Civic is about 220-something thousand dollars. So you are telling me that with all those taxes off, all you are able to save the customer is just about \$72,000? Something seems, Mr. Deputy Speaker, not to be adding up and I think therefore, we have to have a situation where the customer and the consumer is not exploited in this particular country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Bill comes to the House at a very interesting time in the life of the economy; the life of the economy. It comes at a time when people

are looking very critically at the performance of the Government. And well, I think, even the Government will agree that there is a level of disenchantment, there is a level of anxiety in the population as people do not perceive that the PNM administration under Dr. Keith Rowley, Prime Minister, has a clear strategy for taking the country forward, for taking the country out of the economic desolation which is visible in what is really reduced economic activity, loss of jobs. But that is not as bad, Mr. Minister, as the social stresses in the society that people are undergoing.

5.15 p.m.

Just last night a woman in a domestic violence matter, she was chopped on her head, and the police report on every newscast is that they were arguing about finances in the home. And one wonders the extent to which these economic pressures and financial pressures are bringing about a different kind of violence in the homes as a result of economic and financial stress. So, things are happening in the country that did not happen before, and I am not making a blanket statement and attributing it all to the economy. But, again, we have to take note of it. We must take note of it, because there is some suffering that goes on out there that we might not really be aware of, because people are struggling. There are households, and my friend the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo will tell you in his constituency he would have come out, there are households in which people are really struggling to get a meal.

The people of La Brea, for example, in that constituency, they are marching all the time, up to today. They are marching and they are asking, “Where is our next meal coming from?” Why can we not get jobs in this area? It must be a terrible challenge for the Member of Parliament, a Minister, not to be able to put food on the table for her constituents in that particular area. So, there are real struggles in the country. And I am saying that in the context of this Bill to ask, how are we going to use the taxes that we are collecting, or the moneys that we are collecting in order to deal with these pressures in the society in order to really have real social redistribution in a manner that reaches the people who really need the facility of the redistribution of income and the “largess” of the Government.

But, all of that is predicated on how fast we get the economy back up, how fast we get growth in the country, how fast we are able to create jobs in the country, how fast we are able to put people back to work; how fast we are able to get people from the breadline to the work line. And that depends on the extent to which the Government would propose and present a plan that will be feasible, and

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a plan that will quickly bring the country back to growth. But, the general feeling is that the Government continues to flounder and it is like an Alice in Wonderland syndrome, not sure which road to take. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, it is true, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the objective of this Bill is to give value to the measures announced in the budget. But, you know, in a sense, this is really a mundane arithmetical exercise. An exercise in arithmetic. What is really necessary in this country is something very different. We can do this. There is no doubt, we will pass this Bill and these measures will be implemented. But it is not going to solve the problems of this country at this point in time. What is necessary in this country is for this Parliament to undertake a full debate on the state of the economy and the way forward. My colleague the Member for Caroni Central presented an alternative development agenda for the country, and therefore the country needs to hear from the Government exactly what is your developmental agenda, and listen to the Opposition also as to what is the alternative development agenda, because the Opposition is not just an Opposition, it is a government-in-waiting, waiting for the next election to be returned to office to present that agenda. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it appears that the price of oil and the price of gas are going to be settling for a long while at \$50 and at about \$2.75 for gas. And we will have to learn to live with that. How do you say? You have to cut the cloth to suit or to fit the circumstance. I agree with that. What we do not necessarily agree on is the strategy to revive growth and economic activity in the country. That is where I think we are different. That is what my colleague the Member for Caroni Central was pointing out. We agree that we will have to live with a \$50 oil, maybe \$2.50/\$2.75 gas. We agree with that. But what we do not agree between Government and Opposition, is on the kinds of strategies being implemented to revive growth and economic activity, the strategies to ameliorate the hardships and the adjustments that are a necessary part of the process at this particular time in our history. We cannot have a wait-and-see-what-will-happen attitude. And one gets the impression that there is a wait-and-see kind of attitude. One gets the impression that what we are doing in this country at this point in time at the level of Government is every week or every fortnight we sit down and say, let us see how much money we collect today; let us see how much police fines we get; let us see how much speeding tickets we get. Collect all the money and then say, well, this is the money we have, let us see how we can now distribute it in terms of priorities. That is how we seem to be operating.

But, what are we doing really to have long-term investments that will bring long-term sustainable income to the country beyond oil and gas? And that is where we focus. We have talked too long about diversification. You know, I listened to the economists in this country commenting on what the Government is doing, or what the Opposition has done, and so on, all after the fact. But I am not hearing anything creative coming from the lips of the economists in this country as to what should be done, or some proper advice given to this country. And I am very serious, it is always after the fact.

Mr. Singh: They only know the word.

Dr. S. Rambachan: You understand? It is after the fact. You know, this is where the paucity of the intelligence of the university comes to mind. The university should be providing leadership in terms of where this country goes, in terms of economic analysis and prescriptions, but they are not coming forward with that. I have nothing against the university, you know. I have nothing against the university. But there comes a time when you have to say what has to be said. This is a nation of analysts and talkers, but we are very short on action in this society. And those of us who take action, we subject ourselves to criticism. But it is action that will take us forward and not a wait-and-see approach, and we have to do that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, at a time when we need therefore to increase economic activity, and when the private sector is choosing, in my view, in a real sense to be cautious—and one has to respect that—in that regard you have to come out and admire the decision of the Ferreira family to invest in the multistorey car park in Port of Spain. That is admirable, and I hope that other private sector initiatives also take place in the country. But at a time when we need to increase economic activity, and when the private sector might be choosing to be cautious, limiting their investments, I believe that the Government is failing us and failing the country. Because it is at a time like this that the Government should be stepping in to fill the investment gap. If they do not then things are going to get worse in the country. We gave the Government the leeway to borrow \$50 billion; from \$70 billion to \$120 billion, \$50 billion, and they could have used that gap to borrow more money locally, and to stimulate the economy. The longer you take to stimulate the economy, the worse it is going to become for the country.

Dr. Gopeesingh: It regresses.

Dr. S. Rambachan: And it is going to continue to regress. And the recession or depression, whatever it is, is just going to intensify. [*Desk thumping*] You

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know, I am by no means suggesting that we become wild spenders. Please! You know people used to tell me I was the cheapskate in the Government also. But, I am very serious about public funds and how they are spent.

But, the time has come for well targeted, what I call carefully determined target spending in areas of the economy which will achieve certain kinds of objectives. One, stabilize employment and stop the loss of jobs; create food security in the country. This nation has to feed itself and create food security for the future. If you do not have food security, you do not have democracy. Anytime you have to depend on another country to feed you, you have surrendered your democracy, and therefore food security is an important aspect of democratic functioning or democratic society.

We have to also bolster our foreign exchange earnings. On that point, Mr. Minister of Finance, it would be interesting to me to find out, in terms of the exports that we are making to Venezuela, how much—are we gaining foreign exchange or are we losing foreign exchange? How much foreign exchange—

Mr. Imbert: Yes, thank you. I thank the Member for giving way. There is a serious misunderstanding. The Venezuelans are paying our manufacturers in foreign currency before the goods are shipped to Venezuela. So, it is an inflow of foreign exchange. I do not understand why there is such a misunderstanding.

Dr. S. Rambachan: My point is—

Mr. Imbert: I am not finished. And the cost of inputs is less than the cost of the manufacture. So, it is a net inflow of foreign exchange.

Dr. S. Rambachan: Thank you for that, because that is what I wanted to hear that you have a net inflow of foreign exchange and not outflow. Because, you see, a point was raised on this very matter by the president of the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers Association, Dr. Rolph Balgobin, and this is in *Express* article of April 7th—no, June 29, 2016, *Trinidad Guardian* article I believe it was, 2016, and:

“...president Dr Rolph Balgobin”—that is the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers Association’s president—“claims the private sector is contributing to the ‘strain’ in the supply of foreign exchange by ‘moving US currency out of T&T in excess of their requirements.’”

What does this mean? Does this mean that they engage in illegal activity? Does it mean that they are paying money into bank accounts and overseas suppliers that does not equate to what they are importing in Trinidad?

And if Dr. Balgobin, a man of tremendous integrity, a former Independent Senator and what have you, head of the Arthur Lok Jack School of Business can come out and make this thing publicly, then I am sure he is not making this claim based upon superstition or supposition. But he is probably making this claim out of some kind of information base that he has. But he goes further; he went further to say that:

“...the private sector is ‘taking tax avoidance to new heights’, in that many large businesses are paying ‘far less tax than you might think’.”

And this is disturbing. Because, I am not saying that he is accusing the business community of tax fraud, but is this what is being suggested here, that companies are defrauding the Government of legitimate taxes, and this claim is being made by the president of the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers Association.

So, in the context of what we are speaking about here, I wanted to raise that particular matter, and I will welcome some response from the business community as to whether Dr. Balgobin is making an unfair comment, or making an unfair accusation against the business community. So, I am not saying that there should be wild spending, but I am saying that the Government, in the context of what the experiences of other economies have been in times of recession and depression, what have you, the Government has to step in, in order to fill the gap at a time when if they do not, the recession will get worse, and the economy will get worse. I am heartened by the fact that you are going to get US \$1 billion in investments overseas. I can see the advantage of that in that you are going to bolster your foreign exchange immediately by US \$1 billion, so the IMF might be very happy for that. But, I want to urge you to be careful how that billion dollars is also going to be distributed. Because I do not want another Jwala Rambarran situation here and you have to fire another Central Bank Governor. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: I did not fire him.

Mr. Singh: But we want to know the distribution of the foreign exchange.

Dr. S. Rambachan: But, that is the point. For example, you drew down on the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, US \$375 million. You brought it back to the Central Bank. How is that distributed? Who got that US \$375 million? How was that distributed? Why is it that after that injection, as it were, of money came into the economy, people still have trouble getting US \$200 a day?

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Mr. Minister, you know what US dollars are trading for in the black market right now? Seven dollars and eighty cents people are paying for a US dollar. Seven dollars and eighty cents they are paying for a US dollar. I am telling you that.

Mr. Imbert: I thank the Member for giving way. That money went straight to our foreign reserves. It did not go into the economy. It went into the reserves and was converted to TT dollars, which we then used in the economy. Okay? So, it increased our reserves.

Dr. S. Rambachan: And I am now saying to you, that you need to inject money into the economy as the Government. You need to. And you agree with that?

Mr. Imbert: Agree.

5.30 p.m.

Dr. S. Rambachan: And I would like to think that the sectors that lend themselves to an approach where you can give further tax incentive or bolster investments would be, food production, tourism, light manufacturing, food processing and other areas which should be identified as areas for product substitution and export. For example, Courts is one of the biggest importers of products into Trinidad, including furniture. But yet in this country we have one of the largest teak reserves in the world and some of the best woodworkers in this country. And I am wondering why is it we cannot begin to encourage our local artisans and woodworkers to begin to build furniture for export into countries where Courts also serves and gain foreign exchange from this country and increase employment in this country in a simple area like furniture manufacturing. And I am very, very serious about that. Rather than have our teak logs being exported and we are losing out in terms of the raw teak logs rather than the processing of the teak logs.

Hon. Member: If we put a ban on exporting—

Dr. S. Rambachan: Very good, very good. For example, we have—the People's Partnership Government through its vision ensured the building of the cycling velodrome, international Olympic standard, the Aquatic Centre, the tennis centre and what have you. What is being done, Mr. Minister to give incentives, to bring into Trinidad people who would utilize those facilities for training and more than training, your hotels will benefit and other kinds of domestic tourism outfits will also benefit. And therefore I think that you should focus in terms of tax

incentives to bolster that sector, but the Minister of Sport has to have some kind of vision to make that a reality and if that vision is missing he will continue to hallucinate about what is possible.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what this country needs in my view is a recovery plan, a stimulus and recovery plan. That is what this country needs. [*Desk thumping*] And we have not seen from the Government any indication of a recovery and stimulus plan to get this country going forward. Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 2009 when the United States faced one of its worst years, President Obama brought about what was called the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. It was called simply the Recovery Act because it is all about the recovery of the economy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, your speaking time has expired. You care to avail yourself?

Dr. S. Rambachan: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Dr. S. Rambachan: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the Act, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, was an extraordinary response to promote economic recovery and growth. And that is what is required in this country right now. You do not need an average response, you need an extraordinary response. [*Desk thumping*] But instead of ensuring that the highway to Point Fortin continues, that the highway from San Fernando to Princes Town, where all the documentation and studies and things are ready, and you can start and begin to bolster and improve economic activity to do construction, you close down the highway. And it is going to take you, Mr. Minister, more money to restart it than before you closed it.

So what this country needs is a recovery plan, a stimulus plan. That is what it needs. We need an intervention from the Government in partnership with the private sector. It seems that the Government is not thinking clearly. It seems that the Government is confused by the challenges that confronted at this time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, for example, the Minister is going on the road show, he said, in three weeks' time to raise this US \$1 billion. Well, expect by then that the price for a US dollar will not be \$6.62, it will be \$6.82, because the Minister had already signaled earlier on, if you recall, that the dollar should not slip beyond \$6.82. But it is going to slip \$6.82 because that is how the Minister will get \$6.82 billion, rather than \$6.6 billion. So it is going to happen.

I said already that the advantages of foreign exchange will be increased, but how is it going to be spent? How much is going to be used to create assets with

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revenue streams? For example, public housing, which is an important area. Mr. Deputy Speaker, to the Minister of Finance, there are so many things that can be done to stimulate the construction sector. I congratulate you on the one that you brought to the—moving the year from 2018 to 2025 with respect to tax benefits.

And let me also state. I am also a developer and I have been a developer even before I was in politics. I started to develop housing since age 17 in 1966. My father was a contractor from 1956, a company called Universal Contractors Limited in the oil fields, and my company was situated just near where the Member for La Brea lives. So I mean, for a very, very long time, very, very, long time and I have built about 100 houses in Trinidad. So I have been in this for quite a long time. And I am telling you that right now you can stimulate construction activities if you can get your private/public sector partnerships going. What is holding back the Government from getting that going? What is it? Why does the private sector not want to engage you? Is it that your technocrats are the ones who are creating the bureaucracy that is blocking this activity?

In Chaguanas, you can build a car park next to the market and you can remove that Vendors Mall and place it on two floors in that particular car park—about five stories. You can go and do one in San Fernando. Princes Town needs one also that can be done and the space is available and a number of construction activities can begin to take place there which over the next year will begin to take up a couple of 100 people in terms of employment.

So I commend the Minister for increasing the number of years. But I want say, Mr. Minister, that increasing the number of years is not enough. I want to ask the hon. Minister of Planning and Development today, the Member for Arouca/Maloney, what is the status of the Planning and Facilitation of Development Bill? Certain parts of that Bill were proclaimed, I believe in July 2015. But what is the real status of it? What is the status of the planning committee? What is the status of that, what is happening to that?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, while the Minister is very well intended in terms of stimulating construction—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Would the Member gave way?

Dr. S. Rambachan: Sure.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much. Mr. Deputy Speaker, through you I would like to inform the Member that with regard to the Planning and Facilitation of Development Act, the only parts of that that were proclaimed related to the appointment of the Director of Planning. That was the only part that

was proclaimed and even there we had some concerns regarding how that person would have been appointed. In addition to that, what we have done is place that Bill before a committee because there were several parts of that legislation that we did not agree with in terms of the policy that you put forward at the time and as a consequence of that it is now before a committee to examine it so that it meets the policy of the current administration. Thank you very much.

Dr. S. Rambachan: Sure. But you know, Madam Minister, with all due respect to you, through the Speaker, 10 months you are taking to do that. Another 10 months will go, two years will go, three years will go, five years will go and under the PNM nothing will happen. [*Desk thumping*] Because you see, I did not want to do this, but with due respect to the hon. Minister and through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wrote the hon. Minister way back in October 2015 on behalf of a constituent of mine, who had a problem with a land development. And the Minister got my letter and responded to me one month after. And then again I wrote the Minister about two other letters and finally I got a response in the month of May—May 16, 2016—in which the Minister apologizes for the tardiness of the response. But simply says, your concerns are duly noted and the matter is receiving the attention of the Director of Town and Country Planning. Ten months for a reply from the Town and Country Planning. Is it the Minister's fault or the bureaucrat? And if you have that kind of thing happening you would not get any development. Because it takes you two months—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Would the Minister give way?

Dr. S. Rambachan: It take you two months—I would not get extra time from the Deputy Speaker. It takes you two months—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yeah, but you are accusing me of things that are not true.

Dr. S. Rambachan: Two months, after you submit a plan to Town and Country before you get an acknowledgement. Two months. Why does it take two months to do that, to get an acknowledgement? Why? Why? Two months? [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: You did not submit a plan.

Dr. S. Rambachan: I am not talking about that, I am talking about regularly now. Two months. And if you want the evidence I will show you the evidence in San Fernando. Right. It takes you about two months to get a completion certificate between the County Medical Officer of health and the Regional Corporation. Today, when you are doing a land development and you go to the

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fire services to get your fire approval, your final fire approval, they say bring proof of where you brought your hydrant. Imagine you have to carry a receipt now to show proof of where you brought a hydrant.

Hon. Member: That is not new.

Dr. S. Rambachan: That is new, that is new.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: That has always been the case.

Dr. S. Rambachan: So that the length of time, Mr. Minister, it is taking to process documents at Town and Country, it is going to affect these very nice extension of years that you have brought. So you are well-intentioned, very well-intentioned, but you have to deal with the nagging bureaucracy. You have to deal with the lack of attentiveness.

There is a real disconnect between public servants and the understanding of their role in the developmental process and the aims and the ambitions of the political directorate to get things moving in the country. There is a disconnect, a very, very tough disconnect. You will not get speedier economic transformation unless you have speedier decision making. You have to make sure people come to work 8 o'clock in the morning, rather than walk in at 10 o'clock in the morning, or 9 o'clock in the morning or walk in at 8 o'clock in the morning and then they go to buy breakfast and come back at 9 o'clock and then by 2 o'clock everybody wants to run out of Port of Spain because they say traffic is too high.

How can you run a country like that? How can you run a country like that? So, yes, somebody talked about the attitudinal shift. I think it was the hon. Attorney General in terms of driving habits, but let us deal with the productivity shift, the productivity shift that is necessary. So while you are well-intentioned with what you have said today, Mr. Minister, and I applaud you on it, at the same time I think that we got to go beyond that. I want to again say, what is it that you are really doing to stimulate this economy? Where is your recovery plan? What are you doing to preserve and create jobs in the context of promoting economic recovery? What are you doing to increase investments in the country? You have several opportunities to do that, several opportunities and you must take advantage of those opportunities. You have to decide what tax incentives you are going to give and to whom, but you have to give it up this point in time where it is going to create jobs and stop the job loss. Too many people are on the breadline in this country.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, while I see some of the benefits of what is going to be done here, at the same time I think that more has to be done. I want to appeal

to the Minister of Housing and Urban Development, for example, to look at the revision of your policy in line with the private sector. Not everyone can buy a million dollar home. But there is a middle income and there is the real middle income which is more of the lower income. And I think that we should revise the policies, the housing policy in this country where you will have the ability to build a house on 3,500 square feet of land and a house that is 700 square feet, which will allow a 35 by 20 house, which will allow you at least two very decent bedrooms or even three bedrooms and at least one fully equipped toilet and bath with kitchen and living room. Seven hundred square feet and 3,500 square feet of land which will reduce the cost of the home and create an affordable home for about \$650,000 with land and house. And it can be done.

Go to the records of the Self Help Commission. Go to the records of the URP Programmed when I was there as Minister and you will see that we built two-bedroom homes in this country for less than \$160,000. The only thing we did not do was tile the floor. For who? For everybody who is deserving and who came and applied, Member for Toco/Sangre Grande. We did it.

5.45 p.m.

We did it, and I can carry you and show you the kind of people who benefited across this country. I am not afraid. I stand here very proudly and say that we served everybody, and we did that for the benefit of everybody. [*Desk thumping*] I am proud of my record in that regard. Very, very proud of it. It can be done, and I am willing to share this information, and share the approach with the Minister of Housing and Urban Development, who seems to be very affable and very much consensus driven in terms of getting ideas, collaborative. Now they will fear that you will come and join the PP, eh. Watch out.

So Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are myriads of ideas that we have, but what do we do? We hear the promise of a plywood factory, we did not even get it in La Brea and the people still protesting. Still protesting in La Brea. So the Government is devoid. Their minds are barren of an approach to economic recovery, to stimulating this country, and the time has come to invite the people of this country to begin to say how we are going together to reconstruct the economy of this country in the interest of the people whom the economy is supposed to serve.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with these few words, I thank you for the opportunity. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, Member for La Brea, you have the floor. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Hon. Nicole Olivierre): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to rise and contribute to this Bill entitled, an Act to provide for the variation of certain duties and taxes and to introduce provisions of a fiscal nature and for other related matters. The Member for Tabaquite made a very important point in his contribution. He said it is action that takes us forward and not a wait-and-see approach, and that is what this Finance (No. 2) Bill, 2016 is all about. This is your Government taking action.

The Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries has a particular interest in this Bill that we have before us, as it speaks directly to our efforts to promote renewable energy and energy efficiency in our drive to ensure sustainable energy development, and ensure the attainment of the 17 sustainable development goals and, in particular SDG 7, which says to ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.

We in Trinidad and Tobago have widespread access to electricity, but we must ensure that we use our access to energy in a sustainable manner. Our renewable resources must be used in a manner that takes into consideration the impact on the environment, in particular the greenhouse gas emissions that arise from our use of energy.

As part of our commitment to COP 21, we identified the transportation sector as an area of focus for emission reduction. Our unconditional commitment is for a 30 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by December 31, 2030 in the public transport sector, compared to the business as usual scenario, where compared to reference year of 2013. This reduction will equate to an amount of 1.7 million metric tonnes of CO₂ equivalent. Now, how significant is this?

It should be noted that transport represents a significant percentage of the greenhouse gas emissions for Trinidad and Tobago. In 2013, CO₂ equivalent emissions from the transport sector amounted to 18 million metric tonnes, of CO₂ equivalent, approximately 35 per cent of our total emissions. Now, the total number of land vehicles in this country is astronomical. In 2013, we had over 750,000 land vehicles in Trinidad and Tobago. This is in a population of 1.3 million persons. So you could well imagine the quantum of emissions that would arise from so many vehicles, and these numbers of vehicles increase almost weekly. If you go on the Port of Port of Spain, whenever a roll-on/roll-off vessel comes into port, you have in excess of 200, 300, sometimes up to 500 vehicles coming into the country—thousands.

When you are driving up the highway, you look in the car park in Mid Centre Mall, you see hundreds of new or foreign-used vehicles awaiting owners. So, we therefore need to take steps to reduce the quantum of emissions from the transportation sector. Now, we cannot restrict vehicle ownership in this country. There are some nations where you have to get a special permit to own a vehicle. Trinidad is not one of those nations. So long as you can afford a vehicle, you are allowed to purchase one. So the only way we can address this issue of increasing emissions is if we look at the vehicles themselves. I am sure many of my colleagues here not only own one vehicle, but I am sure many of my colleagues here have second and third vehicles. So this shows, on both sides of the House, I know many of you own more than vehicle.

In every single household if there are three persons with licence, I am sure there is a minimum of three vehicles available. [*Crosstalk*] Clearly, this topic has brought a lot of interest with Members on both sides comparing the size of their vehicles, [*Crosstalk*] and it is important to know that when we are talking about emissions, size does matter. [*Laughter*] So we are seeking to encourage persons to purchase vehicles with fewer emissions. Since we can have no impact on the number of vehicles persons buy, we can at least try to persuade them to buy vehicles that have significantly reduced emissions from the vehicles currently in circulation, and this is why we have brought this Bill before the House today.

I would like to highlight the parts of this Bill that deals specifically with this issue of reducing emissions reduction, and it is in Part IV of the Bill, which seeks to amend the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, Chap. 48:50, and the amendments are in the Fourth Schedule. And for the benefit of the general public listening, who would not have access to the Bill, I would read the pertinent parts of it so everyone would clearly understand what provisions are being put into place.

So the Bill states that motor vehicle taxes shall not be charged, levied and collected in respect of a new motor vehicle intended for private or commercial use, which is manufactured to use compressed natural gas; or a used motor vehicle imported for private or commercial use, which is manufactured to use compressed natural gas and not older than four years from the year of manufacture. So we are making provisions for the removal of motor vehicle taxes on CNG vehicles whether they are new or foreign used under four years old. Now, it should be noted that this particular provision has a sunset clause, in that it will expire on December 31, 2020, but CNG vehicles are not the only ones that we are making this provision for.

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The Bill goes on to say that motor vehicles tax shall not be charged, levied and collected in respect of new electric vehicles, which are imported for private or commercial use; or used electric vehicles imported for private or commercial use, which are not older than four years from the year of manufacture. We also make the same provision for hybrid vehicles as well. The same thing, no taxes will be charged for the new vehicles, or imported vehicles four years and under.

In the case of electric vehicles and hybrid vehicles, we do have a stipulation on the class of vehicle that this removal of tax applies to; in the case of electric vehicles, it is in a size not exceeding 179 kilowatts; in the case of the hybrid vehicles it is in a size not exceeding 1999cc; and in the case of CNG vehicles there is no such stipulation; and the sunset clause applies to all of them. Because we believe that once these measures are put into place, given sometime by the year 2020, persons would have become so accustomed to reaping the benefits of these new types of vehicles that we will no longer need this incentive to stimulate the growth of the industry.

Now, these incentives in and of themselves cannot have the desired effect of reducing emissions, of encouraging persons to switch from the regular gasoline and diesel fuel vehicles to CNG, or hybrid or electric vehicles, if we do not have the requisite infrastructure in place to adequately service the markets. Now, in the case of the CNG, NGC CNG was created with a mandate to implement a plan to develop CNG as a major vehicular fuel in Trinidad and Tobago, and NGC CNG company is responsible for ensuring a supply of natural gas to service stations throughout Trinidad and Tobago, to facilitate the widespread introduction and use of CNG vehicles by the population at large.

NGC CNG is currently targeting a total of 30 fixed CNG stations and they have also procured five mobile refuelling units for use in the short term in emergency situations. Currently, there are 13 stations that are in service and five stations that are either down or carded for upgrade and not currently operational. So the eight stations that are currently operating are at Beetham; Rushworth Street, San Fernando; Point Fortin; PTSC headquarters; St. Christopher's on Wrightson Road; Brentwood; Peake's Tacarigua; and at the NGC field office. The five stations that are currently not in operation as they are undergoing upgrades are at Barataria, Chaguanas, Curepe, Cocoyea and Mount Lambert.

Now, in addition to these stations that are currently in operation, there are four new stations at which construction is ongoing and in progress, and these are expected to be completed and open before the end of 2016. These stations are at Orange Grove where the CNG equipment has been installed and electrical works

are in progress; O'Meara Estate, construction is in progress. We expect to complete that within the next couple months; Tumpuna North; and at Starlite in Diego Martin.

Mr. Karim: None in Central?

Hon. N. Olivierre: There is one in Chaguanas that is targeted for construction, starts later in this year.

Mr. Karim: By Monroe Road?

Hon. N. Olivierre: In Chaguanas, yes. That is correct. Now, NGC CNG would have also purchased five mobile refuelling units and these mobile units will be used in the event that any of the stations are not available, and we need to have temporary measures put into place.

Regarding Tobago, NGC CNG is in talks with the THA with regard to the allocation of a suitable location for a station that would service CNG users in Tobago. NGC CNG has set targets for the next year in terms of conversion of existing vehicles towards CNG, and we also have some targets for introduction of new CNG vehicles into the mix in the country. The targets for maxi taxis is at 250, school buses around 10, 70 PTSC buses hoping to convert, about 40 taxis and 240 private cars. So their target for the first year of the initiative, once we have all these measures in place to encourage persons to start acquiring CNG vehicles, is 610 vehicles.

In his contribution earlier, the Member for Caroni Central asked about our progress with regard to incorporation of CNG and how far we have reached in terms of Government fleets adopting CNG. Well, I would like to say that we are a responsible Government and as a responsible Government we believe in continuity of governance, and once there is a good plan that is in progress we will continue with it and ensure that the benefits of it are realized going forward.

However, it should be noted, that initially when the CNG plan was put into place, it was under a PNM Government. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Patrick Manning who started it.

Hon. N. Olivierre: Yes, and we should note that it was our former Prime Minister, the visionary hon. Patrick Manning, who would have initiated this effort as all in stride with his great vision for carrying Trinidad and Tobago to developed country status. [*Desk thumping*]

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And we do acknowledge the previous Government for continuing with his plan and we are here, again once again, to ensure that it is realized going forward.
[*Desk thumping*]

6.00 p.m.

So with regard to the efforts to get the Maxi-Taxi Association to convert their vehicles over to CNG, an MoU was signed between NGC CNG and the association of maxi-taxi, Trinidad and Tobago. The MoU outlined the proposed terms and conditions related to NGC CNG's role and contribution in support of the acquisition of OEM CNG maxi taxis. NGC CNG has been accepting applications from the Maxi-Taxi Association so that they can access the grants, and so far one application has been received and approved. However, this grant arrangement is due to expire in May 2018, so if there are any maxi-taxi drivers out there who are listening, take note that there are grants available, so you can contact NGC CNG, and so we can start moving our maxi-taxi fleet away from costly diesel so that we can start using CNG for our maxi-taxis and cut down on significant amounts of pollution.

In terms of CNG for mass transit, Government did approve purchase of 100 CNG vehicles by PTSC. So far to date, PTSC has successfully procured 35 out of these units and these are being successfully integrated into the PTSC fleet. And I would like the persons in Tobago as well to know that these vehicles will also be deployed in Tobago and arrangements will be made to ensure that there is a supply of CNG in Tobago as well. [*Desk thumping*]

Regarding the state sector. Well, naturally for Government proposing an initiative and trying to encourage it, it stands to reason that the obvious first customer would be the state sector. And NGC, the parent company of NGC CNG, would have been one of the first to start converting its fleet to CNG vehicles and NGC currently has a fleet of some 205 CNG vehicles. NGC has even gone so far as to construct its own CNG filling station on its compound for its employees to use. Other state enterprises that have jumped on board the CNG bandwagon include Petrotrin which currently has a fleet of 106 CNG vehicles; WASA has engaged NGC CNG for the development of a refuelling station at its St. Joseph headquarters for its intended fleet. So we are seeing that the state sector is coming on board and we are having significant progress in transitioning away from gasoline and diesel powered vehicles to using CNG.

By way of data, I know those on the other side tend to complain that they do not get enough data from us, so as a form of data, in terms of the period January 2014 to December 2015, we have tabulated the volume of CNG sold and worked it

out as emissions reductions, and based on the volume of CNG sold, assuming that it was directly replacing gasoline sales, we have worked out that we would have saved in emissions reductions an amount of 3337 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent savings in reductions. So with the limited numbers of CNG vehicles that we currently have in place, we are seeing that there is some reduction in CO₂ emissions, and we certainly hope that once these measures are passed and we encourage additional persons to purchase new vehicles that are CNG powered or hybrid and electric, we will certainly see tangible benefits in reducing our current CO₂ emissions.

The Bill also speaks about electric cars. Now although electric cars have not taken whole fully in Trinidad and Tobago, we did experience the importation of the first Tesla vehicle a couple of weeks ago in June 2016. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Singh: Smart energy.

Hon. N. Olivierre: Well, smart energy, yes. Okay, I do not want to identify the name of the person who purchased the vehicle but I can tell you that I did, in fact, have the pleasure of seeing the vehicle, and having a short little controlled test drive of the vehicle. It is a Tesla model S and—well, this particular vehicle is at the high end of the electric cars and while it is not my role to advertise for any particular vehicle manufacturer, I can say that this particular vehicle was quite impressive. Being an electric car, I can clearly see the future of the automobile industry, maybe 20, 30 years from now, if electric cars really take over, would be a drastic change from what we have today. There are practically no moving parts—well, there is no engine, no moving parts, so there is no need for oil, there is absolutely no emissions.

So if we are as a nation and the globe, if we are indeed moving away from fossil fuel powered vehicles to electric vehicles, the future certainly will see significantly less emissions and we will certainly have a cleaner environment. Of course, that would mean a great deal of changes in our mechanics of today, so there would be no auto mechanics in the future. The mechanic of the future would be an electrician. So there is something—so we certainly need to be able to prepare for that. You see as we explore the advancements in technology, we also need to ensure that we prepare our people for the jobs of tomorrow. We need to prepare our people for the future work and the jobs of tomorrow.

Now, the Member for Caroni Central spent a great deal of time speaking about the advancements in the energy sector that they said would have been done under their time, under their term in office, where we have started to explore the deeper

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horizon and they pat themselves on the back greatly about that, those advancements that took place in the five years. But knowing that these advancements were on the way, it certainly is disappointing that no efforts were made to really prepare our technicians and the engineers in our local sector to be able to work in that environment. Because, as I sit here today, I had the opportunity to visit the drill ship that is currently exploring in our deep water and the percentage of locals who were able to get jobs on that vessel is very, very small because our locals have not had the training and the exposure to prepare us to be able to work to get those jobs.

The company that was engaged to supply the helicopter transport, a basic thing as helicopter transport in the industry, the type of craft that was required is different from what is normally used, what was previously used in the industry and we had no local pilots who were prepared to be able to pilot that type of aircraft. So given that we knew these developments were taken, would be coming to our shores in five years, we should have taken the steps to prepare our locals for these jobs. So while we do laud their efforts in taking us this far, we need to recognize that a lot more could have been done in ensuring that all our nationals could benefit adequately from these opportunities that have been produced. So I am acknowledging the good that you do, but I am saying that as always, there is more to be done. There is always more to be done.

Now, given the quantum of cost savings that—now, in addition to these measures aimed at encouraging persons to move towards renewable energy vehicles, we should also remember that the fuel subsidy has been a significant cost to the Government and we have been reducing that fuel subsidy to some extent. And together with the measures to make the renewable vehicles more affordable, we expect that given the cost savings to be achieved by these measures and the added disincentive of the reduction in the fuel subsidy, it is anticipated that the measures in this Finance Bill will directly influence our citizens to consider conversion to smaller and more fuel efficient vehicles, thereby enabling Trinidad and Tobago to achieve its target for greenhouse gas emission reductions from the transportation sector.

I am, therefore, comforted that my colleagues, particularly the Member for Caroni Central, would have indicated their full support for this Bill, and I assure you that we will continue building on the groundwork that has gone before in ensuring that we can take the country forward towards a sustainable future, and we will continue to advance on every step and ensure that we do not take any backward steps that will derail us from our plans towards developed country

status. And hopefully, by 2020 or not too far from 2020, we would be able to attain the vision that our former Prime Minister, Mr. Manning, would have set us on a path towards achieving, Vision 2020.

With those few words, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Miss Ramona Ramdial (*Couva North*): Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. Before I get into my contribution on this Bill, let me take this opportunity to express my deepest condolences on the passing of former Prime Minister, Mr. Patrick Manning. His contributions to the development of Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean region have been recognized by all over the past couple of days, and I am sure that this PNM-led Government will find a most fitting way to honour his legacy. Personally, for me, what is most admirable is his 40 years of service as a Member of Parliament to the constituency of San Fernando East, most admirable.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, today we are here to debate this Bill that the Minister of Finance has brought before us and I want to quote from a magazine, *FocusEconomics* on the status of the economy at this point in time. It goes on to say that our:

“...essential energy sector is struggling to recover from a deep crisis. As the Central Bank reported on 27 May, output in the energy sector continued to decline in the first quarter of this year.”—2016—“The contraction in oil output prompted a sharp rise in unemployment at the end of 2015 and further job cuts in the first months of 2016....Central Bank highlighted the drastic effect of the decline in oil prices on export earnings. According to Central Bank, for each U.S. dollar that crude oil prices fall, exports earnings decline by USD 50 million. The headwinds emerging from the country’s oil sector crisis prompted the IMF to project a sharper contraction in the Caribbean economy...”

The bleak economic outlook is expected to persist amid rising unemployment and depleting foreign reserves. Analysts expect that the economy will contract by 1.4% this year, which is down 0.4 percentage points from last month’s forecast.”

And that is, of course, from the *FocusEconomics* magazine and that is the backdrop against which we are here to debate this Bill to allow for some of the measures the Minister of Finance has brought.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also want to project and to also show that from another financial forecast, it is predicted that by 2020, the currency exchange for Trinidad

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and Tobago will read for TT \$7.96 for US \$1. The GDP annual growth, by 2020, will just be 1.06 per cent.

6.15 p.m.

The GDP growth rate, which is very important to note, in 2016, is in negative values, 0.60 for the first quarter; minus 0.60 for the first quarter; minus 0.33. In 2017, it would be minus 0.51, minus 0.12 and minus 0.2, with a very gradual increase by 2020 to 0.4. So that is a very, very bleak outlook, with respect to the GDP growth rate for our country within the next four years, and that is the forecasted values.

The inflation rate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by 2020, will be 3.64 per cent and food inflation rate, however, will be extremely high by 2020 with 9.85 per cent. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is no stranger, this information is, of course, something that is there for all to see. That it is the forecasted bleak prospect for our country moving forward. I know that the Minister—[*Interruption*] sorry, this is *Trading Economics* and it is a forecast for the next four years. These are some of the figures that are projected for our country, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and, therefore, the Minister of Finance spoke over the past couple of months, 10 months being in Government, about some of his measures and some of his revenue-generating strategies that he intends to implement.

I just want to make reference to a *Newsday* report of Thursday, October 08th, where he spoke about some of his revenue-generating strategies that he will implement in the coming future. And at the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce, post-budget analysis he went on to give the statistics, with respect to the state of the economy and, of course, after that he spoke about some of the initiatives that his Government will be implementing. And one of them he stated would be the start of:

“...the process of introducing the property tax by implementing the existing Property Tax...2009 with a view to having a ‘fair and equitable property tax’ in place by January 1, 2016. He stressed the tax would use ‘the old levels and rates as a starting point’, repeating it for emphasis, adding that ‘to ensure that no one in need is adversely affected, there will be special provisions to ensure that the elderly and the indigent with low fixed incomes are not disadvantaged, wherever they may reside.’ Explaining that back in 2009 everyone who owned property paid a small property tax he said that would be the starting point when the tax was implemented in 2016 and then the government would move toward a fair and modern property tax system which would be based on valuations and dialogue with all the affected persons.”

So this is just one of the mechanisms or strategies that the Minister of Finance spoke about, in terms of revenue generation for Trinidad and Tobago and moving forward.

He also spoke about, Mr. Deputy Speaker, distortive taxes and the idea of consumption taxes, personal income tax and corporation tax being, of course, distorted right now and a means of finding a way and a means of trying to clear up that distortion.

He went on to state, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I quote:

“Imbert said that because the country’s existing public sector pension system is outdated, the government is developing a new system of public service pensions that would be fair, equitable, modern and sustainable. ‘Retirees will no longer have to live on meagre pensions.’ He added that the Government intended to ‘strengthen and extend the viability of the National Insurance System...up to 2036.’”

And today in this Bill we are seeing some of the amendments to that particular Bill.

He also went on to say that:

It—“was necessary because the 9th Actuarial Review of the NIS Fund had concluded that unless this is done immediately, the NIS system would be unable to pay future pensions. He said the review was completed some time ago but was not laid in the house, adding that the Government would bring the review to the House in the shortest possible time.”

And in addition to that, he went to, of course, give the figures, with respect to the old age pensions with the new cap being \$5,000, giving the retirees an extra \$500 per month. He also went on to say that the cost to the country would be \$160 million as we had 88,000 senior citizens to benefit from this measure.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, these are some of the initiatives that the Minister of Finance spoke about. But the reality on the ground is different from, probably some would say, what the Minister of Finance maybe advised to do. And as soon as this Government took power in September of 2015, one of the first things we saw, or one of the negative fallout, I am not saying that it is wholly the Government’s fault, but because of the economic decline, the reduction in the oil and gas prices and all of that, we saw quite a number, thousands of persons losing their jobs from 2015 [*Desk thumping*] and it continues as we speak.

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You know, the thing about it is—Mr. Deputy Speaker, could you please protect me from the Member for Moruga/Tableland? He is disturbing me.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay. Proceed. That seems to be between the both of you all. Go ahead. Proceed.

Miss R. Ramdial: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will continue. So the impact, one of the—[*Continuous interruption and crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay Members, the Member has been given permission to proceed. Kindly proceed in silence, please.

Miss R. Ramdial: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. One of the impacts, with respect to the downturn of the economy, was the loss of jobs, thousands of people. We would have heard the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, come to the Parliament to quote figures, 8,000 persons losing their jobs over that 10-month period and, of course, it continues today, both private sector and public sector. This is a major impact, with respect to persons losing their jobs, no revenue coming in to take care of families.

What the Member for Tabaquite spoke about earlier on is in fact a reality, the stresses, the financial burdens placed on families at this point in time is, of course, seeing something that has never really been witnessed before where it is that you have families and bread earners feeling the effects and the impact of losing their jobs and, of course, resorting to suicide in some instances. In my constituency there were about three suicides emanating from families suffering from financial burdens and stress. And that is the reality on the ground.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one would hope that the Minister of Finance has been taking note of what has been happening and that the reality is striking him daily, every day, and that he is brainstorming, as we speak, to come up with measures that would see that these impacts of losing jobs are not continued or sustained for the period coming.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with respect to the removal of VAT, or the decrease in the VAT from 15 per cent to 12.5 the Value Added Tax, in addition to that we also had the removal—Mr. Speaker, I would tie it in this Bill. All right? We also saw that removal of the VAT from food items that were once zero-rated are now subjected to the 12.5 per cent VAT had a severe impact also on the population. Low-income people will feel the pinch, as one newspaper quoted. The President of the Supermarkets Association, Dr. Eunice Abraham, said: this deep concern was expressed by the association with respect to the removal of the VAT.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Finance also spoke about the online tax to finance hospitals, and it is one of the revenue-generating measures that—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Young: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(1). We have been trying to wait for the correlation but we seem to be back in time in October 2015, talking about—
Standing Order 48(1).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, I know you are making the point but tie it in as soon as possible please “nah” so that we would not have the necessary Standing Order being invoked.

Miss R. Ramdial: Sure, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I would want to believe that this debate is about the economy and about the measures that the Minister of Finance have implemented to date, for 10 months and, of course, the results of his machinations over the past 10 months, with respect to the economy. [*Desk thumping*] So when I speak about tax and revenue-generation, all of that, I am speaking about the effect on the economy and by extension, on the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: But Member, I understand you clearly but what I am saying, we have particular clauses to deal with this particular Bill today. So I am saying just tie it in as quickly as possible in order to avoid them invoking the various Standing Orders. So please proceed.

Miss R. Ramdial: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So, I will move on to that particular part of the Bill that speaks to the motor vehicle amendment, with respect to the CNG and the hybrid cars. The Minister of Finance would have said on the 25th April, and it is, of course, quoted in another newspaper report that the Minister of Finance said drive smaller cars, trying to force a culture change on the people of Trinidad and Tobago, drive smaller cars. And to justify his statement, the Minister of Finance said that large SUVs will be affected by the 50 per cent increase in motor vehicle tax and custom duties proposed by the Motor Vehicle and Road Traffic (Amdt.) Order and the Customs (Amdt.) Order.

Imbert said the increased duties and taxes did not apply to taxis, maxi-taxis, goods vehicles, agricultural vehicles, trucks, private school buses and vehicles used for public purposes with an engine size exceeding 1999 ccs. The increases target private passenger motor vehicles such as station wagons and Sedans, he said. He also went on to state further—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, may I invoke Standing Order, again, 48(1)? Relevance. What clause is the hon. Member referring to?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay. Overruled, Sir. Continue, Member, continue.

Miss R. Ramdial: Thank you Mr. Deputy Speaker. He also went on to compare, of course, what was happening in other Caribbean countries like Grenada, Jamaica and Barbados. And his justification was that 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 group and this measure is intended to spread the burden of adjustment.

He said that the second purpose of the increased taxes was driven by the fact that larger engines burn more fuel. The taxation came in the context of the fuel subsidy and in the context of this Government's commitment to conserve fuel and reduce the country's environmental pollution and carbon footprint he said.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for La Brea would have talked about the NGC/CNG initiative [*Desk thumping*] but I want her to know that it was the former Government who introduced that particular initiative. It was, of course, the former administration who brought down 25 public transportation buses [*Desk thumping*] CNG fuelled and set up the station at City Gate to ensure that we reduce our carbon footprint and look to reduce our fuel subsidy in the future. [*Interruption*] Well you have a Minister of transport to fix it right. Fix it.

So Mr. Deputy Speaker, whilst it is that we see that the Minister has continued some of our initiatives, being the NGC/CNG initiative to move ahead with the conversion, we applaud him for that but we also want to see what they can come up with to generate revenue for Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] A lot of what the Minister of Finance is speaking about today are programmes and policies that the former Government put into place for them to continue with. [*Desk thumping*]

The deep-sea offshore drilling and all of the platforms and the drilling we saw, our Prime Minister made a trip to one of the offshore rigs and all of that, those programmes and those offshore deep-sea exploration, offshore drilling, were introduced by the former Government to generate revenue. [*Desk thumping*]

6.30 p.m.

By the year 2017 or 2018, if I am not mistaken, the former Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs would have said, they would see the benefits of that deep-sea oil exploration—oil and gas exploration drilling, and the revenue that would be generated from that, coming to the purses of Trinidad and Tobago.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in addition to that, the Minister has also said that he is about to set for a foreign roadshow, sounding like a circus, a foreign roadshow—about hoping to borrow US \$1 billion, and raise financing and all of that. I hope and I want to reiterate what some of my other colleagues would have said, that we want full accountability and transparency with respect to how these moneys [*Desk thumping*] are going to be disbursed, when he gets back to Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in addition to that, we have seen also for future prospects, the Minister has given his word to the working class of this country, with respect to paying off back pays and all of that. We have seen some tranches being delivered to the protective services and other health workers, other sectors, but what about the new bargaining schedule that is about to come, when the labour unions would be approaching the Government to bargain for the new upcoming fiscal years? How is the Minister of Finance going to fund these new bargaining labour negotiations?—this is what we what we are looking to see with respect to revenue generation for our country. I know that the Member for Tabaquite spoke about tourism, agriculture and all of that, but we are yet to see some sort of plan come before us in this Parliament, to show that we are serious about revenue generation.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Government and governance is a continuum. I must say that we are mature enough as Government and as Opposition to recognize some of the good programmes and policies moving ahead, and I want to urge the Government to continue with that NGC CNG Project. We will, of course, see the decrease in the fuel subsidy, as it becomes large and infiltrates Trinidad and Tobago, but what we also want to see as a population, and personally as a Member of Parliament, of course, new strategies of revenue generation, so that our unemployed citizens, for one, can look with hope to the future, with respect to being employed, being shifted to other sectors, so that they can, of course, contribute again to the development of Trinidad and Tobago.

So I do not intend to be long, and I just want to say that we would hope that the Minister of Finance has all good intentions, and that we would want to encourage him to continue to do what is right, especially with the finances of this country. It is very important—economics most important for moving forward and, therefore, we wait to see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the upcoming months, how well he does, otherwise the population will judge him. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister in the Office of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs (Hon. Stuart Young): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy

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Speaker. I sat here for the past few hours listening as amazement, with some level of amazement at the contributions from the other side. I would like to start, by reminding the population of what we faced when we came in, and why we are faced here today, with the Bill—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: “Yuh talking? Den ah go talk.”

Hon. S. Young: Your talking could make any difference? [*Laughter*]—and what we are faced with as a nation, and maybe the Member for Naparima can answer the nation with this question, why it was in September 2015 when we came in, the overdrafts were maxed out to the tune of \$32 billion? [*Desk thumping*]—and listen to them, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and let the population look at the behaviour and the amazement from the other side at what it was they left the state of the economy in. And to stand here and listen to them for hours, and to listen to them talk about revenue generation, and these types of things, knowing fully well—and as the population should know—they are the ones responsible for almost bankrupting the economy. [*Desk thumping*]

Those on the other side, the Member for Naparima who wanted to spin wheels, while they spent hundreds of millions of dollars in an unabated manner. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, Member for Naparima, please. We have been going along pretty fine all afternoon and this evening, please, please, you will have your opportunity. Continue Member.

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, [*Desk thumping*] and maybe this would be the appropriate time to just correct once again, the misinformation from the other side, with particular respect to what is going on with planning, and to answer the hon. Member for Tabaquite, as to what it is that was found by the hon. Minister of Planning and Development, when she came into office.

The hon. Member for Caroni Central left appeal applications languishing for four years, and failed to sign appeals of over 200 appeal applications, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and they were asking us about what is being done with appeals. So over 200 appeals were done—[*Interruption*] whilst Invaders Bay was being utilized. [*Interruption*] Well, they are being signed. They are being addressed right now. [*Crosstalk*]

So the next point that we would like to talk about, I would like to use the opportunity to talk about, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is the necessity or the benefits

with respect to the waivers of interest and penalty with corporation tax, petroleum tax—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, please.

Hon. S. Young:—corporation taxes, petroleum taxes, value-add tax, customs and income tax. As we heard from the hon. Minister of Finance, these amnesties with respect to those items are expected to raise revenue to the hopeful tune of \$500 million, at a time when it is necessary for us to get some money into the Treasury.

Now, what I would like to also talk about is the amnesty with respect to the Companies Registry, and I think there should be emphasis and some focus with respect to what is being achieved, or what we hope to achieve with the amnesty being provided for persons to file their annual returns, their outstanding notice of directors, et cetera. This is being done for the members of the public, and in particular the NGOs. We have been inundated with a number of requests from various religious organizations. I am sure as Members of Parliament, everyone here would have been in receipt in the last couple months, of pleas from various NGOs and especially on the religious side, who were served with notices by the Registrar General's Department. I would like to commend the Registrar General's Department for the good job that they were doing in upholding the law, but fortunately the Minister of Finance has seen it fit to use this opportunity to provide amnesties for everyone to put their houses in order. So this is a cry for them. They have until September 16th to get their house in order and to avoid the very high penalties that are currently applicable. So we look forward to the support for that.

This ties in very well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with the greatest of respect, to the Government's policy with respect to the fight with regard to corruption. The hon. Attorney General touched on it very briefly, and I would like to pick up the point, which is that Trinidad and Tobago is now on record, internationally, as talking about—and it was at the Anti-Corruption Summit in London, 2016, and this ties in to what it is we hope to achieve in our fight against corruption.

Trinidad and Tobago is committed of the fight against the scourge of corruption, and to pursuing those who have engaged in acts of corruption, with a goal of successful prosecution, and recovering as many assets that are the fruits of corruption, for the benefits of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. One of the things that we have committed to do, and is going to fit into the Companies Registry, is to have a registry of beneficial ownership. So that persons can no

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longer hide behind the façades of shell companies, and setting up shell companies, where we do not know who the real owners are. They will now be obligated to declare who the real and beneficial owners of these companies are and that, of course, ties in as well, to the tax amnesty that is being provided.

So what we would like to say as a Government is, this is an opportunity for everyone to get their house in order, pay your taxes, pay up your company's annual returns, make sure that all of this is in order, before we bring in the legislation with regard to beneficial ownership of companies, as well as what the Attorney General was referring to, which is civil asset forfeiture and explain your wealth provisions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this as well ties in to a topic which is related to the corporation tax and the taxation aspects of something call FATCA. FATCA featured very recently in the past week, where we had quite a surprising press conference by some of the leading bankers and the Bankers Association. I believe it was Republic Bank, Scotiabank, JMMB, as well as RBC, when they called a very strange press conference and were calling upon the members of—persons to write to the Members of Parliament, for us to support FATCA legislation. But I would like to use this opportunity, through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to place frontally and on the record, and for the population of Trinidad and Tobago that just two weeks prior to that, these same members met with the hon. Minister of Finance, raised these FATCA obligations. And what it is, is that the United States has passed law now that requires all of their citizens and companies incorporated in the United States to declare all of their income from all over the world to United States' IRS, and what they are requiring us to do as a sovereign is to support that, via legislation, as well as the signing of an inter-governmental agreement.

So when the hon. Minister of Finance met with the Bankers Association two weeks ago, and this ties into the whole corporation tax and the amnesty position, he gave them his undertaking at that stage that we were about to sign the inter-governmental agreement, as well as the drafting of the legislation had taken place. This legislation, in order to be passed, requires the support of the Opposition and those on the other side. So what was told to them is, if you want to fulfil these international obligations, we as a Government—and what is quite interesting, and you have heard them talk about it—these are matters that actually came up in 2010.

So the complaint was over the last five years, no matter how much they had been pleading, nothing had been done, but this Government, through the hon. Minister of Finance, two weeks ago gave the obligation to have the inter-

governmental agreement signed, and it is coming to Cabinet very shortly for approval for it to be executed. But then with respect to the legislation that is going to affect the banking relationships between our local banks and international banks, requires the support of the Opposition. So I use this opportunity to put the country on notice that it requires the consent of the whole of Parliament, and it is not an obligation resting solely on the Government.

Whilst we are going to do all that we can, ultimately, it will require the support of the Opposition. So—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Three-fifths?

Hon. S. Young:—a three-fifths majority, because it would require a special majority as it is affecting persons' rights. What it is going to, is that our Board of Inland Revenue must share their records and their information with the IRS. So, of course, persons are saying that their rights are going to be affected. So it will require the support of the whole of Parliament, and I would also like to use the opportunity to tell those on the Bankers Association quite simply, that is not how we do business. You do not go and hold a press conference and threaten the Members of Parliament in the manner that they did.

Quite frankly, what they should have done is, after they met with us, is ask, and I am certain that those on the other side would have met very openly, with the Bankers Association, sat down, listened to their concerns and then worked—[*Interruption*]*—*exactly, and worked together to have it done, but this sort of cartel behaviour, where they are threatening the Members of Parliament, will not be accepted, [*Desk thumping*] and I like to caution them. [*Desk thumping*] I would like to caution these bankers that that is not the way you do business in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Member: Very good. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

6.45 p.m.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, just a couple other points I would like to talk about. I would just like to use this opportunity to just address a couple points, because I do not want to keep us here for much longer and much longer than is absolutely necessary. My friend and the hon. Member for Couva North talked a short while ago about what had taken place with revenues from deep-sea drilling, et cetera, and what had happened under the former Minister of Energy, but our experience on this side has been quite different.

In fact what we found when we came in is that there were a lot of expired contracts, both upstream and downstream contracts, that had been left on shelves

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for too long and that has resulted in litigation from a downstream industry point of view as well as expired contracts from upstream which has led to a curtailment situation. So whereas we have been told over the past five years it had to do with maintenance issues, et cetera, quite frankly, that is not the truth and we are working hard and assiduously through our Minister of Energy and Industries to have these issues addressed.

And then, through you as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the other issues that was raised by the hon. Member for Tabaquite—and he is right, is an issue that concerns all of us—this is the issue of NIS and NIB contributions and Health Surcharge contributions being deducted by employers from their employees' payslips and not being paid over to the statutory bodies charged with the obligations of receiving it, and then going on to fund our national pension.

I would like to put on record again, through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that if persons and employees are aware of this, there is a process where they can go to the Criminal Tax Investigation Unit and make their complaints and they would be protected. Although the whistle-blowing legislation is not yet in place, they would not be fingered and utilized, and then either the audit division or the Criminal Tax Investigation Unit at the Board of Inland Revenue can go and perform audits. So we are calling on all employers to do what is right and stop taking the deductions from those of their employees who require it because then, exactly as the Member for Tabaquite said, when the time comes for them now to utilize the benefits and they go to the NIB, they find that those benefits are not in place.

We heard about, under the last Government, Petrotrin and WASA migrating their fleets to CNG vehicles. Again, this is something that is being looked at very carefully, because as we came into office there were a lot of clouds hanging over it and the whole procurement process. So that is being looked at there.

Having said that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and having said that I do not want to detain us for much longer, I think the Attorney General addressed the visiting forces issue raised by the Member for Caroni Central. What it really is, is that it is not a carte blanche allowing any contractor to get the benefits, and the benefits really are to import vehicles tax free, and that is really the benefit. What has to happen is a Cabinet decision has to be taken, because of course it is done via an order of the President and that can only be done via a Cabinet decision. So we will keep our eye on it.

As we understand it, what it is for is, for example, the provision of security services and other specialized types of services to the US Embassy and others

using and bringing in their contractors, but it is certainly not something that would be done *carte blanche* and there are certain requirements that will be fulfilled just to give you that level of comfort.

I would like to wrap up my contribution, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by using the opportunity, on behalf of Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, to offer our sincerest condolences to the family of the hon. Mr. Patrick Manning, the former Prime Minister and former political leader of the PNM, and to thank them for all that they allowed him to contribute to this great country of ours. He sat here the last time where the Member for Couva South is sitting. And for 44 years, and the legacy that he has left, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on behalf of Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, we would really like to thank him and to put on record our great and deep appreciation for all that he did.

My personal interaction with him, and I was fortunate, was from a professional level and in a professional nature, to act as junior counsel on a number of cases for him whilst he was Leader of the Opposition as well as Prime Minister. The guidance that I received in those few interactions, I would always appreciate—and the stories that he would share and the experience that he would share and the guidance that he would share. So I would like to personally thank him as an individual, and then as well on behalf of Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. With those few words, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to make this contribution this afternoon. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, since being appointed to the position of the Public Relations Officer of the People's National Movement seems to have been emboldened in his conduct where it borders on being brazen and "brassface". [*Desk thumping*] To come and stand in the Parliament and indicate that he listened to the contributions of those on this side as it relates to—in total amazement and what the PNM had to face when they came into political power, and what the population should know, and what was the level of the overdrafts and so on.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, he has forced me—whilst I do not enjoy reading the manifesto of the People's National Movement—he has forced me to go in that direction. I want to remind the Member what the People's National Movement manifesto focused on. It sought to make broad-based commitments as it relates to the People's Partnership tenure in Government. [*Crosstalk*] I do not like to pull it out Naparima. I rather take some notes and so on as it relates to this particular document. And their manifesto focused on what is their record, and they alluded

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to when we were in Government. What is their record on the economy? There has been economic stagnation, no significant growth since 2010, five years of chronic budget deficits, no effort to balance the national budget, shortage of US dollars, capital flight, no attempt to diversify the economy of Trinidad and Tobago and no innovation.

In 10 months of PNM rule led by Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley, the economy of Trinidad and Tobago is in a state of stagnation and it is the biggest—*[Desk thumping]* The PNM manifesto is the biggest con job document that has ever been perpetrated on the people of Trinidad and Tobago. *[Desk thumping]* So I just want to place that on record, and put the newly appointed PRO of the People's National Movement in proper perspective in relation to what they focused on. *[Desk thumping]*

Because what is your record on the economy of this country in the last 10 months? What is your record on transforming and growth of the economy? Having commented on numerous occasions, and I could conclude that there was an orchestrated plot when Governor Jwala Rambaran was appointed to that position, and having consistently targeted him when you all were sitting on this side: what is the position as it relates to foreign exchange and capital flight in Trinidad and Tobago since the new Governor of the Central Bank has been appointed? *[Desk thumping]* I hope probably in winding up the Minister of Finance can share more light on this particular issue, and what has been the direction as it relates to diversifying and growing the economy of this country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Attorney General and also the Minister in the Office of the Attorney General focused on the issue of providing incentives as it relates to or attending to what they termed “to incentivize the private sector” as it relates to the construction of homes and growing the economy of the country and so on. But I want to remind both of them what has happened to the public/private partnership under the Republic Bank Limited in southern Trinidad where this project was supposed to lead to the construction of approximately 90 housing units; why it has been torpedoed by this particular administration. Probably the Member for San Fernando East could clarify and bring some more light on this particular issue.

In relation to this particular Bill which is before the House today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is in the service of Trinidad and Tobago, and for the well-being of the population of this country, and it focuses on income tax and corporation tax and

the national insurance system of this country. It seeks to amend a number of pieces of legislation. I will attempt to spend a little time on the whole issue of the national insurance system of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to join all on this side and on the opposite side who took the opportunity, in their respective contribution, to call upon the management of the National Insurance Board of Trinidad and Tobago to provide what we would call better customer service to all those who would have served this country, whether retired and who will continue while and during their working life to look towards the benefits under the national insurance system. I am sure that the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West, will totally agree with me as it relates to what I am saying, taking into consideration where she was before she entered this honourable House.

The very important issue also of the health and safety and accommodation of these buildings because I know that the Minister of Finance, who has the responsibility of this particular organization under his portfolio, will take the opportunity to call upon the management to address the very relevant issue of health and safety and accommodation for the public who visit these offices from time to time, so as to provide minimal discomfort when they visit. Because I, myself, have looked at this particular issue and it causes a great sense of concern to me as an individual and taking into consideration that one day I may be a recipient or beneficiary of the national insurance scheme of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Crosstalk*] Far from that, Minister of Finance.

I want to say that in this particular regard, I think that it is incumbent upon all of us to address the status of the national insurance system from a financial point of view, in a more what we would call in-depth manner in relation to the state of the finances of the national insurance scheme or system of Trinidad and Tobago. Because the Minister of Finance is very familiar with the findings of the Ninth Actuarial Review which indicated that the number of contributors will be just below 500,000 for the next 10 years, but will then gradually decrease to 378,352 by 2060 and the ratio of contributors to pensioners will thus decrease from 3.7 to 1.1 over the next 50 years. The financial projection revealed that the system expenditure exceeded contribution income in the financial years 2013 to 2014.

7.00 p.m.

I am sure that probably in his winding-up he will address this very important issue of the financial position of the National Insurance Board as at 2016 because the investment income, it is expected to grow until 2019 based on the investment

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that the National Insurance Board has taken. But given the volatility of markets and what we have seen in recent times, and so on, I do not know how it has impacted upon the investments of the National Insurance Board, and I hope that in winding-up that the Minister of Finance could clarify this particular issue because it is projected, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that from 1919 to 1920 assets will rapidly decrease and the national insurance funds will be completely depleted between 2029 to 2030 if nothing is done to modify or address the issue of contributions to support the expenditure of the system. I am sure that you are quite familiar with this particular issue, and as you go in fulfilling your responsibility you will seek to address this in the context of the importance to all the stakeholders who benefit from this particular system.

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Madam Speaker, it is important to find out also, as I said, how much the state of the finances have deteriorated by and what will be done to retrieve the system. I would want the Minister of Finance to clarify if the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago is contemplating increasing the retirement age for pension benefits from 60 to 65, and, indeed, if there will be widespread consultation to address this particular move on the part of the management of the National Insurance Board of Trinidad and Tobago. Because, it is important that this be told to all and sundry, all the stakeholders, and we hope that there will be widespread consultation, because my sources within the trade union movement, my sources within the National Insurance Board of Trinidad and Tobago have indicated to me that there seems to be a plan afoot by the Government of the day to move the retirement age from 60 to 65, and I hope that there will be a sense of in-depth consultation with all the relevant stakeholders.

There must be meaningful consultation to address this very sensitive and this very delicate issue because this has implications for the workforce of Trinidad and Tobago, and I am sure that it must not be addressed in a piecemeal approach. We must all ensure that the consultation must be done in a way that what we have seen in recent times where the Government has been very flippant, has been a bit arrogant in its approach to dealing with legislation in this particular House, that this is not the approach that is pursued at it relates to this very, very important issue in relation to the national insurance system of this country.

It is important to pursue job creation in Trinidad and Tobago because under the People's Partnership Government we created 55,000 jobs, [*Desk thumping*] and in creating 55,000 jobs, Madam Speaker, it meant that there were 55,000 additional contributors to the national insurance system of Trinidad and Tobago.

In the last 10 months we have seen approximately 10,000 persons losing their jobs, and what that means is that the system has 10,000 less contributors in relation [*Desk thumping*] to the sustainability and the finances of this particular scheme. From a social security point of view, Madam Speaker, it is important that we get this right. We get this right in terms of the finances of this system, and also the growth of the economy of this country because if companies continue to send home persons, there are tremendous implications for this system.

There are tremendous implications for the socio-economic stability of Trinidad and Tobago, and I continue to hear from the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development about placing workers very close to her heart, and her Government is committed towards the well-being of providing social protection for the workforce of Trinidad and Tobago. She came out very, what I would call, fast out of the blocks, but was fast but slow in delivery in actually meeting the workers and the management of ArcelorMittal when crunch time, or when the decision had to be made. Also, within recent time, 66 workers of GGI have been sent home without any form of social protection. Also, within recent times too, Madam Speaker, in Tobago we have seen where the actions of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago have led to the continued increase of the unemployment rate in this country.

I speak specifically to two programmes, which are the People Helping People programme and the Women for Women programme, which the Women for Women programme aim to train 170 single parents in the areas of bread and pastry making, cosmetology, agriculture, garment construction, floral arrangement, and so on, and the average age of the participants in these programmes was between 35 to 37, all women with an average of four children each, as I said, all single parents. And because of the actions of this Government, the Ministry of Tobago Development has been closed, and with the closure of the Human Development Facilitation Company Limited there are approximately 700 people who are on the breadline. And, in spite of having heard of a 10-point plan, I have not really understood beyond point 1 from the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, because I am yet to understand points 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10; workers are in a state of limbo, they do not know where to turn in relation to legislation.

We would have heard that the amendments to the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act would have been coming to the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, and I thought that any Government, where in an economy such as the size of this one, where 10,000 persons would have lost their jobs, and if we

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conservatively multiply that by five, it would have an impact of over 50,000 persons; I thought that a Government that has the people at its heart, a Government that says, “Let us do this together”, would have brought amendments to the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act, and accompanying pieces of legislation to ensure that a sense of stability is brought to families who are suffering. [*Desk thumping*]

When I peruse the legislative agenda of the Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago, and I look very carefully from September 2015 to '17, September '17 to '19, and September '19 to '20, I saw some amendments as it relates to, or proposed amendments or legislation which will come to the House as it relates to the Industrial Relations Act and the Workmen's Compensation Act, and so on, but I saw nothing as it relates to amendments to the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act. That in itself tells me that the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development is either mamaguying the trade union movement of Trinidad and Tobago, or the PNM is just being true to form as it relates to using the labour movement and ensuring that when they get into power they turn their backs on the labour movement of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Speaker, I hope that we understand collectively, and, more so, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago understands its responsibility to charting a direction for the growth and development of the economy, because if the economy fails then, ultimately, the social protection system will collapse in this country, and, of course, the national insurance system of this country, the days will be numbered. I want to just focus on some of the specifics as it relates to the 9th Actuarial Review, and one of the things that will concern me as an individual, and I am sure taking into consideration the background of the party and the Government that I belong to that always was focused on people-centred development and improving the quality of life and standard of living of all during our tenure in Government, we ensured that the old-age pension, and also the national insurance pension grew, and was increased. We are saying that it is important to ensure that there also be an increase in the national insurance, or what we would call, retirement benefit.

It is important just as how the old-age pension has been increased to \$3,500 also, that the management of the NIB, the board of NIB, who also take their recommendations, and so on, to the Minister of Finance for approval to the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago, address this particular issue. Because it is no secret that the workers of this country, and also the senior citizens of this country, have been subjected to an inflationary trend since the 9th of September. You

would heard the Member for Tabaquite indicating what the US is trading on the black market. You would have heard also from my colleagues who focused on the inflationary trend based on—although VAT was reduced to 12.5 per cent being restored on 7,000-plus zero-rated items, and it is impacting upon the ability, especially of senior citizens, to purchase goods and services.

7.15 p.m.

Madam Speaker, it also has implications for senior citizens because when they cannot access drugs from CDAP, when they cannot access quality healthcare from the public health system and so on, they rely on this benefit from the national insurance system to keep their homes running and so on.

I could refer you to specifically a situation that came to me. I will not name the individual, but an individual came to me recently at the office of Couva South, the constituency office. And that person indicated to me that he had recently retired from serving the URP programme from the Couva regional office. And he attempted to have his forms properly filled out to apply for the retirement benefits and the information had not been forthcoming from the URP office because he had to make it through the Couva office and the Couva office had provided no information as it relates to what is the state of his records from the head office. And that individual is surviving on \$385 per month over the last three months, and he has a sickly wife, a spouse, to look after too. And these are the things that we must all put our heads collectively to in attempting to resolve.

And I join all and sundry making that appeal too, to ensure that the records, the officers of the National Insurance Board, the compliance unit must become more aggressive, must go out there and bring employers to task as it relates to having their records of employees up to date and remitting their deductions to the office of the national insurance system of this country. For too long we have heard, and we have heard the cries of workers in this country. When they retire, when companies fold and they go in search or attempting to access their benefits and so on from this particular system, we are told or they are told that your employer did not pay—we do not have the proper records and so on. And I know that the Minister of Finance, the Acting Prime Minister, is in a different, his mannerism seems to be a bit different today and so I will plead upon his sense of goodwill to continue to liaise with the National Insurance Board to ensure that there is a strong sense of compliance from this particular angle.

And in this regard also, Madam Speaker, I want to say too that you would have heard, when the Minister of Finance was actually piloting the Bill, the

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Leader of the Opposition and the Member for Siparia sought clarification on this very issue of the national insurance system because the Minister indicated that he would want to defer the new benefits and the new contribution rates to September 5, 2016, because he would want more consultation to take place.

But I would attempt to amplify the concerns of the Leader of the Opposition and not only the Leader of the Opposition, but all of us on this side and also persons who are in the system who have indicated to us that the proposed changes to the National Insurance Act and the National Insurance Regulations, in order to amend the various rates of benefits and we all know, because it is stated in the legislation to be payable or by an eligible person from September 5, 2016. If this comes into being, it would discriminate against current recipients of benefits. Recipients of benefits would continue to receive the same rate of benefits and shall not have the right to have their benefits increased.

This is unprecedented and has never happened before or in the past. Wherever there have been increases in benefits, Madam Speaker, in the past those who were in receipt of benefits had their benefits automatically increased. And I am sure that the Minister of Finance can seek further clarification and further advice from his colleague, the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West.

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

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Yes, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: And I just wish to caution you of the rule against tedious repetition. You may proceed.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, I am guided. I was simply attempting to amplify this particular position as it relates to amendments which have been circulated and what the Minister of Finance is contemplating through this particular piece of legislation and deferring it to September 5th, how it will lead to discrimination and also taking into consideration that 3,000 persons are likely to be affected.

And we have also heard from the Minister of Finance about taxation, a more efficient approach to taxation and so on and the importance of making an appeal to companies and so on, from the Attorney General and the Minister in the Office of the Attorney General, to be compliant and so on.

We have been told in the budget presentation and the mid-year review of the Minister of Finance about the need for a more efficient taxation system. We have

been told and we have heard about a revenue authority, but that is all that we continue to be told of. We have not or on occasions he has focused on money Bills in this House, he has not been in-depth. He has not been clinical as it relates to what is the state of the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority. What will be the fate of workers at the Board of Inland Revenue? What will be the fate of workers at the Customs and Excise Division? Will all the workers be absorbed into the Revenue Authority? How many will we terminated? Well, we continue, as from a Government's position, to grow the unemployment rate of this country?

And in this regard too, and I am sure that a government which understands the relevance of the labour movement, hopefully taking into consideration that you all signed a memorandum of understanding with a sector of the labour movement prior to the general elections of 2015, you will understand the importance of a recognized majority union and the good principles of collective bargaining and good industrial relations practices. And in that regard whether in this new entity, this new organizational structure of the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority, whether there will be unionized terms and conditions of employment, whether the issue of successorship will be addressed and so on, these are the important things, these are the voices that the Opposition is hearing from workers who are employed in the Board of Inland Revenue and at Customs and Excise as it relates to their future employment in these two entities.

So, Madam Speaker, it is important too that from a social protection point of view, as the unemployment rate and the numbers continue to increase in Trinidad and Tobago, we should hear something or, at least, I thought that in this particular Bill that was piloted that something, that some remark, or in passing, the Minister of Finance would have said that from the point of view of the national insurance system as they continue to focus on developing it and probably harmonizing it with other systems and so on for the benefit of the population of Trinidad and Tobago, we would have heard about the establishment of an unemployment insurance fund. Something that will bring great relief to the families of dismissed workers in this country, terminated workers and I am sure it would be welcomed by all and sundry in the continued development of Trinidad and Tobago from a socio-economic point of view.

So from where I stand, Madam Speaker, this particular piece of legislation is important in the continued development of the country, based on the relevance to the national insurance system, the taxation system of Trinidad and Tobago and so on. But the Government has a responsibility to take on board the recommendations of the Opposition as it relates to the national insurance system.

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The Government has the responsibility also to take a step back and look at the state of the economy, look at how the rate of unemployment has skyrocketed since September 7, 2015. The Government needs to offer hope to the citizens of this country from the point of view of developing the social security system. The Government needs to be strong on addressing the issue of legislation which will improve the standard of living and the quality of life of all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago as they would have grown accustomed to in relation to a partnership government that was people centred in relation to its tenure as a government of Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (*Caroni East*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, this House has been in a sombre mood for the entire evening and it is very fitting. And permit me the opportunity to express on behalf of my constituents of Caroni East and on my own behalf sincere condolences to the family of our former Prime Minister, his strong and graceful wife Hazel who served as Minister of Education and Minister of Local Government. I was in the Senate when she served as Minister of Education. To her sons, David and Brian and sister Petronella Manning-Alleyne, my colleague for more than 30 years in the field of neonatology.

We sat on opposite sides. I personally, many of my colleagues would have sat longer than I did, for eight years from 2007 to 2015, on opposite side of Mr. Manning, a person who came to define a significant part of our country and the region's post-independent history. His decades of dedicated, unwavering service to his country and region, his policies helped to shape our nation's global industrial thrust in the energy sector, one of the important people, by shaping our modern day economic and social systems in society.

He served our country with obvious joy, dedication and commitment and for that we must always and eternally be grateful to him. We rejoice in his life's journey and its immortal impact across our country, region and international community. May his family find strength and comfort in the arms of the Almighty at this tragic time and may his soul rest in eternal peace.

Madam Speaker, this evening, this afternoon and then moving onto this evening—it is the first time for a long time that I have seen the Minister of Finance in this incarnation and the Minister of Works and Transport and so on in previous incarnation, and now Acting Prime Minister and acting now as Minister of Works and Transport, it is one of his best presentations that I have seen him— [*Desk thumping*] for asking for support from this side of the House. Something has—he has been transformed and I congratulate him. [*Laughter*] Well, one thing

I would say and he knows it, I have sat with him many times when we did the joint select committee meetings, the special select committee meetings and joint select committee meetings on the Children Bill, the alcohol Bill, the tobacco Bill and he was a person of great patience—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: He still living, you know.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh:—and fortitude. [*Laughter*]

7.30 p.m.

So when he is in one setting he is extremely beautiful, but when he comes here—we had to deal with him while he was in Government, while we were in Government, then now he is back in Government. But, today, he sought to get the support of our team, the Opposition, in a very constructive manner in getting support for two Bills that he wants to bring forward: the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Bill and the Insurance Bill. And then our hon. Prime Minister indicated that we have some problems with one of the pieces of this Bill today, and which we will need some changes to.

So, this Bill today, an Act to provide for the variation of certain duties and taxes and to introduce provisions of a fiscal nature and for related matters is an omnibus piece of legislation, and it incorporates about nine different areas. It is consisting of a number of related but separate parts which seek to amend and/or repeal one or several existing Acts, and/or to enact one or several new Acts. So, it has one basic principle or purpose which ties together all the proposed enactments and thereby renders the Bill intelligible for parliamentary purposes. Nine pieces coming together in an omnibus piece of legislation and bringing together a single Bill so that all the legislative amendments resulting from a policy decision to facilitate parliamentary debate, and this is what we are doing now.

So, it is a money Bill, and basically this one seeks to give concessions in a number of different areas; the previous one, the Finance (No. 1) Bill. This is the fourth piece of finance type of legislation that came in, if I am not mistaken, this term, in the 10 months. The first was the budget statement on October 5th, then the second one was the Finance (No. 1) Bill, which came to this House on January 11th, and it was in the Senate in the other place on January 15th, that was Finance (No. 1) Bill; and then we had the midyear budget review on April 8th, and in that we included the variation of appropriation; and this one now is Finance (No. 2) Bill.

So, for four pieces of financial issues, we are debating here this evening, if I am not mistaken, and the Minister can correct me if it is four or five, but at the

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end of the fourth piece of financial issues coming to Parliament for debate, I want to proffer that the country is totally lost as to where we are in our economic situation as a nation state; and after 10 months I do not think the Government nor the Minister of Finance has been able to bring this country to a state, and to indicate to our people where we are in terms of our financial situation. The Finance (No. 1) Bill had a number of areas where there was imposition of taxes, and it was of a fiscal nature to bring in more revenue; the VAT, the Business Levy Fund, the Green Fund, and a few others to bring in more revenue. But, when we are bringing in revenue, we must look at it in context of what we are bringing in revenue for, and what is the larger picture.

In the budget presentation it was predicated that there was going to be an expenditure for about \$60 billion. Then the hon. Minister in one of the finance presentations indicated that it is going to come down to \$55 billion. Then he indicated that revenues might only be about \$40 billion, and therefore will have a deficit of close to \$15 to \$20 billion. But, we are still—even as a parliamentarian I am uncertain as to where we are in the financial aspects of Trinidad and Tobago for fiscal 2015/2016. We are imposing tax measures in Finance (No.1) Bill, and we are giving support to the people by ensuring that they benefit from certain areas where you are giving life to in this omnibus piece of legislation. But, we are unable to determine based on what you told us that you were doing in Finance (No.1) Bill, most of which would have become working around February and would have been assented to, and we want to be able to have an understanding of what financial benefits that it has brought in, in terms of the revenues in these areas from the Finance (No. 1) Bill.

And then by the imposition of these areas, by giving support to the national community in a number of different areas, how much you think we might be losing in terms of revenue and giving back to the population. And I want to put that over to the hon. Minister, by putting these things we are imposing taxes, and we are giving in one hand and we are improving the lives of people on another, how much revenue we are deriving this way and how much are we going to lose by the Finance (No. 2) Bill—well, not lose because the people would benefit from it.

So, we need to be a little clearer of where we are, and if the hon. Minister in his winding-up can tell us where we are as a country? What revenue we will be generating? Where is it coming from? And how much we expect to spend by the end of this fiscal year, September 30, 2016? We are just about three months away again, two and a half months away again. So, at least we should have an

understanding, and I am sure the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago want to have an understanding, based on the knowledge that everyone has, that the price of oil and gas have gone done considerably, and they would want to see how the Government is dealing with the matters of finance. So, hon. Minister, through you, Madam Speaker, it is important for the country to have a clearer understanding as far as this is concerned.

In the Finance (No. 1) Bill, the hon. Minister indicated that he would bring the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Bill and the Insurance Bill by June of this year, and which he has done, but last minute the end of June, and today we are being hustled because we got this piece of legislation Finance (No. 2) Bill on Friday, and basically we had Saturday and Sunday to look at it. But, it is not detailed and not too long for us to have an understanding. So, obviously the Minister had to rush the issue of the Insurance Bill, and then the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Bill has not come forward. I do not think we have seen that piece of legislation here yet—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, I just want to refer you to Standing Order 48(1). You have been on your legs 13 minutes. I think I have exercised tremendous—gave you tremendous latitude, and therefore what is before us is Finance (No. 2) Bill, and I would really ask you to bring your contribution into Finance (No. 2) Bill. Thank you.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Madam Speaker, I would have thought that the hon. Minister of Finance would have brought something on the property tax, which he promised to bring in March and he did not bring. So, this Finance (No. 2) Bill should have included something on the property tax. It should have included something on the heritage and stabilisation, because they took money from the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, and there was no avenue for us to even discuss that. So, this Finance Bill should have incorporated something on that as well. So, Finance (No. 2) Bill, we would have expected to have that incorporation in it. And what is important, he said in the Finance (No. 1) Bill that this Finance (No. 2) Bill will come in February. But here it is we are in June—March, April, May, June—four months later and we are now receiving it. So that I would close the discussion on that aspect of it.

Now, I want to respond a bit to what the Attorney General said. I do not think that you were here, but you might have been listening. And he spoke about a number of Bills that he wants to bring—*[Laughter]*

Mr. Deyalsingh: Standing Order 48(1).

Dr. T. Gopeesingh:—and no—very relevant, I am speaking. *[Laughter]*

Madam Speaker: I just wanted to say to the Member that maybe his memory is not so efficient in terms of when I was here, but you may proceed.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I stand corrected, Madam Speaker. But, I am happy that you were here [*Laughter*] and the Attorney General made mention of a number of Bills that he wants to bring in. You know, the Attorney General cannot feel good about that when he knows to himself that he brought in only two or three pieces of legislation within the last 10 months, and when he is aspiring to bring this vast amount of legislation they would have probably lost Government and we would be on that side by the time he—[*Desk thumping*]

But he provided a lot of data on the companies issue which is part of the Companies Act, Chap. 81:01, which is one of the areas in this Bill, and he gave a lot of data on it. But surprisingly, he was not able to produce the data and provide the data on the Bail Bill.

Madam Speaker: Member! Member!

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yes, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member! Again, it may be considered very clever, but we are understanding the argument, we are on the Finance (No. 2) Bill. I have warned you a second time. And if we are talking about the Bail Bill, I think we heard about three strikes. You may proceed.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I was referring to the Companies—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh:—Act, Chap. 81:01—

Madam Speaker: Excuse me, Member, please. Leader of the House.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. I may give my friend an opportunity to collect his thoughts [*Laughter*] during my moving of the Procedural Motion.

Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 15(5), I beg to move that the House continue to sit until the completion of the matter before it. Enough time, Member?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yes.

Question put and agreed to.

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Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would not detain the House too much longer, because I know we have been here for a long evening.

Let us look at the National Insurance Act, Chap. 32:01, where this Act setting out the framework for national insurance in Trinidad and Tobago, and under the National Insurance Act the NIB is the body designated to carry out the general functions, powers and duties under the Act. And this National Insurance Board provides comprehensive long-term, short-term and employment injury benefits to approximately 517,000 workers. And, Madam Speaker, and colleagues, over four billion is currently paid to beneficiaries on an annual basis. So, we are looking to increase the contributions and looking to increase the benefits as well, and we have certain reservations about the timing for that, and which the hon. Leader of the Opposition will deal with that a little later.

7.45 p.m.

The National Insurance Board has paid in excess of \$30 billion in benefits since its inception, and currently manages a fund of approximately \$26 billion. I would like to proffer to the hon. Minister, that he take some active steps in looking at the whole insurance area and the NIB in terms of the way forward, and look particularly not only about the contributions and the benefits that citizens will be getting, but from a macro framework the whole issue of pension scheme and the pension fund strategies.

There was a Joint Select Committee in 2013/2014 on the role of National Insurance Board and the National Insurance Appeal Board, and there was another Committee set up by Parliament to look at the pension reform. But, from a macroeconomic perspective, despite the fact that we are dealing with contributions and benefits, the pension industry needs to be looked at because it impacts on economic growth through promotion of financial market efficiency, transparency, national savings and capital market development, and cost to Government and private sector. Why is that important, Madam Speaker, in the context of this Bill and the amount of contributions we are making? Because here it is that we have the National Insurance Board with about \$40 billion in assets and we are not deriving the benefits that we should have from investment of this \$40 billion.

Permit me just to give a little information about the national situation in terms of the ratio of persons age 65 and older, because this is where we are looking at benefits for people. Persons age 65 and over and to persons under the age of 65,

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the percentage is 43.5 per cent. So, the ratio of persons age 65 and over to persons under the age of 15 is 43.5 per cent, and by international standards any ratio greater than 30 is considered old.

Life expectancy—this is important because the National Insurance Board has to take that into consideration, and hon. Minister will have to lead them and lead them into discussions on this. Life expectancy of males have risen to 71 years in 2011, from 68 in 2000. So in 11 years, life expectancy for males has increased by three years. For women, in 2000, life expectancy was 73 years, and in 2011 it is now 77 years. So our ladies are living longer. So in terms of long-term pension contributions from the working population, what we are seeing now will not be sufficient to support an ageing population.

So no matter what we discussing today under this Bill in terms of the National Insurance, if we continue the way we are going we will not be able to support the pensions for our aging population, and this is a critical area that must be looked at properly. So we have to protect our aging population from poverty in the long-term and we must look at a redistributive income. The other area that had occurred, was a discussion on the pension reform by the Ministry of Finance at one time, and it is important for the hon. Minister of Finance to have some information in terms of guiding him forward and guiding NIB forward on this.

Under the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act what the Government has decided to do, this is very noteworthy and very acceptable because we want to reduce the carbon imprint and so on, which has been spoken about by—
[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Carbon what?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Footprint. Carbon footprint and the reduction of carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. So we accept this and we go along very well with this area under the motor vehicles, in terms of the customs duty and the motor vehicle tax.

The corporation tax. We heard a lot from two of the colleagues there, the Minister in the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs, and the Attorney General. They spoke at length on the corporations and what they want to do about these corporations, but I want to warn them that in any piece of legislation that they are bringing to this Parliament, as the Attorney General speaks about proportionality on most occasions, I want him to understand that in framing the piece of legislation that is going to come forward.

Madam Speaker, these are some of the little areas that I wanted to speak about and we hold the Government to their word. They promised that they will bring the property tax piece of legislation, they have not brought it; they promised to bring the Heritage and Stabilisation Act, they have not brought it; they promised to bring the piece of legislation which could have been included here, that is the tax on alcohol and cigarette, what has happened to it? It is no longer there. It was not in the Finance (No. 1) Bill, not in Finance (No. 2) Bill.

So is there some incompetence that we are seeing? The lack of capacity and capability that we are seeing, in terms of the promises that have been made by the Minister of Finance and his team, are not being able to live up to the expectations of what Parliament was going to get. So the Minister will have to explain, based on his promises, why he has not been able to deliver on some of these promises which he echoed not only in this House, but in the other place as well, when he introduced the Finance (No. 1) Bill in the Senate on January 15th.

So, Madam Speaker, thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for La Horquetta/Talparo. Minister of Finance.

The Minister of Finance and Acting Prime Minister (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, in the spirit of camaraderie and geniality that pervades this House, has allowed us to complete and perhaps catch a little bit of the game at the Oval—perhaps. Madam Speaker, first I want to thank all hon. Members for their contributions, notwithstanding the—what shall I say—emotional nature of some of the contributions. I think that is the best word I could use. Passionate! Passionate! Notwithstanding some of the passionate adventurism that some speakers engaged in, I wish to thank all Members for their contributions.

With respect to the statements made by the Member for Couva South, I think the Member asked whether the NIB investments or the fund has been affected by the volatility and the uncertainty in the international community arising from Brexit and other reasons. But I want to indicate that the NIB is limited in terms of the international investments they could make, and it is timely that the Member should bring it up because I have a request before me from the National Insurance Board. Now this was pre-Brexit, just before. I will say about two weeks before I had a request from the National Insurance Board to consider increasing the percentage of investments that can be invested overseas. I had not yet begun to give it detailed consideration, and I must say what has happened in terms of that vote for United Kingdom to leave the European Union has caused me to reflect.

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But the point that the NIB made is that the investment opportunities in Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean are limited. They are very limited and the returns are very, very small. So it is still something that we will keep under consideration. So, as far as I am aware, there has been no significant impact on the National Insurance Fund post the turmoil in Europe.

With respect to the retirement age, this was in fact the subject of a prime ministerial question some time ago. I was in the House when that question was raised by a Member opposite, and the substantive Prime Minister did say at the time that we have no plans to increase the retirement age. So I do not know what is the source of this rumour that we are actively considering an increase of the retirement age, we are not. Not at this time. So I would like to put that speculation to rest.

With respect to records at the National Insurance Board—I mean, this is factual. I recall some time ago I had asked to see the statement on my own contributions and six years were missing. I have been employed now since 1979 continuously, and the six years that were missing is when I was employed in Parliament. It did not make any sense and, in fact, it arose when we had payment of gratuity seven years ago. I was told I had to settle that and I decided look, rather than fight up with the National Insurance Board and the Parliament, I just went and paid the contributions again. So that I can understand that there are many, many issues with respect to the records. It is not just the records at the National Insurance Board, the system of payments and the apportionment of payments to individuals really needs a drastic overall.

On many occasions I have heard of individuals where NIS has been deducted from their salaries and it is not appearing on their record at the National Insurance Board. These are people that work for state corporations and it does not matter what Government is in power. This has happened. As I said, it happened to me, where as a parliamentarian my NIS contributions just disappeared. So I quite understand and I do give an undertaking that this is something I will give particular attention to.

With respect to the—let me just say now and I will speak again when we come to the committee stage—question of the contribution rates that are being proposed on the tables and so on, I just want to read from the Ninth Actuarial Review which covered the three-year period from July 2010 to June 2013, and this is in the Conclusion of the Actuarial Review on page 107 of the Report. This is what the actuaries had to say:

“The actuarial review has shown that the financial situation of the NIS has significantly deteriorated over the three-year period from...July 2010 to...June

2013. The general average premium of the scheme has increased from 17.6 to 23.8 per cent between the two valuations. On that account, major actions must be undertaken in order to restore the financial health of the system.”

And the actuaries went on to make a number of recommendations, most important of which is they made the point that:

“The present contribution rate is clearly insufficient to finance the”—National Insurance scheme—“in the long term. It is recommended to increase the contribution rate and to introduce into the...Act an automatic mechanism for a”—periodic adjustments to—“the contribution rate on the basis of actuarial reviews.”

So the point is that the actuaries have said now, for some time, that the fund is in trouble and that it is necessary for us to increase the contribution rates. What we have before us today is the work done by the National Insurance Board based on the actuarial report. Now I fully appreciate the point being made by the Opposition and I have looked at the amendments proposed to clause 4, but the advice that I have is that we must consult with the actuaries before we can consider implementing these amendments because this is a very, very complex and important matter.

And therefore, it would not be prudent of us to simply proceed with these amendments, laudable as they are, without a detailed examination of their implications and the requirements to ensure that the national insurance fund is funded to the extent that it can pay benefits over the medium to long term.

8.00 p.m.

So I am giving the undertaking again and I will give it at the committee stage for a third time, if necessary, that between now and September, the Ministry of Finance will carefully study the points made with respect to any possible unequal treatment or any variance with respect to the benefits received by individuals ex ante and post facto to see whether there are anomalies, and I give the assurance that if we determine after consultation with the actuaries and the National Insurance Board, if there are anomalies, we are will correct them in September. I want to put that on the table. I am told the attorneys have been looking at this since the Leader of the Opposition raised it, which must be about six hours ago or five hours ago. The attorneys, the Chief Parliamentary Counsel, the Treasury Solicitor, the consultants at the NIB, have been examining this issue and the response is that it is a very complex matter and we should not rush into it.

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So I would like to leave the Bill as is but I give the undertaking that we are going to study it very carefully, and we get a detailed explanation from the National Insurance Board and also a detailed analysis of the impact of the proposed amendments that are being proposed by the Leader of the Opposition, and we will let you know what is happening. It will be full disclosure because we are all in this together and this is something that we have to do together. The national insurance system is too important. There are too many people involved and too many beneficiaries. I was surprised to learn that the Member for Couva South is not on the cusp of eligibility for national insurance pension. “Coulda fool me.” [*Laughter*] But say what. I am on the cusp; I am not far away from qualifying for national insurance pension. But we will most certainly take your views into account and treat them with the seriousness that they deserve. The bottom line is the contributions have to be increased.

With respect to a comment made by the Member for Caroni East and I would caution the Member for Caroni East, be careful when you are so fulsome in your praise, Members on your side might get jealous. [*Laughter*] But I want to thank the hon. Member for Caroni East for your very kind remarks, your very kind sentiments, I appreciate them. Now, the Member for Caroni East asked about the revenue that we might lose or gain with the measures. The fact of the matter is there is a fundamental principle here. These are incentives, so you give up taxes in order to stimulate economic activity which itself leads to increased income and leads to increased revenue.

So that it is very difficult at this point in time to establish what the revenue situation will be because right now, there is not the kind of investment that we would like to see in multi-storey car parks, in housing construction, in the construction of commercial buildings and so on. We feel now with the adjustments we have made to the regime, we should—[*Interruption*] and taking into account the complaints raised about the approvals process, we feel that this will lead to an expansion in activity in the construction—[*Interruption*] Minister, please. Member, please. What happened? Former Minister, please, please, cool it.

So, Madam Speaker, through you, we believe that by these measures, there will be a stimulus to the construction sector and even though these measures give up taxes, they lead to greater economic activity which leads to greater revenue. So you give with this hand and you get in this hand and I will use a parallel. The incentives to the petroleum sector, while they give up a lot, they have had the intended effect of causing increased exploration and drilling, that is a fact, which in the long term, it could take seven, eight years. If BHP strikes oil now as we

speaking, it will take seven years, it would not be until 2022 or 2023 before these oilfields come into production. So while you give up the revenue in 2015 and 2014 and so on, it is an investment in future production. So with respect to these incentives, it is not possible to precisely calculate, at this point in time, what the incentives will yield. So it is not a good idea to do a precise calculation to say all right, these incentives will cost us \$50 million but we expect to get \$200 million.

We will see because there are lots of factors that affect investment by the private sector. We have a risk-averse private sector in this country. I had a visit from a potential investor in one of these car parks who said that the incentives as they are now were inadequate in order to allow him to earn the rate of return on his investment in the particular car park. And he was asking whether we could look at a waiver of value added tax on the construction materials, as an example, or perhaps guarantee that a percentage of the car park could be populated by Government vehicles.

We thought that at this time, that was a little too complex. We did not think it was appropriate at this time to waive value added tax on the construction of a car park because it is very, very difficult to manage, very, very difficult to determine whether the materials that would be purchased would, in fact, be used for the car park. This is something that requires careful study. With respect to guaranteeing that a proportion of the spaces in the car park would be rented by the Government, again, this is something that we thought was not appropriate at this point in time.

And I was quite pleased and pleasantly surprised to see the Furness group starting the construction of a large car park, almost 2,000 spaces right at the corner of Independence Square and Edward Street and I thought to myself, well, this is a private sector group that has done its modelling, has done its calculation, has done its forecasting, and has decided to take the plunge and go forward and construct this 2,000 spot car park, and that will clearly stimulate economic activity, it will clearly stimulate activity in the construction phase and certainly later on, would create jobs and create economic activity.

So that the point I am making, it is difficult with our risk-averse private sector to see how they re-act and you have to keep tweaking and you have to keep adjusting and you cannot go overboard but you have to understand when your incentives are not working. The reason why—*[Interruption]* You wanted to ask a question? Sure.

Dr. Gopeesingh: In that context, hon. Minister, is there anything that Government is considering with the private sector investors for renewing their

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confidence in joining with Government in terms of what you desire, in terms of the housing construction and other constructions? Is there anything that you want to do to build their confidence back to reinvest with you all?

Hon. C. Imbert: Well, the fact is that you have to create the economic environment—Madam Speaker, through you. You have to create the economic environment that creates a risk profile for a project that makes it viable because all projects are risky you know. It is not as if it is a guaranteed return. I mean, I am sure that in 2006, people who were invested in the oil sector, thought that it would never end and then it went from \$147 down to \$35, the price of oil, and then it flew back up to \$100 very quickly and remained there for about five years. So I am sure that, again, people in the oil sector thought, well, this will never end but look at what has happened now. So that private sector investors are always modelling all of the factors involved, all of the uncertainties, all of the risks, all of the threats, all of the opportunities.

With respect to the specific question that you have asked, our policy with respect to housing will be to encourage the private sector to finance, design and construction housing with a guaranteed takeout by the Government in one of two ways. Either we match persons on the database at the TTMF and the Home Mortgage Bank and so on who have already qualified for mortgages. They have already been screened, they have already been judged to be capable of paying a mortgage. Either we match the database to the particular housing developments or we have another form of guarantee for private housing developers. Because this takes out the risk element in terms of the project. So that what the developer would then be looking at is the rate of return and having removed the risk, we then have to agree on what is a reasonable return, because we do not want a situation where it is all in favour of the investor, and it all against the taxpayer because it is the taxpayers' funds we are talking about.

But that is the approach that we are going to use. Either we match the qualified applicants to the projects or if that is not feasible with respect to a particular project, we will give a guaranteed takeout of the—and that is coming. This is not instant coffee. These things are not done overnight. I mean, without being pejorative at all, there are so many things that your administration spoke about and you know, years later, these things could not be achieved. These things are not simple. What you need is a will and you need a commitment to get them done. And I can assure you that it is our intention for the benefit of everyone to get these things done. It is in everybody's interest to get the private sector, to get private capital, to get idle resources, idle equipment, idle land, idle materials and

so on, and put them to work and create wealth and create an economic activity and create jobs, and it does not matter if it is the Member for Tabaquite that is incentivized or motivated—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rambachan: Or the Member for San Fernando West.

Hon. C. Imbert: Or the Member for San Fernando West who is incentivized. [*Laughter*] It does not matter because the objective is to create economic activity and to mobilize idle capital and idle resources. So I hope that that is an answer to that.

With respect to cigarette and alcohol taxes, that will come. That will come later in the year. With respect to the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund—the amendments—that also will come. And with respect to the amendments to the property tax, that too will come later on in 2016. The property tax is proving to be a slightly complex matter because there are issues related to equality of treatment. There are some complex issues related to equality of treatment of individual taxpayers. So we have to make haste slowly with respect to that one.

With respect to what we did earlier in the year, there were some budgetary measures that we dealt with, changes to the VAT regime, Green Fund business levy, increase in the personal allowance, increase in the cap on pensions. There is a whole series of things that were announced in October last year and what I am doing is implementing them as we go along. I have a work programme and we are moving towards completing the work programme.

What is before us today is to implement the policy of trying to encourage alternative forms of energy, alternative systems in terms of motor vehicles to encourage conservation, to encourage the green economy, to move people away from fossil fuels towards other forms of power for motor vehicles. We are trying to put in place—well, not trying to put in place, we are putting in place our measures with respect to stimulation of the construction sector. We are dealing with the fact that we must increase the contributions to the national insurance fund and it is a work in progress.

I have already announced our framework in terms of our measures and as you see, the work is being done. You know sometimes, you get up in this Parliament and you say, look, my plan is to do something in March and something intervenes and you do it in April instead. But the fact of the matter is, this all part of the work programme of the Ministry of Finance and we are working towards accomplishing all of the objectives that we have.

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So, in conclusion, I would like to say that I appreciate all the contributions made today. I think on behalf of all of us, I will declare an interest on behalf of everybody here that we have all benefited from amnesties in the past and we may all benefit from amnesties in the future, so I am doing that on behalf of every single one of the 41 Members here so that you do not need to declare your own interest in voting for this legislation as I suspect that you will.

And with those few words, Madam Speaker, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

8.15 p.m.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.

House in committee.

Clauses 1 and 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3.

Question proposed: That clause 3 stand part of the Bill.

Madam Chairman: I believe there is an amendment to clause 3(e).

Mr. Imbert: 3(e) In the inserted section 24A(1)(b), delete “;or” and substitute “; and”.

In clause 3(e), which amends section 24 and inserts section 24(1)(b) the word “or” should be deleted and replaced with “and”. That would be on page 4 of the original Bill in the amendment that introduces 24(1)(b). This would be at the end of (i). There is the word “or” which we have to replace with “and”. Are you seeing it?

Madam Chairman: Okay, so you delete “; or” and substitute “; and”.

Mr. Imbert: Correct.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 3, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 4.

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

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, there are amendments from both sides to clause 4. You go ahead.

Mr. Singh: Madam Chair, the Leader of the Opposition has circulated several amendments to clause 4. We would want to read this into the record and there is a certain undertaking given by the hon. Minister of Finance. So, perhaps if we could circulate it and make it easy.

Mr. Imbert: It is already circulated.

Circulated amendment:

Clause	Extent of Amendment
4(1)(g)	In clause 4(1)(g), in the proposed Section 54E.(1), delete the words, “Table A6 in the Third schedule” and substitute the words, “Table A7 of the Third Schedule”.
4(1)(g)	In clause 4(1)(g), in the proposed Section 54E.(6), delete the words, “Table B6 and C6 of the Third schedule” and substitute the words, “Table B7 Part I and II of the Third Schedule”.
4(1)(g)	In clause 4(1)(g), in the proposed Section 54E.(7), delete the words, “Table D6 in the Third schedule” and substitute the words, “Table D7 of the Third Schedule”.
4(1)(g)	In clause 4(1)(g), in the proposed Section 54E.(8), delete the words, “Table D6 in the Third schedule and the National Insurance (Employment Injury) Payment of Medical Expenses (Amendment) Order” and substitute the words, “Table D7 of the Third Schedule and the National Insurance (Employment Injury) Payment of Medical Expenses (Amendment) Order”.

Mr. Singh: So it reads as circulated and, perhaps, you want to give the undertaking.

Mr. Imbert: Sure. As I said for the last five hours, the lawyers at the Chief Parliamentary Counsel’s Department, Ministry of Finance and the National Insurance Board have been looking very carefully at the point made by the Leader of the Opposition and the proposed amendments, and the response I have is that it

is a very complex matter and it would be better to consult with the actuaries to ensure that whatever we do does not jeopardize the ability of the fund to pay the benefits in the medium to long-term.

So, I give the undertaking, again, that between now and September I will ensure that there is proper discussion with the National Insurance Board and the actuaries to determine the full impact of the adjustments. We determine the implications and also what the effect would be of the proposed amendments and we will return with appropriate adjustments to the Bill that would deal with the issue that has been raised in an appropriate manner for the benefit of all and we will keep you fully informed of what is taking place.

Mr. Singh: Satisfactory for the time being.

Madam Chairman: So the undertaking is noted and I also believe there is another amendment that is circulated.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, there was just a word missing on page 9.

Circulated amendment:

Clause 4(f)(ii) Insert after the words “during the”, the word “period”.

Mr. Imbert: The original Bill had “during the 3rd March” and it should be “during the period 3rd March”. So this inserts the word “period” so it would read “during the period 3rd March, 2014” as circulated. And also, at the end of that same subsection (7), we are adding the word “and”.

Madam Chairman: No, that is another clause, Minister.

Mr. Imbert: Oh, that is another clause. I am sorry. I am sorry. My apologies.

Madam Chairman: Okay?

Mr. Imbert: Yes.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 4, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 5.

Question proposed: That clause 5 stand part of the Bill.

Madam Chairman: I believe there is also an amendment to clause 5.

Circulated amendment:

- Part IV - Clause 5(a)
- (1) In the substituted subsection (7), delete the words “if not” and substitute the words “is not”.
 - (2) Insert, at the end of the substituted subsection (7), “; and”.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, as circulated, it would be on page 24 of the Bill that was circulated with the yellow highlights and that is an amendment to Part IV, clause 5(a). We are deleting the words “if not” and substituting the words “is not”. It is just a grammatical error. Instead of “if not” it should be “is not”. And then we have to add the word “and” at the end of that subsection. So it would read:

If an Order is not laid in Parliament within the period of sixty-one days referred to in subsection (6), the Order shall on the termination of that period expire and be of no further effect; and

And you go on to (b).

Madam Chairman: Is it a colon “and” or just and?

Mr. Imbert: A semi-colon “and”, as circulated.

Question, on amendment, put and agreed to.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, we have an amendment to clause 5, where there were two clause 5 apparently in the original Bill. So we have to renumber the second 5 as 6 and there are consequential amendments after that.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So Minister, is this page 27?

Circulated amendment:

- Part V
- Renumber clause 5 as clause 6.
- Renumber the existing clauses 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 as clauses 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11.

Mr. Imbert: Yes. I just want to point out that in the circulated amendments, we are changing the effective date for the amnesty from 31st August to 16th September.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Minister, let me just put the question first.

Mr. Imbert: I understand, sorry, my mistake.

Question, on amendment, put and agreed to.

Question put and agreed to.

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

Clause 6.

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

Mr. Imbert: We have an amendment to clause 6(d).

Circulated amendment:

Renumbered clause 6(d)	In the inserted section 45E (1) (a) and (b), insert after the words “newly-constructed multi-family dwelling”, the words “, the construction of which commenced on or after 1 st July, 2016”
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Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, on page 27, in the renumbered 6(d), down at the bottom of the page, the penultimate word “dwelling” before the semicolon, you put a comma and we want to insert the words “the construction of which commenced on or after 1st July, 2016.”

8.30 p.m.

And then in—that is in (a), Madam Chairman, and similarly on the second page in (b), after the word “dwelling”. It appears twice, okay?

Question, on amendment, put and agreed to.

Mr. Imbert: 6(d).

Mr. Al-Rawi: If you are doing that, then you have to take 6(d)(e).

Mr. Imbert: No, well, I think we should—

Mr. Al-Rawi: Just take (f) and do the two together. So you should give—

Madam Chairman: So you want to do clause 6(d) and clause 6(f)?

Mr. Imbert: It is up to you. No, no, we are taking the whole of 6.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Okay, once you mention clause 6(d) and 6(f), we are good.

Mr. Imbert: You are taking the whole of renumbered clause 6—

Madam Chairman: As circulated?

Mr. Imbert: Yes. So that is clause 6(d) and clause (f).

Circulated amendment:

6(f): In the substituted section 103A, delete the words “31st August, 2016” wherever it occurs and substitute the words “16th September, 2016”.

Question, on amendment, put and agreed to.

Question put: That renumbered clause 6 stand part of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 6, renumbered clause 7, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 7.

Question proposed: That clause 7 stand part of the Bill.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Minister, would this be renumbered clause 7?

Mr. Imbert: Renumbered clause 7, yes.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 7, renumbered clause 8, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 8.

Question proposed: That clause 8 stand part of the Bill.

Madam Chairman: I believe there is an amendment?

Mr. Imbert: Yes, Madam Chairman. The original Bill—[*Interruption*]

[*Dr. Gopeesingh rises to exit the Chamber*] [*Laughter*]

Mr. Imbert: “He going cricket?” I think we all want to go cricket.

Madam Chairman: And, therefore, if we be attentive, I am sure we will.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, I do not know what is going on with my Bench. I do not know what is wrong with them. Let us move on. So we are:

Circulated amendments:

(1) In the chapeau, delete the words “in Schedule 2”;

(2) In the inserted section 54 A:

(a) deleting the words “31st August, 2016” wherever it occurs and substitute the words “16th September, 2016”; and

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- (b) in paragraph (c), insert the word “at” before the words “31st December 2015”.

Madam Chairman: Would you also take clause 9(b) also?

Mr. Imbert: Yes, could you also—Yes, I will take clause 9 (b) as circulated.

Circulated amendments:

- (1) Insert before the existing paragraph (b), the following:

“(b) in Schedule 2—”

- (2) by renumbering paragraphs subparagraphs (i) and (ii), respectively.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 8, renumbered clause 9, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 9, renumbered clause 10, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 10.

Question proposed: That clause 10 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Imbert: We have an amendment to renumbered clause 11:

Circulated amendment:

Delete the words “31st August, 2016” wherever it occurs and substitute the words “16th September, 2016”.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 10, renumbered clause 11, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

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

House resumed.

Bill reported, with amendment, read the third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to a date to be fixed. However, before the Adjournment, I would like to ask that we be allowed to bring Eid ul Fitr greetings, please? Thank you.

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**Greetings
(Eid ul Fitr)**

Madam Speaker: Indeed.

The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam Speaker. It give me great pressure to bring the Government's greetings to the Islamic community, to Trinidad and Tobago and to the world indeed, that celebrates the festival of Eid ul Fitr, to this honourable House, through you, Madam Speaker.

This is a tradition, and I speak now, translating as best as I can for the rest of Trinidad and Tobago. I have the pleasure of being the son of a very staunch Muslim man, son of a very staunch Presbyterian mother, of a Hindu grandfather, married to a Catholic wife, and growing up in Trinidad and Tobago. So it has been a very good experience to see religions from many different perspectives, and to be born into them, I think, perhaps, this is the blessing of Trinidad and Tobago, truly and most spectacularly.

We are technically in the ninth month of the Islamic Calendar, and on July 05th, we will celebrate Eid ul Fitr. It will be celebrated in other parts of the world on Tuesday, as opposed to the Wednesday. It takes us back to the whole meaning of sacrifice and religious observance. The month of Ramadan as it is called in Arabic, when it first occurred, has great symbolic and deep religious impact for practising Muslims. It is, in fact, the recognition of the Angel Gabriel's visitation upon the Prophet Muhammad, alayhi as-salam, peace be unto him. In the beginning of the transfer of knowledge from God the Almighty, Allahu Akbar, to the Messenger of God. In that context, 23 years elapsed, whilst that message was being received in a very powerful way, as the Angel Gabriel came on to the Prophet Muhammad, alayhi as-salam. He said to him:

[*Arabic spoken*]

Speak and read, essentially, to a man who was illiterate, and thence was born the impact of God's will in transforming mankind.

Islam has evolved over the years, and is a very profound religion, a very disciplined religion, practising many tenets, essentially core-characteristic shared by other religions, that of faith, that of submission, that of prayer, that of charity, certainly concepts known to all religions.

It is—[*Interruption*] pardon? And abstinence, of course. The Month of Ramadan itself, is intended to have reflection upon sacrifice and abstinence, as

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my learned friend from Chaguanas West has reminded me. It is not only sacrifice and abstinence from food, but from every form of temptation or sometimes considered to be evil. It is a restraint of mind and soul, and as the body purifies itself through abstinence, so too is the soul intended to be purified in that process.

The Month Ramadan culminates in the celebration of Eid ul Fitr, which is the lesser of two Eids. Eid is a religious celebration, a celebration is literally what it means, Eid. Eid al-Fitr is the eid shayari, the smaller of two Eids. The first one is Eid al-Adha, which is the greater of the two sacrifices. Eid al-Fitr ends in the day, the one day in the Islamic year when you are not allowed to fast. And Eid al-Fitr literally means, the celebration of the breaking of fast. Fitr, to break fast, Eid celebration.

On that day a very important charity is required to be done and that is, of course, zakat, which is where you give of your earnings, your annual earnings to the poor and to the distressed. In recognition of the sincerity of the religious holiday, that being the time when the Angel Gabriel came to deliver the message of God, the first verse revealed unto the Prophet:

[*Arabic spoken*]

—was Al-Fatiha, which is:

[*Arabic spoken*]

—which is the opening verse; fatiha, means to open.

Al-Fatiha is the opening verse, and combined in those seven short verses, is intended to be the essence of Islam. So permit me in bringing Eid Mubarak, celebrations of Eid, simply to read into the record Al-Fatiha, which is the best way that one can offer celebrations. I will read it in Arabic and then in English:

[*Arabic spoken*]

Which means in Arabic:

In the name of Allah the Eternal Merciful,
And a special merciful,
Praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds,
The entirely Merciful, the especially Merciful,
Sovereign of the day of recompense or judgement,
It is you we worship, and you we ask for help,

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Guide us on the straight path,
 the path of those upon whom you have bestowed favour,
 not those who have evoked your anger, or those who are astray.
 And I thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

8.45 p.m.

Mr. Fazal Karim (*Chaguanas East*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Let me first join with my colleagues and the national community in extending sincere condolences to Mrs. Hazel Manning, David and Brian and members of the extended family of the Hon. Prime Minister, formerly, Mr. Patrick Manning.

Mr. Manning would certainly go down in the, and etched in the history of Trinidad and Tobago for his significant contributions that he would have made to the development of our blessed nation. I knew a bit about Mr. Manning by reading about him in the College Annual, since though we were not around contemporary students, we were both from the same alma mater like the hon. Attorney General, Presentation College, San Fernando. And, therefore, it is both with a sense of sadness, but also with a sense of blessing that we would have been able to share the life and accomplishments of this very wonderful human being.

Madam Speaker, Eid ul Fitr is one of the two festivals in Islam. It is both a happy and a sad occasion. It is a time of rejoicing, for having completed a month of rigorous fasting, extra prayers, reading the Holy Qur'an and increased charity. It is also a sad time that we are leaving this month of great blessings and opportunities for forgiveness and spiritual refinement as depicted in the well-known Qasida bidden Alvida or farewell to Ramadan.

On the morning of Eid there is a special congregational prayer either in the mosque or in open air. Madam Speaker, after the service, gifts are exchanged and people visit relatives and friends. Locally, Eid dinners are organized in the days that follow the Holy Month of Ramadan. Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic Calendar, follows the month of Shaban. During this month of Shaban, Muslims prepare themselves physically and psychologically for Ramadan. Many even keep fast, at least six optional fasts, in the month of Shaban. The fast of Ramadan is obligatory except if one is ill or on a journey. And, even so, if you miss any of those days, you are expected to complete the like number of days of fast subsequently.

Ramadan is followed by the month of Shawwal. All the Islamic months are either 29 or 30 days, and are marked by the appearance of the new moon and,

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therefore, Trinidad and Tobago will join with the Muslim community in looking out for the sighting of the new moon if it was not sighted this evening, will be sighted tomorrow night. And, therefore, the holiday by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is appropriately earmarked for Wednesday as Eid ul Fitr.

Madam Speaker, fasting is not restricted to Muslims alone. According to the Holy Qur'an, chapter 2 verse 183 it says:

That fasting was prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you so that you may attain Taqwa or piety or God consciousness.

Indicating that all generations before the Holy Prophet Muhammad, upon whom be peace, would have fasted.

Muslims are commanded to fast so that we may learn self-restraint. This restraint and devotion is especially felt during Ramadan, but we must all strive to make this a daily part of our learning. There are many benefits of fasting as commanded by Almighty Allah, God, and the Sunnah, the practice of the Holy Prophet, upon whom be peace.

Through increased devotion, Muslims feel closer to their creator and recognize that everything we have in this life is a blessing from him. Through fasting, a Muslim experiences hunger and thirst and sympathizes with those in the world who have very little to eat or drink anything. To increased charity, Muslims develop feelings of generosity and goodwill towards others. The Prophet, upon whom be peace, once said: A man's wealth is never diminished by charity.

Through self-control, a person practises good manners, good speech and good habits. Through changing routines, Muslims have a chance to establish healthier lifestyle habits, particularly with regard to overcoming any forms of compulsive behaviour. Through family and community gatherings, Muslims strengthen the bonds of love and brotherhood in their own communities and throughout the world.

During the last 10 days of Ramadan, Muslims seek to observe the night of grandeur, the night of power, Laylat al Qadr. We are told to seek any of the odd nights in the last 10 nights on which the Holy Qur'an may have been revealed. You know, Madam Speaker, former hon. Prime Minister, Mr. Patrick Manning, died on the 27th day of Ramadan, and the night of that 27th is when we are told to seek that night of grandeur when the Holy Qur'an was first revealed.

Madam Speaker, about 70 days after Eid ul Fitr is the festival known as Eid ul-Adha, sometimes commonly called in Trinidad and Tobago, Bakr-Eid and that

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Eid is associated with the hajj. This Eid and the hajj generally commemorates the trials and sacrifices of Abraham and his family. The hajj is observed annually by Muslims throughout the world and Muslims of Trinidad and Tobago have been able to make the pilgrimage every year.

We want to thank all those who would have been associated, particularly the previous UNC administration, and subsequently followed by the PNM administration, in ensuring the facility or the ease for our pilgrims in Trinidad and Tobago to receive their hajj visas right here in our country through the courtesy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Madam Speaker, as a member of the Muslim community, and since I have the rapt attention of the Acting Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, who is now going to be listening to what I am going to call for—and the Acting Prime Minister now hear me make this call together with the Attorney General—as a member of the Muslim community, for the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to continue to pursue vigorously for the establishment of an Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia here in Trinidad and Tobago.

I say that because we have to travel to Venezuela to seek visas to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and one remembers and recalls what would have happened recently with some of our nationals in such pursuit. But in addition to that, I think the hon. Acting Prime Minister, Minister of Finance, and now also Minister of Works, will do well to pursue this because of the similarity of the economies of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Trinidad and Tobago in terms of oil and gas. Additionally, we can both benefit, not only in terms of the economic activities, but the social, the cultural and religious beliefs and practices.

Madam Speaker, I wish to, on this side, with our political leader and Leader of the Opposition, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, to join with all of us and with you, Madam Speaker, and my colleagues on the other side in extending to the national community a very productive and blessed Ramadan and Eid ul Fitr 2016. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Hon Members, I wish to extend greetings to the Muslim community and the nation on the celebration of Eid ul Fitr on Wednesday, July 06, 2016. As it is well known and it has been said here, this feast is also known as the festival of the breaking of the fast. It is one of the most important religious holidays occurring in the ninth month of the Islamic Calendar. It occurs after the sighting of the new crescent moon which signals the end of the month of Ramadan, the holy month of fasting, special prayer and introspection.

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As we join with our Muslim brothers and sisters in this year's observance, let us keep uppermost in our minds and hearts the underlying messages of spirituality, forgiveness, humility, unity, charity and brotherhood and, in particular, let us give thanks that in spite of our diversity, we can appreciate our similarities as the messages of spirituality, forgiveness, humility and charity resonate in all our major religious denominations.

Fellow nationals, may we hold dear our coexistence in tolerance and peace as a perusal of recent international events shall reveal the occurrence of a series of violent and traumatic incidents resulting in the loss of many lives in Turkey, Bangladesh, Iraq and, today, in three cities in Saudi Arabia, all of which have allegedly been timed to coincide with this holy celebration. May we individually and collectively use this occasion to recommit to our national watchwords of discipline, production and tolerance which spring from the underlying messages of Eid. I wish you all a peaceful and happy holiday. Eid Mubarak. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 8.58 p.m.

The following question was asked by Mr. Rushton Paray earlier in the proceedings:

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Rio Claro/Mayaro/Guayaguayare Tourism Projects (Details of)

101. Mr. Rushton Paray (*Mayaro*) asked the Minister of Tourism:

With reference to tourism projects and related initiatives earmarked in fiscal 2016, for the south-east region of Rio Claro/Mayaro/Guayaguayare, could the Minister provide a list of projects inclusive of:

- a) details of activity/initiative for each project;
- b) the cost for each project;
- c) the proposed commencement and completion dates for each project; and
- d) whether consultations will be held with the relevant stakeholders for the project?

The following reply was circulated to Members of the House:

The Minister of Tourism and its implementation Agency, the Tourism Development Company (TDA) have undertaken the development of sites and attractions in Trinidad over the years. Tourism projects are developed in consultation with community groups with an aim to creating new or enhancing existing sites and attractions, utilizing the assets of the community.

In coastal communities such as Rio Claro/Mayaro/Guayaguayare, preliminary consideration is being given to developing the beaches as tourist sites. However, these beaches fall under the purview of the Regional Corporations, since the TDC has responsibility for four beaches at present, namely Maracas, Las Cuevas, Vessigny and Manzanilla. The remaining beaches throughout the country fall under the purview of the various Borough and Regional Corporations. The TDC is guided by these organisations in conducting any developmental works at the beaches under the purview of the Regional Corporations.

In fiscal 2016, the TDC has completed scope of works for the construction of user amenities at the beach located at Church St, Mayaro. Further discussion will be held with the Mayaro/Rio Claro regional Corporation to discuss management and maintenance of these facilities through the use of the local community groups. Beaches along the East coast in the Mayaro/Guayaguayare district earmarked for the construction of washroom facilities include Plaisance Beach and Indian Bay.

Consultations with the fourteen (14) Regional Corporations are planned for fiscal 2016 and this consultation process will assist the Ministry of Tourism and TDC with project identification and development towards implementation in fiscal 2017.

The following question was asked by Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan earlier in the proceedings:

**Special Branch Police Officers
(Assignment of)**

137. Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan (*Tabaquite*) asked the Minister of National Security:

Could the Hon. Minister provide the number of Ministers who currently have Special Branch Police Officers assigned to them as part of their personal security detail and the number of hours per day such officers are so assigned?

The following reply was circulated to Members of the House:

Honourable Members, according to information received from the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, Special Branch officers are presently assigned as part of the personal security detail for one (1) Minister. The security detail comprises a total of four (4) officers functioning on a two (2) team rotation, for twelve (12) hours per day.

The following question was asked by Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh earlier in the proceedings:

**SSA Employees
(Termination of Employment)**

144. Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*) asked the Minister of National Security:

Could the hon. Minister provide the number of Strategic Services Agency employees terminated with effect from September 2015 to date, including the job title and reason(s) for dismissal?

The following reply was circulated to Members of the House:

The restructuring exercise at the Strategic Services Agency (SSA) has resulted in the dismissal of eleven (11) person holding the following positions:

- Director
- Deputy Directors (2)
- Director Intelligence
- Assistant Director, Information and Communication Technology
- Assistant Director, Administration
- Security Field Specialist
- Senior Field Officer
- Strategic Coordinator Multi Agency Coordination, National Operations Centre
- Deputy Director Business Operations, National Operations Centre
- Senior Executive Director, National Operations Centre

Following the change in government in September, 2015, a decision was taken by the new administration to review the National Security apparatus. The review revealed that there were several national security agencies with disaggregated functionalities which were not operating at optimal capacity. This was viewed as counterproductive. Following the review, one of the priorities identified was the restructuring of the Strategic Services Agency to incorporate the National Operations Centre and the National Security Training Academy. This new configuration will facilitate better rationalization of intelligence gathering into one main entity to support law enforcement activities. An inherent reality in the restructuring exercise of any organization is that there would be some degree of the displacement of members of staff, as was the case with the Strategic Services Agency.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO ORAL QUESTIONS

The following question was asked by Miss Ramona Ramdial earlier in the proceedings:

Miami to Bahamas Cruise (Expected Benefits of)

165. Miss Ramona Ramdial (*Couva North*) asked the Hon. Minister of Tourism:

Could the Minister state the reasons for sponsoring \$450,000.00 for a cruise from Miami to Bahamas and the expected benefits to the people of Trinidad and Tobago?

The following reply was circulated to Members of the House:

The Ministry of Tourism did not sponsor four hundred and fifty thousand (\$450,000.00) for a cruise from Miami to Bahamas. The Ministry supported the project launch and marketing promotion in the amount of \$65,000.00. The launch was held on May 23, 2016 at the Queen's Park Savannah. Support towards the initiative was also provided by the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts in the amount of \$225,000 to be utilized as payment towards local artists. The total Government support was therefore \$290,000.

Expected benefits to the people Trinidad and Tobago:

The benefits to support of the event by Trinidad and Tobago:

- Marketing the destination to 2,400 potential visitors (passengers) and 900 crew members

- Showcasing Trinidad and Tobago's mix of culture, including soca, chutney, comedians, carnival band and characters, pan and fashion
- Promotion of Trinidad and Tobago through the medium of culture, entertainment, fashion and locally manufactured products.
- Promotion of the destination as artiste will act as ambassadors for the country
- Creating a new platform for the engagement of local artistes
- Potential charter of Cruise Line to Trinidad for Carnival 2017/2018.

The Cruise industry is the fastest growing segment of the leisure travel market experiencing an average passenger growth rate of 7.2% per annum since 1980. Notwithstanding the challenges of the international economic environment, an estimated 22.1 million passengers cruised globally in 2014, of which 12.0 million originated in North America. The industry is characterized by new, large, feature-rich, innovative ships coming on stream each year. In 2014, fifteen new ships sailed for the first time and thirty-three new state of the art ships are planned to be added to the fleet through 2020, at a cost of over US\$25 billion. The industry's success is headlined by the Caribbean, which continues to rank as the dominant cruise destination, accounting for 35.5% of all global itineraries in 2015.

The Ministry of Tourism (MOT), the Tourism Development Company Limited (TDC) and the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (PATT) have been working towards growing the cruise sector in Trinidad and Tobago. A coordinated effort has been made towards the expansion and the development of the cruise industry in Trinidad and Tobago. Focus has also been placed on communications outreach to cruise lines and cruise line Executives. Additionally, a number of one-on-one meetings have been held and the sector is expected to show continued growth.

Trinidad and Tobago has also been working with a Cruise Line towards the establishment of a training centre in Trinidad. It is the intention of the Cruise line to pursue partnerships with local training institutions and Government Agencies in the immediate to long term. This initiative has great potential for the country and will create opportunities for Trinidad and Tobago nationals to be recruited as staff, officers and crew members on board the cruise line's global ships and brands. Trinidad and Tobago can benefit in several ways from the pursuit of this initiative as follows:

- Increased employment opportunities for Trinidad and Tobago nationals
- International awareness of Trinidad as the Cruise Line training destination

- Utilization of Trinidad and Tobago crew as ambassadors to promote the country
- Recognition of Trinidad and Tobago as a prime destination for hospitality and tourism training; and
- Generation of foreign exchange earnings via national and Caribbean students.

The following question was asked by Mr. Rodney Charles earlier in the proceedings:

**Contract Officers at Overseas Missions
(Payment of Termination Benefits)**

178. Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*) asked the Hon. Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs:

Could the Minister state whether termination benefits have been paid to all contract officers whose services were terminated at overseas missions since September 2015?

The following reply was circulated to Members of the House:

The Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs has commenced the paperwork for termination benefits to be paid to contract officers whose services were terminated at Overseas Missions since September 2015.

The following question was asked by Miss Ramona Ramdial earlier in the proceedings:

**Indian Arrival Day Celebrations
(Groups Funded)**

179. Miss Ramona Ramdial (*Couva North*) asked the Hon. Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts:

Could the Minister provide a list of all groups which received funding for Indian Arrival Day celebrations?

The following reply was circulated to Members of the House:

With respect to Question No. 179, thirteen (13) applications were received and funding was approved for nine (9) organizations. A breakdown of the list of groups approved by the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts for Indian Arrival Day 2016 celebrations, is stated below.

**FUNDING FOR INDIAN ARRIVAL DAY
FISCAL YEAR 2015-16**

No.	Name of Organization
1.	Siparia Old Road/Ackbar Trace Village Council
2.	SWAHA
3.	Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha
4.	National Muslim Women's Organisation of Trinidad and Tobago
5.	National Chutney Foundation of Trinidad and Tobago (NCFTT)
6.	The Shiva Dharam Sabha of Trinidad and Tobago
7.	GOPIO International Trinidad and Tobago Chapter
8.	Haathon Ke Seva
9.	Kali Mata Bhavan
10.	National Council of Indian Culture
11.	St Helena Development Corporation