



REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Debates of the House of Representatives

4th Session – 10th Parliament (Rep.) – Volume 25 – Number 24

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)**

THE HONOURABLE WADE MARK
SPEAKER

THE HONOURABLE NELA KHAN
DEPUTY SPEAKER

Friday 4th April, 2014

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**THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT
IN THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE TENTH PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO WHICH OPENED ON JUNE 18, 2010**

SESSION 2013—2014

VOLUME 25

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, April 04, 2014

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, may I have your attention, please? I have received communication from the hon. Prakash Ramadhar, Member of Parliament for St. Augustine, who is out of the country and has asked to be excused from sittings of the House during the period April 04 to April 20, 2014. The Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley, Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West, Leader of the Opposition, is also out of the country and has asked to be excused from sittings of the House during the period March 31 to April 10, 2014, and the Hon. Alicia Hospedales, Member of Parliament for Arouca/Maloney, has also asked to be excused from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

**JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE
(APPOINTMENT OF)**

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received correspondence from the Hon. Timothy Hamel-Smith, President of the Senate. It is addressed:

“April 03, 2014

Hon. Wade Mark, MP

Speaker of the House

Office of the Speaker

Level 2, Tower D

The Port of Spain International Waterfront Centre

JSC (Appointment of)

Friday, April 04, 2014

Honourable Speaker,

Appointment of a Joint Select Committee

Your letter dated the 25, 2014 on the subject at caption refers.

I wish to inform you that at a sitting held on Tuesday, April 02, 2014, the Senate agreed to the following resolution, which was moved by the Leader of Government Business in the Senate:

'Be it resolved that the Senate agree to the establishment of the Joint Select Committee to consider the Legislative Proposal entitled '*The Draft Houses of Parliament Service Authority Bill, 2014,*' and to appoint the following Senators:

1. Senator the Hon. Timothy Hamel-Smith
2. Senator the Hon. Anand Ramlogan, S.C.
3. Senator the Hon. Emmanuel George
4. Senator Camille Robinson-Regis
5. Senator Elton Prescott, S.C.

Accordingly, I respectfully request that you cause this matter to be brought to the attention of the House of Representatives.

Yours respectfully,

Timothy Hamel-Smith

President of the Senate"

VISITORS

(DELEGATION FROM THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA)

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I am pleased to announce that this morning, in the Speaker's gallery, there is a very powerful delegation from the People's Republic of China, headed by His Excellency Ambassador Huang Xingyuan, as well as his wife, Mrs. Ma Li, and a host of very top officials, including councillors, first secretary, second secretary, attaché and members of staff of that embassy in Port of Spain. They have come here to witness the proceedings of the House of Representatives. We want to welcome the delegation from the People's Republic of China. [*Desk thumping*]

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Illegal Quarries

65. Miss Marlene Mc Donald (*Port of Spain South*) on behalf of Miss Alicia Hospedales (*Arouca/Maloney*) asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs:

- A. Could the Minister state:
- i. How many illegal quarries have been identified throughout the country?
 - ii. Where are these illegal quarries located?
 - iii. How many persons have been arrested and charged for illegal quarrying from June 2010 to date?
- B. Could the hon. Minister list all the licensed quarries that operate within the country?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Kevin Ramnarine): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Question 65, part (i)—I will just read the answer to part (i), which deals with; “how many illegal quarries have been identified throughout the country”. The answer to part i reads: In the last three years, the Minerals Division of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs investigated 27 reports of illegal quarrying activity. Where it was confirmed that illegal quarrying was taking place, the matter was referred to the police for enforcement action.

With regard to part (ii) of the question: “where are these quarries located?” Mr. Speaker, reports of illegal quarrying have been received mainly for areas in Mathura and Valencia and I would put on the *Hansard* record that Mathura in particular is the epicenter of illegal quarry activity in Trinidad and Tobago and we at the Ministry are working very hard with the police and other enforcement agencies to bring that situation under control and some headway has been made.

Other reports have been received—these are other reports of illegal quarrying—for Wallerfield, Cedros, Caparo, Talparo, Guaracara, Vega de Oropouche, Longdenville, Mausica Road, Forres Park and Las Lomas.

With regard to part (iii): “How many persons have been arrested and charged for illegal quarrying from June 2010 to date?”

Oral Answers to Questions
[SEN. THE HON. K. RAMNARINE]

Friday, April 04, 2014

From the records of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs, since June 2010, six persons have been arrested and charged for offences related to illegal quarrying. In addition, quarrying equipment have been seized from several police raids on illegal quarry operations and are currently detained at Camp Cumuto in Wallerfield.

With regard to part 65B, at present, there are 42 licensed quarries in the country. These are broken down into 25 on state land and 17 on private land. Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the list that was requested as part of the question be circulated in written form to Members of Parliament. Thank you very much.

Vide end of sitting for written part of the answer.

Petrotrin Oil Spill (Details of)

73. Mrs. Paula Gopee-Scoon (*Point Fortin*) asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs:

- A. With respect to press release No. 8 dated December 27, 2013 from Petrotrin, could the Minister confirm whether there was a leak during loading operations on or about December 26, 2013?
- B. If the answer to part A is in the affirmative, could the Minister state:
 - i. What quantity of oil was spilled?
 - ii. Whether any employee(s) were suspended due to this mishap?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Kevin Ramnarine): Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. With regard to question 73, part A, I would just read the answer.

There was a leak on the No. 15 sea line on Petrotrin's Pointe-a-Pierre port on December 26, 2013. With regard to question 73B(i), the quantity of oil spilled was estimated at 10 barrels; and with regard to 73B(ii), no Petrotrin employees were suspended due to this mishap. That concludes, I believe, the answer to question 73.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Supplemental, please. Was any caution not taken in view of the very serious leak and more than serious disastrous consequences which took place on December 17, that we should have another leak so quickly right after?

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Well, Mr. Speaker, you will recall that the first leak was on December 17, 2013, and after that there were several leaks that were reported in various parts of the Petrotrin company. This particular leak was some nine or 10 days after that first major leak on the 17th. The report on that leak, which is, of course, a much smaller leak, I have gotten a brief on the report this morning.

The cause of that leak was similar, again, to the causes of the leak on December 17. Again, this was the failure of a chain that was holding up a pipeline, that caused the pipeline, once the chain failed, to sag and, therefore crack. So, therefore, the follow-up action has been taken with regard to these particular lines, not only sea line 15 but sea line 10. They are partially in service and the areas that were affected have been isolated and tenders have gone out for the repair of those contracts.

But, certainly the whole issue of asset integrity and maintenance is now very important and very front and centre for Petrotrin and, indeed, the entire energy sector, because the Cabinet only two weeks ago approved a Cabinet Note to initiate a national facilities audit of the entire energy sector.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Another supplemental. In view of these leaks which have taken place and one of them, a major leak, in terms of monitoring and control, is there some serious enforcement now? Have you put other measures in place, in terms of monitoring and control of loading operations?

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Certainly, following the events of the 17th and the 26th, greater oversight and greater monitoring of those loading operations have been put in place and I would also add, speaking as Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, my Ministry team, which is the HSE Division in San Fernando, they have been paying regular visits to that Pointe-a-Pierre jetty and walking the jetty to get a first-hand opinion and view of the state of the infrastructure there.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Further supplemental. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hon. Minister, could you say, for the record, whether those leaks from the 17th and any subsequent leaks were the result of sabotage by Petrotrin employees or lack of proper maintenance on the part of Petrotrin?

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Mr. Speaker, what—and I thank the Member for St. Joseph for the opportunity to clarify this, as I did in the Senate a few days ago. On the whole issue of sabotage, when these leaks started, what was said, of course—first of all there was speculation by the media that it was sabotage. And then there was a statement coming from Petrotrin and the statement exactly

Oral Answers to Questions
[SEN. THE HON. K. RAMNARINE]

Friday, April 04, 2014

read that there was compelling evidence that suggested that there was sabotage in relation to two specific incidents: Riser Platform 5 in Trinmar and the Rancho Quemado leak, which is on land and, therefore, no conclusive statement was ever made that there was or was not sabotage.

So I hope that satisfies the question.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Further supplemental, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Final supplemental. Go ahead.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Thank you. Could the Minister state in light of the fact that there was compelling evidence, has the final report confirmed that this evidence is in fact compelling and there was in fact sabotage?

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: No, there is no conclusive finding to substantiate that view, thus far. What has happened is that in both cases, reports were made to the police.

In the case of Rancho Quemado, this involves a lease operator at Trinity and they made a report to the police, independent of Petrotrin and Petrotrin themselves made a report to the police, in respect of Riser Platform 5 and I cannot say where those investigations are right now. That is with the police.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Could I ask one final supplement, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: One final one.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Thank you. Would you, therefore, say, Mr. Minister, that it was therefore reckless on the part of Petrotrin to even claim they were sabotaged in the absence of a report?

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Mr. Speaker, I would not want to answer that because it will be a violation of the Standing Orders. I think the Member is soliciting an opinion from the Minister.

10.15 a.m.

**La Canoa Road, Santa Cruz
(Roadworks)**

69. Mrs. Joanne Thomas (*St. Ann's East*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Infrastructure

Could the Minister state:

- a) Whether the Ministry gave instructions to cancel any road works at La Canoa Road in Santa Cruz?

- b) Whether the commencement of any road works in La Hoe Road in Laventille has been cancelled?
- c) When will work on these two roads commence, if the answers to parts (a) and (b) above are in the negative?

The Minister of Works and Infrastructure (Hon. Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] The Ministry gave no instructions to cancel any road works at La Canoa Road in Santa Cruz. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, work has been going on in the constituency of St. Ann's East, and so far, \$26,159,003.47 has been spent on 21 road projects in St. Ann's East:

Cornbird Drive, \$388,274;
 Poui Avenue, \$313,150;
 Holy Cross Roman Catholic Church compound, \$584,198;
 Money Avenue, \$407,351;
 Cocoa Road, \$2,009,937;
 Moses Avenue, \$862,953;
 Santa Rita Trace, \$3,536,956;
 Lady Young Road, \$1,149,954;
 Cakes Land, \$2,656,487;
 Duncan Trace, \$1,954,738.

St. Ann's East again:

Multi-Option Police Section, Special Branch, \$659,419;
 Bamboo Trace, \$2,408,923;
 Field Trace, \$173,816;
 Jones Trace, \$354,668;
 La Finca Road, \$1,034,055;
 Redman Drive Circular, \$427,848;
 Coldon Road, \$1,520,036;
 Vickey Trace, Zion Hill, North Coast Road, \$2,201,972 and \$431,198;

Light Pole 14, Maccoon Trace, \$1,437,387;

Immortelle Children's Centre road works, \$383,813.65.

Twenty-one projects to the value of \$26,159,000.

Mr. Speaker, the La Canoa Road, several residents from La Canoa Road visited my office on two occasions last year, and they visited again this year, making representations for La Canoa Road. We conducted the feasibilities on La Canoa Road at the request of the residents, and currently—I never got a request from the MP. I got a request from the residents. La Canoa Road is currently on the PURE Programme for the second quarter of fiscal 2013/2014. Mr. Speaker, La Canoa Road is a major piece of rehabilitation, costing \$5,392,624.16. It is programmed and it is approved under the PURE Programme through Nipdec, to be tendered in the second quarter of this year, which is where we are now.

The scope of works entail:

- Clearing and grubbing
- Scarifying, removal and reworking of the existing surfaces
- Application of granular based course
- Cold milling of asphalt paving
- Application of bituminous surface course
- Construction of concrete pipe culverts
- Construction of drainage system inclusive of curb and slipper drains.

Mr. Speaker, the expected time of completion of works from the date of start-up, will be 40 days.

With respect to the La Hoe Road in Laventille, it does not fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure. It is the Ministry of Local Government which is responsible for this road. Mr. Speaker, therefore, there is nothing I can say about La Hoe Road. I have spoken about La Canoa Road, as I said, it is imminently going to start.

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Mr. Speaker, question 82 should be directed to the Minister of Health, and I will ask that question no. 82 be deferred by one week.

The following question stood on the Order Paper in the name of Mr. Fitzgerald Jeffrey (La Brea):

**Seafood in the Gulf of Paria
(Test for toxicity levels)**

- 82.** Could the hon. Minister of Food Production state:
- a) The dates during the past two years when tests were conducted on the fish, shrimp, crab and oysters in the Gulf of Paria to ascertain toxicity levels?
 - b) The results of those tests stated in part (a) above?

Question by leave deferred.

**Caribbean Airlines Limited
(Move of US Banking Settlement Arrangements)**

109. Miss Marlene Mc Donald (Port of Spain South) on behalf of Miss Alicia Hospedales (Arouca/Maloney) asked the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy:

- A. Could the Minister indicate whether there is an initiative to move Caribbean Airlines' US banking settlement arrangements to First Citizens Bank?
- B. If the answer to part (A) is in the affirmative:
 - i. When will the settlement arrangement take effect?
 - ii. The name of the person leading the initiative on behalf of Caribbean Airlines?

The Minister of Finance and the Economy (Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai): Mr. Speaker, the question is being asked in respect of Caribbean Airlines' banking arrangements. Mr. Speaker, First Citizens Bank submitted a letter of intent in January 2011, in respect of the US banking settlement arrangements for Caribbean Airlines. This was pursuant to a draft memorandum of understanding signed between the two companies in 2010 for cross-border transactions. To date, this initiative has not progressed.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Supplemental, Mr. Speaker? Thank you. Could the Minister state whether the non-progression of this initiative has anything to do with the failure of the Trinidad/London route?

Sen. The Hon. L. Howai: Mr. Speaker, the route has not failed. [*Desk thumping*] However, I should add that, no—whatever is happening in respect of the London route, and I have to say that, again, it is not that that route has failed, but certainly, the fact that it has not progressed, has nothing to do with the particular route that the Member has asked a question about.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Further supplemental, Mr. Speaker. In as much as the Minister has said the route has not failed, is the route breaking even? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Let us go on to the hon. Member for Arouca/Maloney.

**Caribbean Airlines Limited
(Hiring of staff in Trinidad and Tobago)**

110. Miss Marlene Mc Donald (*Port of Spain South*) on behalf of Miss Alicia Hospedales (*Arouca/Maloney*) asked the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy:

With respect to the hiring of staff by Caribbean Airlines, could the Minister state:

- a) Whether a decision was taken by Caribbean Airlines (CAL) to discontinue the hiring of staff practice in Trinidad and Tobago and if so, when?
- b) The number of persons hired by CAL in Trinidad and Tobago during the period 2010 to 2013?
- c) The number of persons hired by CAL in Jamaica during the period June 2010 to present?
- d) The number of employees in Trinidad whose contracts were not renewed by CAL during the period June 2010 to present?
- e) The number of persons in Jamaica whose contracts were renewed by CAL during the period June 2010 to present?

The Minister of Finance and the Economy (Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai): Mr. Speaker, again, in respect of Caribbean Airlines, whether, in fact, a decision was taken to discontinue the hiring of staff in Trinidad and Tobago. No such

decision was made, Mr. Speaker, although all employment activities require approval by the Board to ensure allocation of staff. This decision was made by the Board, effective December 04, 2013.

The number of persons hired by Caribbean Airlines in Trinidad and Tobago during the period 2010—2013?

These were as follows: 433 persons were hired: in January to December 2010, 92; in 2011, 162; in 2012, 114; and in 2013, 65.

Part (c) of the question relates to hiring in Jamaica. In Jamaica in 2010, 998 persons were employed, but these were persons who were transitioned from Air Jamaica: in 2011, 117; in 2012, 3; in 2013, zero; and in 2014, zero.

Part (d) of the question relating to Trinidad. The number of persons who were hired amounted to 52; and in 2010, 8; in 2011, 19; in 2012, 23; in 2013, 2.

With respect to Jamaica, contracts renewed. In 2010, 713; in 2011, 528; 2012, 369; 2013, 335; 2014, 333, and these related mainly to renewals of contracts and initially to the transitioning in, and regularization of contracts for persons who came over from Air Jamaica.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Supplemental, Mr. Speaker. Could the Minister state whether the hiring of persons—was anyone hired to install the GPS systems on the planes from LAN-Chile which you leased without GPS?

Sen. The Hon. L. Howai: Mr. Speaker, I do not have the particulars of that decision, details of who had been hired. So perhaps if the question can be put on the Order Paper, we can answer it at another time.

**Ministry of Finance and the Economy
(Contracts to Ernst & Young)**

111. Miss Marlene Mc Donald (*Port of Spain South*) on behalf of Miss Alicia Hospedales (*Arouca/Maloney*) asked the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy:

With respect to the award of contracts to Ernst & Young by the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, could the Minister state:

- a) The number of contracts awarded to date?
- b) The dates the contracts were awarded?
- c) The contract sum for each job done?
- d) What tendering procedure was followed in the award of these contracts?

The Minister of Finance and the Economy (Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These relate to contracts awarded by the Ministry of Finance and the Economy to Ernst & Young. Mr. Speaker, there were no beginning and end dates in the question. So I have sought to try and create a time frame.

Mr. Speaker, three contracts were awarded by the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, over the period 1999 to the present time to Ernst & Young. The contracts were awarded July 28, 1999; August 01, 2000 and August, 24, 2011, respectively.

With respect to part (c) of the question, the contract sums for the period were as follows: in 1999, \$1,164,798.75; on October 01, 2000, \$73,611.25; on October 24, 2011, \$3,700,000 plus expenses and VAT.

Part (d) of the question, Mr. Speaker, in 2011, Cabinet agreed inter alia, that the Ministry of Finance and the Economy procure legal, financial and commercial consultancy services, for the provision of advice relevant to the determination of a restructuring solution for Clico, the management of the Clico Bond Issue, options for maximizing Government recovery of funds expended, and the resolving of any dispute with the management or shareholders of CL Financial.

On account of Ernst & Young's involvement in the Clico matter from early 2009, when the crisis first became apparent, and the volume of work which they had undertaken up to 2011, when the Cabinet decision was made, and which would have had to be duplicated if another firm of accountants had been retained at that juncture, the Ministry of Finance and the Economy engaged Ernst & Young on a sole selective basis.

Mr. Speaker, in 1999, Ernst & Young was engaged to provide technical advice on the formulation of an implementation plan for phased private sector participation, into the operations of Caroni (1975) Limited. The then Cabinet-appointed committee gave consideration to three international accounting firms to conduct the assignment. The committee in the end chose Ernst & Young since of the three firms, Ernst & Young had the longest association with Caroni (1975) Limited, having served as the company's auditors up to the time of its acquisition by Government in 1975, and having been reappointed auditors from 1991, when it was no longer mandatory for the Auditor General to be appointed statutory auditor of all state enterprises.

Additionally, Ernst & Young had been involved in investigations of many aspects of the operations of Caroni (1975) Limited, and since 1992 it had been the

practice for Government to retain the services of auditors as divestment advisors in privatizations, which involve the preparation of information, memoranda and the selection of investors.

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Mr. Speaker, I ask that this answer be deferred by one week for the Minister of the Environment and Water Resources.

The following question stood on the Order Paper in the name of Mr. Fitzgerald Jeffrey (La Brea).

Importation of Crabs and Oysters

- 84.** Could the Minister of the Environment and Water Resources state whether there are any plans to import crabs and oysters into the coastline of the southwestern peninsula to replenish the destroyed stock, and if not, why?

Question, by leave, deferred.

Construction of La Brea and Erin Fire Stations (Details of)

- 85. Mr. Fitzgerald Jeffrey (La Brea)** asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

With respect to the construction of the La Brea and Erin Fire Stations, could the Minister state:

- a) The names and addresses of the contractors who were awarded the contracts to build both fire stations?
- b) When will construction commence?
- c) The estimated cost of construction for each fire station?

The Minister of Gender, Youth and Child Development and Acting Minister of National Security (Hon. Clifton De Coteau): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to the information received from the Chief Fire Officer, at present there are no plans or proposals to construct fire stations at locations in La Brea and Erin. As such, question (b) would not be applicable, and I am sure that the Member of Parliament for La Brea would also agree, that question (c), would also not be applicable.

Mr. Speaker, if you would permit me, to advise my dear friend, do as I have done in Moruga/Tableland, an area that was neglected for years, I have applied to have a fire station in Moruga/Tableland, and I have even identified a site for them.

Mr. Jeffrey: Supplemental. Hon. Minister, are you saying that there are no plans to construct fire stations at La Brea and Erin? Is it that what you are saying?

Hon. C. De Coteau: Mr. Speaker, I know in the education field that we both came from, repetition leads to retention. And as such, I would want to repeat what was given to me by the Chief Fire Officer, when he said, that at present, there are no plans or proposals to construct fire stations at locations in La Brea and Erin. Probably the application you made may have been lost with the last administration. I am advising you as I have done, to apply for a fire station. I have applied for one in Moruga/Tableland.

10.30 a.m.

**Bridge at Ibis Circular Road, Paria Gardens, Aripero
(Construction of)**

86. Mr. Fitzgerald Jeffrey (*La Brea*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Infrastructure:

Could the Minister explain the delay in the construction of the bridge at Ibis Circular Road, Paria Gardens, Aripero, when an assurance was given from the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure that construction would have commenced since 2012?

The Minister of Works and Infrastructure (Hon. Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for La Brea is enquiring about the delays in the construction of the bridge at Ibis Circular Road, Paria Gardens, Aripero. This falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Local Government and not the Minister of Works and Infrastructure.

I have been looking at this bridge, as we are looking at several other bridges in order to do work, but just to remind my dear Member for La Brea, in that very area that he is referring to, work has been going on there under the URP Programme. Thus far, we have built the Keskidee box drain, curb and slipper, Eagle Crescent box drain, Cacique Drive, which is road paved, Iere Drive road paving, Keskidee Crescent road paving and, in addition to that, Guapo Road refurbishment is soon to begin and Chinese Village box drain has been built. These are just a selection of projects being done in that particular area.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to that, in the constituency of La Brea under the new programme of the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, through PURE, in the La Brea area, Sobo Road, drainage and concrete works to the tune of \$990,000 are about to start; patching works on the Southern Main Road in La Brea are also

about to start—\$491,579. The Southern Main Road, from Mondesir to Sobo Junction, 6 kilometres are going to be redone at a cost of \$5.5 million, so that, in that particular area—I am not listing yet all the things in the La Brea area.

Mr. Speaker, I am saying this because there is a contention that this Government only deals with areas where Members of Parliament from the People's Partnership are. That is a fallacy and that is a lie. That is why I am using this opportunity to make it known to the national population that we distribute—it is a falsehood—that we are doing work in all constituencies and, in that particular constituency, \$16.3 million of work is about to begin.

Mr. Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, hon. Minister, in 2010, we were told by the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Could you ask your question, please?

Mr. Jeffrey: Hon. Minister, are you aware that, in 2010, the Minister of Works and Infrastructure had indicated that they were going to undertake work on that bridge at Ibis Circular in Aripéro?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, I am not aware of that, but I said I am very much aware of the condition of bridges in the country. At this time, we have 13 major bridges, costing just over \$160 million, I believe, being built. I have another 13 about to be tendered and another 11 that are being designed. So, when you check it up, it is about 37 major bridges.

When I held the position of Minister of Local Government, in that particular year, we did close to 60 local government bridges across the country. So, we are continuing the programme and I am sure that the Ibis Circular Bridge will be considered.

Mr. Jeffrey: Another supplemental, Mr. Speaker. Hon. Minister, are you aware of the importance of that Ibis Circular Bridge in the sense that the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development is one of those persons who will be affected if that bridge is not dealt with as soon as possible?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, we do not do work in the country simply because a Minister lives in a particular area. That is not our criteria for doing work. Our criteria and our philosophy are to treat each member of the public, each citizen, equally and therefore we spread the work on the basis of needs and resources. That is an important point I want to make, to make that distinction between the way we operate our philosophy of service compared to their philosophy of service.

**CEPEP Teams
(Details of)**

104. Mrs. Patricia Mc Intosh (*Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West*) asked the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Development:

Could the Minister indicate:

- (a) How many CEPEP teams are functioning in the constituency of Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West?
- (b) Whether the Ministry intends to deploy more CEPEP teams in the same constituency to deal with the unkempt landscaping issues within the constituency and, if so, when?

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Mr. Speaker, part (a), the number of teams that function in the Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West constituency vary from three teams to 15 teams on a per need basis and on special request from the Member of Parliament for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Part (b), yes, there are plans to deploy more CEPEP teams in the same constituency to deal with the unkempt landscaping issues over the next six to 12 months.

**Maloney Mall and Bon Air Village Plaza
(Details of vacant booths)**

112. Miss Marlene Mc Donald (*Port of Spain South*) on behalf of Miss Alicia Hospedales (*Arouca/Maloney*) asked the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Development:

Could the Minister state:

- (a) The number of vacant booths at the Maloney Mall and the Bon Air Village Plaza?
- (b) Why were these vacant booths not assigned to tenants over the last three years?
- (c) When will the vacant booths at the Maloney Mall and Bon Air Village Plaza be assigned?

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker. On this matter of the allocation of vacant booths at the Maloney Mall and the Bon Air Village Plaza, I would indicate, in response to part (a), there are 24 vacant units at the Maloney Mall, and eight vacant units at the Bon Air Plaza.

Upon entering office in 2010, we undertook a complete audit of the distribution, allocation and functioning of all village plazas and shopping malls managed in HDC estates. It was discovered by 2011 that there was a complete mismanagement of the shopping malls under the Housing Development Corporation for several years—in fact, amounting to almost a decade—primarily during the period 2005—2010.

In several of these malls, we found that persons were in possession of shopping units/vending booths. There was absolutely no paperwork to explain how persons would have arrived at occupying booths in malls throughout Trinidad. More than this, we also found that there was a complete lack of policy and guidelines on the allocation and rental of vending booths in shopping malls and village plazas throughout Trinidad under the Housing Development Corporation.

For example, Mr. Speaker, in some of these shopping malls, which were established with the prime objective of allowing residents from the village or residents from the estates to undertake small and micro business to generate income and employment, we have found that there were professional persons, such as medical doctors or dentists in possession of vending booths at a shopping plaza.

I will not call the names and I will not call the location to embarrass anyone but, Mr. Speaker, in a particular village plaza, we had the obscenity of a high professional operating in a vending booth at an HDC mall. To see the person in his practice was \$200 and the cost of the vending booth per month was \$150.

We have also had situations where councillors and I think, in some cases, former councillors attached to the then ruling People's National Movement were themselves occupiers of shopping malls and booths under conditions where we could not find paperwork to explain under what circumstances and by what arrangements they were in occupation of vending booths.

Mr. Speaker, if that was not bad enough, several of those persons then started to run up a debt. In one case, they were owing— having to pay \$500 a month—

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the HDC \$27,000 in debt for occupying a vending booth at a village plaza in south Trinidad and this is by a councillor, a member of the local government fraternity, not a member of the People's Partnership.

Mr. Speaker, these are some of the irregularities we found. The HDC then embarked on a very rigorous process of developing a policy for the occupation of these vending booths—including a proper policy and financial assessment of the needs of communities—and instituting programmes that would attract the deserving members of the HDC communities, also inviting those members to pay a proper fee that we believe is affordable in the circumstances. So much so, that for the latest intake of persons occupying vending booths in some areas, particularly Couva and San Fernando, the rental has now gone to \$2,500, which we believe persons occupying these booths can afford given our own economic assessment of what they are doing and what they are selling and so on.

So, Mr. Speaker, it was a very, very difficult situation to confront. We still have ongoing problems collecting debt from persons in occupation of vending booths throughout Trinidad in the village plazas and shopping malls. We have, for the Maloney Mall in particular, over 300 pending applications to fill those spots. We are processing them according to a new and rigorous policy framework that will ensure that persons who are granted this opportunity to conduct their economic activities will be persons whom we believe will be faithful to the HDC, will pay their monthly rental and will occupy and keep the premises in good order.

We expect, by the end of the year, to have all shopping malls and village plazas completely full by persons who will be paying, in some cases, an increased rental fee, depending on the type of business they conduct, depending on the size of the vending booth that they occupy and our own assessment of their ability to pay. Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

**Chief Financial Officer of Caribbean Airlines
(Dismissal of)**

113. Miss Marlene Mc Donald (*Port of Spain South*) on behalf of Miss Alicia Hospedales (*Arouca/Maloney*) asked the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy:

Could the Minister state:

- (a) Why was the previous Chief Financial Officer of Caribbean Airlines dismissed?

(b) When was the effective date of dismissal?

The Minister of Finance and the Economy (Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai): Mr. Speaker, the previous Chief Financial Officer of Caribbean Airlines was separated at the end of his probationary period. This decision is, of course, the sole prerogative of the employer. The effective date of separation was August 14, 2013.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Supplemental, Mr. Speaker: could the hon. Minister state the reason or reasons for this separation?

Mr. Speaker: That was not asked in the question. Do you have another supplemental?

Repair Works on Landslips (Delay)

87. Mr. Fitzgerald Jeffrey (La Brea) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Infrastructure:

Could the Minister explain the reasons for the delay in carrying out repair works on landslips in the following areas:

- i. Upper Sobo Village, La Brea;
- ii. Upper Carapal, Erin;
- iii. Upper Salazar Trace, Point Fortin;
- iv. Lot 10 Village?

The Minister of Local Government (Hon. Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan): Mr. Speaker, repair works on landslips continue throughout the country. Repair works on landslips in Upper Sobo Village, La Brea; Upper Carapal, Erin; Upper Salazar Trace, Point Fortin and Lot 10 Village fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Local Government and, again, not the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure. Having said that, we recognize the difficulties the Ministry of Local Government has in accessing the kind of funding to undertake major landslips in the country.

For the benefit of the hon. Member for La Brea, we continue to look at landslips throughout Trinidad and Tobago and these landslips are also under the purview of both the URP and the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure. Under the Bridges, Landslip and Traffic Management Programme of the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, currently, major landslips are being repaired in several areas of the country:

Mayo Road	\$5 million
Bonne Aventure Road, two landslips	\$7 million
Southern Main Road	\$6.4 million

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And, Mr. Speaker, in San Francique Road, the landslip there is going to cost \$12.8 million. Landslips are very expensive, as the former Minister of Works and Transport, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, will tell you—very, very expensive.

At the moment, Mr. Speaker, in addition to these seven projects that are currently being undertaken—and these are big projects; they are not small projects. In one case, in Bonne Aventure, the project is 110 metres long; another one, 60 metres; another one, 55 metres.

In addition to these seven projects, we are tendering another 26 landslip projects right now across the country and at the moment also, in the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, we are designing 60 more landslips to be done across the country. So, Mr. Speaker, in the vision of the programme of works, seven are being done, 26 are about to be tendered and 60 more are being designed at this point in time.

10.45 a.m.

Mr. Jeffrey: Further supplemental. Hon. Minister, are you aware that in 2012, your predecessor took a site visit in upper Sobo and promised the residents that in two weeks' time work will commence on the landslips?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, I am not aware of that, but what I want to say about my tenure as the Minister of Works and Infrastructure, I try to close the gap between the promises I make and the action that I take. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Port of Spain South, would you like question—
[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, the questions to the Minister of Local Government, I would ask that question Nos. 88 and 89 be deferred to next week.

Mr. Speaker: Okay. Let us go.

The following questions stood on the Order Paper in the name of Mr. Fitzgerald Jeffrey (La Brea):

**La Brea Fish Market
(Construction of)**

- 88.** With respect to the construction of the La Brea Fish Market, could the hon. Minister of Local Government state:
- (a) The expected commencement date of construction?

- (b) The name and address of the contractor who was awarded the construction contract?
- (c) The cost of the contract?

**La Brea Provision and Vegetable Market
(Renovation and Refurbishment of)**

89. With respect to the renovation and refurbishment of the La Brea Provision and vegetable market could the hon. Minister of Local Government state:

- (a) The expected commencement date of works?
- (b) The name and address of the contractor who was awarded the contract?
- (c) The cost of the works?
- (d) The anticipated date of completion?

Questions, by leave, deferred.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I understand there is a statement to be made by the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs on the situation affecting nationals in Venezuela. The hon. Minister is not in the Chamber at this time, I now seek the leave of the House to have this matter be addressed sometime later on in the proceedings. Do I have leave of the House?

Assent indicated.

LAND TENANTS (SECURITY OF TENURE) (AMDT.) BILL, 2014

Bill to amend the Land Tenants (Security of Tenure) Act, Chap. 59:54; read the first time. [*The Minister of Housing and Urban Development*]

FINANCE BILL, 2014

Order for second reading read.

The Minister of Finance and the Economy (Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move:

That a Bill entitled an Act 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.

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Mr. Speaker, perhaps, before actually getting into the Bill, I could provide a bit of context as far as the overall performance of the economy goes, because this Bill is intended to deal with the issues of continuing the growth momentum in the economy. Before doing so, however, I have been asked whether, in fact, the Finance Bill is not coming a bit late, and I would just like to say that the question of the timing of this Bill is dealt with in the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act. Section 3 of the Act allows a period of four months after the imposition of a tax under subsection (1) of the Order, failing which the tax falls away. However, no Orders were made for the imposition of new taxes in this fiscal year and, therefore, the matter does not arise and, in fact, in 2005 and 2007, the Finance Bill was laid as late as July in those particular years.

So, Mr. Speaker, in getting to the economy and what is happening with the economy, I want to say that performance is strong across all sectors. By the end of this year, we expect that the economy, in nominal terms, would have recovered all of the ground that it lost between 2008 and 2009. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, you will probably be aware that in 2008, when the price of oil went to \$140 a barrel and propelled by that momentum, the economy grew to \$175 billion, but then by 2009 when the price of oil fell almost to \$40 a barrel, the economy dropped to \$121 billion or in nominal terms by about \$54 billion.

Our projection for GDP at the end of this year is that the total GDP of Trinidad and Tobago would have grown to approximately \$177 billion [*Desk thumping*] and that by the end of next year, in real terms, the economy would have—[*Interruption*—without yeah. If we deal with real prices, that is real GDP, we expect that by next year the economy would have recovered all of the ground that would have been lost as a result of the fall in oil prices. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, as I said, across the board, all sectors of the economy are growing strongly. As you know, the energy sector was affected by the major maintenance work that took place during the course of last year, and this major maintenance work is, in fact—I was so advised by the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs—perhaps, the largest that has taken place in the history of this country on our offshore installations. And, as a consequence, therefore, the overall output of the sector was impacted. But notwithstanding the effect of this, and the energy sector being as large as it is for the economy, the economy continued to show growth and has shown growth over the past year and a half with the exception of a small interregnum in the third quarter of 2013, when there was a major shutdown in the offshore segment of our producing fields for natural gas.

The non-energy sector has grown by approximately 2½ per cent on average over the last six quarters. In the third quarter of 2012, the non-energy sector grew by 2.3 per cent; the fourth quarter, 1.9; the first quarter of 2013, 3.6; the second quarter of 2013, 2.6; the third quarter of 2013, 1.9 and the fourth quarter of 2013, 2.4. So there has been a continuous growth in the non-energy sector, and we expect this momentum to continue in 2014 [*Desk thumping*] and as a result of the initiatives which we are putting in place, we expect this growth spurt to actually accelerate.

Mr. Speaker, the other macroeconomic indicators continued to perform exceptionally well. In the labour market, the Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development has announced a reduction in the unemployment rate to 3.7 per cent [*Desk thumping*] the lowest level in the history of this nation. [*Desk thumping*] This has to a large extent been the result of a strategy adopted by the Government to focus on the remedying of infrastructural deficiencies in several parts of the country and improving the network of infrastructure in various parts of Trinidad and Tobago. This, combined with the continued expansion in all sectors of the economy has increased some pressure in the labour market and has resulted in the reduction.

The data from the Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development have also revealed that over 13,000 new businesses were registered in 2013. [*Desk thumping*] We recognize that not all new businesses created resulted in job creation. There are some businesses that are simply open to effect particular transactions, but it certainly provided anecdotal support for the continuing expansion of business activity.

Last year, Government's fiscal operations resulted in a deficit of \$4.2 billion, equivalent to 2.6 per cent of GDP. This resulted mainly from the settlement of outstanding wage negotiations for the period 2008—2011 which this administration had inherited. However, data for the first quarter of this current fiscal year show a surplus of \$4.2 billion. This was higher by 46 per cent than we had originally budgeted, and resulted from the inflow from the sale of shares in the First Citizen IPO, which brought in an amount of \$1 billion as well as increased dividends from state enterprises. In addition, all categories of revenue for the Government came in above budget, reflecting the continuing expansion of the economy. Thus far, there has been an increase in expenses by 6.6 per cent, but this has been offset by the growth in revenues.

Headline inflation, Mr. Speaker, continues to trend downward. The latest figure for February showed inflation at 3.9 per cent and core inflation which

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excludes food prices decelerated to 2 per cent at the end of last year. Food inflation, which dipped to an annual low of 3 per cent in September last year, was the main impetus behind the reduction in the rate of growth of headline inflation, and I would like to place on record my congratulations to the Minister of Food Production for the progress he has made in this particular sector. [*Desk thumping*]

However, Mr. Speaker, we do note that there are pressures building up internationally which can affect inflation as we move forward and we continue to monitor the effect of that on a very, very close basis, because it could have an impact on monetary policy and interest rates. There has been drought in 11 western and central states in the United States and these states are major producers of meat, fruit and vegetables and, therefore, we see the possibility of the uptick in inflation as a result of what is happening in the international arena which is, of course, outside of our control.

With respect to lending, Mr. Speaker, lending for consumer purposes and real estate mortgages gained momentum during the course of last year although credit demand by business firms has not increased as much as expected. The IMF in its Article IV consultation which ended earlier this week, actually had put this down to the fact that they believe, anecdotally, that there has been a build-up of large cash reserves by certain firms resulting from increased profitability, and it is one of the things which we ourselves had noted.

Consumer spending is, of course, up and this has been commented on by the International Monetary Fund, and it is an area that we continue to look at very closely to determine the effect on inflation as a whole. Motor vehicle sales are up 25 per cent and sales of cement, an indication of construction activity, continued to increase robustly towards the end of last year.

The country's balance of payments continue to be healthy registering a surplus of US \$226.8 million for the first nine months of the year, and it is estimated to have closed the year with a larger surplus of \$786.3 million for 2013. As a result, gross international reserves, Mr. Speaker, have climbed to approximately US \$10 billion. [*Desk thumping*]

In addition, we note that the foreign currency deposits in the banking sector have grown to over US \$3 billion. The Heritage and Stabilisation Fund has also grown to over US \$5 billion. Standard and Poor's have continued to maintain their rating for the country, and our overall debt profile continues to be well managed with total debt, including guarantees, amounting to 40.6 per cent of GDP, well within the parameters for similarly rated countries. [*Desk thumping*] So, overall,

Mr. Speaker, macroeconomic indicators remain sound; the fiscal position remains strong; inflation is well contained, employment is at record levels; foreign exchange reserves are at historic highs and the debt profile of the country remains well managed.

So, within this context, Mr. Speaker, we want to place the initiatives which were in the budget, in the Finance Bill. These initiatives are aimed at rebalancing our economy away from its dependence on non-renewable resources although we recognize in the short term that the dependence on the energy sector will remain, and we note also the potential for significant growth of this particular sector and, therefore, a major part of our budget initiatives are aimed at stimulating growth and stimulating exploration and production of our energy resources.

Mr. Speaker, this Finance Bill contains amendments to approximately 17 pieces of legislation and the repeal of one, which is the Cocoa and Coffee Industry Act and probably I could just deal initially with the Cocoa and Coffee Industry Act which is the one Act we are repealing. Of course, Mr. Speaker, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago places a high priority on agriculture. It is one of the five pillars that we had identified

11.00 a.m.

Over the last three decades, we have seen cocoa production, exports, acreage cultivation, and farmer participation slowly and steadily dwindling. The number of farmers who grow cocoa has dwindled to a handful from a high of 10,000 in 1966. During the last five years, on average, we have been producing approximately 1,600 metric tons of cocoa per annum, and when we compare this with large producers, such as Côte d'Ivoire, it is almost a drop in the bucket. In fact, Côte d'Ivoire produces more than a million metric tons annually, notwithstanding the fact that certainly the quality of their cocoa is inferior to ours.

We recognized therefore that it was important for us to revamp the industry and to put specific initiatives in place to ensure the growth of this industry. The Act, as it exists, is archaic and very restrictive. For example, it bans the selling of beans to buying agents on Sundays; for example, if you wanted to sell on Corpus Christi, you could not do that because of the restrictions in the Act. If you wanted to sell on Good Friday, you could not do so. If you wanted to sell other than that, the premises of a buying agent, you could not do so. If you wanted to do so five o'clock in the morning, you could not do so.

There are a number of things that are restrictive. In fact, it was very interesting to note too, Mr. Speaker, that if a farmer refuses to answer or tells an untruth to a

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buying agent, he is liable on conviction to a fine of \$750. I know that is something that probably would have been very restrictive in certain other places, Mr. Speaker, if one had to face the same kind of fines for telling these little fibs that people might want to tell.

The thing with the industry is that the industry is a US \$70-billion industry, and the Cocoa Research Unit at St. Augustine—many of us may not be aware—is the custodian of the International Cocoa Genebank, which has a collection of 2,400 unique cocoa varieties and it is the only one of its kind in the world. Therefore, we do have a basic infrastructure and a knowledge-base from which we can look to develop the cocoa industry, particularly moving from primary production to downstream processing and including the use of all the by-products that come from cocoa.

So, as a result of that, Mr. Speaker, because of our intention to grow the cocoa industry, it is proposed to put a more flexible arrangement in place, starting with the repeal of the Act. At the same time, we shall abolish the Cocoa and Coffee Industry Board and in its place will be the newly formed Cocoa Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited, which was registered on December 23, 2013. This company will take up the responsibility to regulate, control and guide the rebuilding process for this industry. So, Mr. Speaker, that represents the context within which we are asking for the repeal of this particular piece of legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I turn now to the question of the gaming industry. Mr. Speaker, clauses 2, 3, 14(d), 14(z) and 16 will be examined together as a package, representing measures which in part are in keeping with the commitments that this Government made in its 2013/2014 budget presentation. Mr. Speaker, I should signal at this point that additional amendments on the gambling measures will be circulated to hon. Members at a later stage of this Bill.

In my presentation to this honourable House on the occasion of the debate on the Appropriation Bill, 2014, I noted that although gaming is emerging as a substantial industry in Trinidad and Tobago, under the current legislative framework prevailing in Trinidad and Tobago, many of the casino operations which are conducted by self-styled private members' clubs and all gaming machine operations in recreation clubs, in pubs, in arcades and in shopping malls, are illegal activities.

This state of affairs has existed for too long, and today I am happy to report that this Government has begun a process which will result in a decisive change in

the way in which this industry will be allowed to operate. Three important standards guide us. These are: one, that the vulnerable will be protected; two, that gaming should in all respects be fairly and openly conducted and, three, its operations must be within the ambit of the law. Strict control of this sector is of critical importance. Today the gaming sector in Trinidad and Tobago is estimated to be worth more than TT \$2 billion.

Private members' clubs directly employ approximately 7,000 people and indirectly employ thousands more. They told me their number is approximately 35,000, although that still has to be verified. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Finance and the Economy understands that there are more than 25,000 amusement gaming machines operating in approximately 6,000 pubs, bars and recreational pubs across the country. While this growth suggests that there is a public demand for gaming services, there are inherent dangers that must be addressed. The gaming sector can only be a legitimate source of prosperity and entertainment if it is effectively regulated to deter crime, protect the vulnerable and promote fair treatment for the customer.

These provisions are the first step in the implementation of a very strict regime which will ensure that this country's regulatory environment meets acceptable international standards to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago's regulatory compliance reputation is not impaired. In the longer term, Mr. Speaker—and we are working actively on this—a new gaming authority will be established and that authority will be armed with all of the necessary regulatory powers to do the following: one, oversee the licensing of premises; two, approve of all operators, suppliers and key employees of institutions in which gaming of any kind is carried on; three, ensure that a proper taxation and tax collection regime is in place; four, deal decisively and quickly with unscrupulous operators and, finally, ensure that the industry's responsible and conscientious consumers are protected at all cost.

In the shorter term, however, Mr. Speaker, more immediate steps must be taken to advance Trinidad and Tobago in the direction of a properly regulated environment, and this is what I intend to do with the short-term measures which are put into this Bill. In the first instance, we propose to increase the fee payable, as we indicated in the budget, for a betting office licence for betting pool operators from \$100,000 to \$200,000 a year. The Betting Levy Board has oversight for the development and improvement of horse and dog racing, and

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monitoring compliance with any rules relating to the operation of pool, betting offices and outlets.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, let me say that the Betting Levy Board is taking steps to computerize all the betting shops under its regulatory control with the full support of this Government. Additionally, the Government notes that the licence fee which is being payable has been the same, or which is currently payable has been the same since 1995. What we have sought to do is adjust this fee in keeping with the increase in inflation over the period of time since 1995, and we have set the fee now at \$200,000. This measure is to be found at clause 2(c) of the Bill, where item 17(2)(a) of the First Schedule to the Gambling and Betting Act, Chap. 11:19, will be amended.

The second measure which we will put in place, Mr. Speaker—and which we are putting in place—will have immediate effect on the prevailing environment and which has, at its core, the protection of citizens who patronize private members' clubs, and this is a new requirement for a deposit of \$500,000. This deposit will be mandatory for all private members' clubs with a certificate which allows for gambling activity on their premises. Mr. Speaker, this \$500,000 deposit seeks to protect the consumer while imposing regulatory parameters on those who offer casino-style games.

We have also ensured that in the event of a claim being successfully made against a private members' club, that club cannot enter into any further gambling transactions until and unless the deposit has been replenished with the Comptroller of Accounts to restore it to the required \$500,000. Any members' club which fails either to pay or to top up their deposit and enters into any gambling transaction is liable to lose its certificate, and the secretary of the club commits an offence for which there is a fine.

Of course, it is recognized that where the secretary is not negligent in paying or topping up the deposit, he/she shall be indemnified by the club. The indemnification provision is not currently in the Bill, and will be included as an additional amendment to the Gambling and Betting Act and the Registration of Clubs Act. Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, members' clubs will now not escape their obligations to pay tax in respect of their devices and tables, as they will now be required to prominently display a tag issued by the Board of Inland Revenue on all tables, machines and other devices on club premises. The requirement for the

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tag will be in addition to the receipt which the Board of Inland Revenue, as a receiver of revenue, is ordinarily required to issue upon payment of any tax, including the gaming tax.

The situation which currently exists, Mr. Speaker, is that members' clubs engaging in gambling activities are required to pay no taxes other than the taxes set out in the Schedule of the Registration of Clubs Act. Those taxes are well laid out in the Schedule. Mr. Speaker, based on in-depth research into the gaming regimes in other jurisdictions, and also taking into consideration the current environment in Trinidad and Tobago, we will remove pool tables from the foregoing list. We are of the view that a pool table should be permitted to be used in bars and recreational clubs without being considered a gaming device. [Crosstalk] This measure is effected at clause 3(f) of the Bill—I will introduce them to the Pastor—where the schedule is to be amended by deleting item 6.

Mr. Speaker, to enforce the obligation to pay tax, this Bill provides that from December 15, 2014, all taxes payable by members' clubs must be made in one lump sum and not quarterly as currently obtains. This requirement is found at clause 3(1)(a) of the Bill. However, Mr. Speaker, the list of amendments will provide for the payment of the annual gaming tax within 15 days of the issue of the certificate by the licensing committee, permitting the club to carry on gambling activities on its premises. The secretary of the club will now be either a member or an ex officio member of the club, and will be required to pay all of the taxes on behalf of the members' club.

In the case of licences under the Liquor Licences Act, the tax will be required to be paid within 15 days of the issue of the licence. Additionally, upon payment of the tax, the BIR will issue a tag to be affixed to devices, tables or amusement games. Failure to display the tag issued by the Board of Inland Revenue on any table, device or amusement game, found to be operational on the register or licensed premises will be an offence. The tag will be valid until a new one is issued by the BIR in the ensuing year, or the certificate issued by the licensing committee is revoked or not renewed. So, Mr. Speaker, on an annual basis or if the certificate is withdrawn and you need to get a new one, you will have to be paying this particular tax.

Mr. Speaker, the final measure being proposed for immediate implementation would at last bring some regulatory control to liquor licensed premises, which for the longest while have been operating gaming machines without the necessary control measures being implemented, whatsoever. Mr. Speaker, this Bill also

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proposes to create a limited exemption to certain liquor licensed premises which will be allowed to host a category of games to be known as amusement games.

Permit me to explain, firstly, so that there is no misunderstanding as to what an amusement game is. Mr. Speaker, I would like to make it clear that an amusement game is not the same thing as a slot machine, otherwise known as a one-armed bandit. The amusement game is an electro-mechanical device in which small sums are wagered and which small sums are won. The upper limit or potential winnings is \$5,000.

Secondly, there should be no misconception that all liquor licensed premises will be allowed to host amusement games. The allowance will be limited to premises for which the liquor licence allows for consumption on the premises. The allowance will therefore exist in relation to spirit and wine retailers' licences and hotels, special hotels, restaurants, special restaurants and night bar licences only.

Mr. Speaker, as the existing law stands, certain premises are deemed not to become gaming houses for the purposes of the Gambling and Betting Act, and persons managing those premises will not be liable to be convicted of the offence of gambling.

11.15 a.m.

These premises are expressly stated under section 10(1) of that Act to include a private dwelling house and a members' club that is permitted, under the Registration of Clubs Act, to carry on gambling as an activity of the club as part only of its common objects.

At clause 2(a) of the Bill, Mr. Speaker, it is now proposed to add a list of premises deemed not to be common gaming houses, and this is set out in section 35(3) or (4) of the Liquor Licences Act. The premises specified in a licence referred to in section 35(3) or (4) of the Liquor Licences Act, refer to premises which have spirit and wine retailers' licences and, as I said, hotels, special hotels, restaurants, special restaurants, and night bar licences. Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, the number of amusement games permitted shall at the outer end be limited to 20.

Mr. Speaker, you will observe at what should be clause 3(2), and not 3(1) of the Bill, that there is a commencement provision in relation to 3(1)(a), (b) and (c) of the Bill. The intention here is to make provision for the annual gaming taxes payable by private members' clubs with effect from January 01, 2015. The existing system makes provision for the payment of quarterly instalments of the gaming tax, the last of such quarterly payments being made on or before October

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15 in a given year. The intention is that the taxes for the year 2014 will continue to be paid quarterly.

Mr. Speaker, I turn now to the amendment to be made to the Municipal Corporations Act, which is a new amendment that we will be circulating, which will empower the President to grant a duty allowance to municipal police officers. You would recall that in 2010 a special tax-free duty allowance of \$1,000 per month was granted to all members of the police service. Payment of a similar duty allowance was extended to other members of the protective services, such as the prison services, the fire services and the special reserve police, however, municipal police officers were inadvertently excluded from this benefit. Given the fact that the municipal police officers perform similar duties and functions as other officers, and should therefore be treated equitably, clause 4 of the Bill seeks to rectify the situation by enabling the President to extend to these officers the tax-free duty allowance of \$1,000 per month with effect from October 01, 2010. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Speaker, I turn now to the green sector and the Litter Act. There has been an increase in ticketing for littering by litter wardens, the police and the borough police, and there has been an upsurge in vigilance as far as this is concerned. There has been increased patrolling and there has been increased monitoring of industrial areas especially, such as quarries, sawmills, environmentally sensitive areas and general areas, for noise pollution and illegal dumping. Arrests have been made for illegal dumping as a result of a number of stakeouts which the environmental police unit has undertaken.

I am told that a typical midnight surveillance in the cane fields would reveal trucks carrying old tyres, household appliances, pharmaceuticals and even old motor cars, being dumped particularly between midnight and 3.00 a.m. The Environmental Police Unit on average issues about 200 tickets per month, and have collected fines in excess of \$450,000 per year, just from vehicle violations, in respect of the dumping of old cars and so on.

To create a further deterrent, we propose to further increase these fines. Where the fine was \$2,000, this is now going to be increased to \$4,000, and where it was \$4,000, it is going to be \$8,000. In the case of failure to comply with a clean-up notice or leaving derelict vehicles in a public place, the fine is increased from \$2,000 and \$400 every day to \$4,000 and \$800 every day thereafter. To effect these changes, sections 3(6), 3A(2), 4, 6(4) and 9(2) will be amended appropriately.

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I turn now, Mr. Speaker, to the mineral aggregate sector. The resources: gravel, sand, tar, asphalt and so on, of this sector are needed in the production of a myriad of products, ranging from cement, sealants, abrasives, glass, fillers, potty, drilling mud, concrete, clay, ceramic products, et cetera. Because of the great value of these minerals, it has spawned a great deal of illegal quarrying which is taking place on state lands. In fact, it is sometimes more profitable to break the law and be fined, than to not engage in some of the illegal activities which are taking place.

Our vision for the sector is to see an equitable distribution of lands for quarrying purposes. We want to see the supply of high quality aggregate at affordable prices. We want to see environmental protection. We want adherence to royalty and tax laws. We want restoration of exhausted quarry lands quality, the institution of product quality control standards and the regulation of the tar, sand and asphalt sectors.

We need to make sure, as part of this, that the deterrents against illegal activity are sufficient to be deemed deterrents. Therefore, where the fines were \$200,000, they have been increased to \$500,000, and where they were \$300,000, we have increased these to \$700,000. For anyone who purchases any mineral from an illegal operator, the fine on summary conviction will be increased from \$100,000 to \$500,000.

For any legal operator—and this is a legal operator—who fails to notify the director of minerals of the discovery of any minerals not authorized by the licence or fails to maintain proper books or records, or obstructs the director in the exercise of his power, or pollutes any watercourse in the exercise of its operations, the fine is increased from \$100,000 to \$500,000. For anyone who commits breaches of the Act or the regulations where no punishment is specified, the fine will be increased from \$50,000 to \$200,000. To effect these changes, section 45(1), (3), (4) and (5) of the Minerals Act will be appropriately amended.

In conjunction with this measure, for the illegal removal of asphalt or other minerals on state lands, the penalty is to be increased from \$120,000 to \$300,000 on first summary conviction, and from \$250,000 to \$500,000 for subsequent convictions, and from \$60,000 to \$120,000 on first summary conviction and from \$120,000 to \$300,000 for subsequent convictions. To effect these changes, section 25(a) and (b) of the State Lands Act will be appropriately amended.

Mr. Speaker, I turn to electronic transactions—the law for the processing of electronic transactions. For all of history, the business of the Government has

been carried on by cash and cheques. Today, we are making an historic amendment to the way in which Government carries on its business. [*Desk thumping*] Effective from today we are seeking to introduce the capability, which my colleagues will speak on some more, to introduce electronic transactions and to facilitate the conduct of Government business by electronic transactions.

According to surveys done by InfoLink Services Limited, approximately eight out of every 10 citizens, or 76 per cent of the population, use direct debit or LINX payment methods. There are over 500,000 active LINX cards, with an average of 3.2 million transactions per month in 2013, or approximately \$38 million transactions per year. In the case of credit cards, we do approximately 15 million transactions at a value of approximately \$8.5 billion. There are also substantial volumes done through the ACH system, the automated clearing house as well as the realtime gross settlement system, the RTGS, where larger value transactions are conducted. On a daily basis, billions of dollars of business are conducted in this way in our economy.

On the other hand, the use of cheques has remained relatively unchanged, according to the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, notwithstanding the growth in the economy, the growth in transactions, the growth in value and the growth in electronic transactions. We expect that mobile devices will now become also an avenue for payment in the years to come. We expect that by 2020, estimates of transactions involving mobile payment could make up to 25 per cent of the market. It is imperative, therefore, that the Government modernizes its payment system to keep pace with changing technology and to make its systems more effective and efficient. The Government, therefore, needs to transform and keep pace with changes in technology.

To effect these changes, a new part, the electronic funds transfer, will be inserted under section 23 of the Exchequer and Audit Act, called section 23A, which will allow for the electronic transfer of funds, in accordance with general or specific directions issued by the Treasury. The regulations for this part will see the insertion of section 23B, and contravention of a regulation will result in a penalty on summary conviction of \$150,000 and imprisonment for one year.

This Finance Bill also requires an amendment to the Electronic Transactions Act in section 2, by inserting a definition of revenue which encompasses the wide range of payment systems and sources of funding which can occur in our economy today.

Mr. Speaker, I turn to the construction sector and the adjustments which we have to make for the construction sector. This is a critical part of our economy, and it is important that this sector continues to play its role as a major employer of goods, services and people, as well as a major contributor to the growth in gross domestic product. To do so, the Government has decided to increase the time frame for developers of residential house sites, commercial building and multistorey car parks to collect their incentives from 2015 to 2018. [*Desk thumping*] It is further proposed that the hon. Minister of Trade, Industry and Investment, be authorized to sign the certificates effecting the tax exemptions.

So we have put into the Bill appropriate amendments that will allow us to make those particular changes and facilitate the approval by the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Investment. Section 45A removes the words “after consultation with the Industrial Development Corporation”, which no longer exists—it has become defunct—and section 45C, extend the period to claim from 2015 to 2018. By the amendment we are putting in section 45(D)(1), we are substituting the words “Minister with responsibility for industry” in the Income Tax Act to give effect to that measure, to allow the Minister of industry Ministry of Trade, Industry and Investment to be able to approve those specific exemptions for tax purposes.

11.30 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, I will now turn to the residential house sites, and I will now examine clause 11 of the Bill which will amend sections 45A, 45C and 45D of the Income Tax Act, Chap.75:01.

It may be recalled that in 2013, the Finance Act amended the Income Tax Act with respect to the development of land for sale as residential house sites by exempting from tax the gains or profits derived from the initial sale of residential house site. In order to qualify for this incentive the site infrastructure must conform to development planning standards for roads, drainage and all utilities.

Mr. Speaker, this incentive applies where the residential development project commences on or after October 01, 2012, and the income derived from the sales of residential house sites was received by December 31, 2015. A new section 45C was inserted in the Income Tax Act to give effect to that measure. It is proposed to increase the time frame for developers to meet the statutory requirements in order to receive tax exemptions relating to house sites. This period will now be

extended to December 31, 2018 and will require an amendment to section 45C of Income Tax Act.

Mr. Speaker, I am also aware that there have been some delays in the implementation of the arrangements surrounding this particular incentive, and I want to give the assurance to developers that, notwithstanding the delays in the implementation, it is our intention to ensure that no developer who complied with the law loses these benefits.

With respect to the SME sector, Mr. Speaker, it is noted that despite the high liquidity in the commercial banking system, and the availability of a small business window at certain banks, the Central Statistical Office found that only approximately 11 per cent of small and medium-sized enterprises start-up funding came from the banking community with over 70 per cent coming from personal savings.

Government plans for the establishment of an SME market on the Trinidad and Tobago Stock Exchange was amended so that SMEs whose capital base is greater than \$5 million but less than \$50 million, and listed on the Trinidad and Tobago Stock Exchange for trading purposes, will be taxed at a rate of 10 per cent for the first five years.

So, Mr. Speaker, what we are doing is that we are putting in place an arrangement that will work over and above the initiatives we have for small businesses, which have been taken up by the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, and what we are seeking to do is now put an incentive in place that also helps the medium-sized enterprises to access additional financing.

However, in order to claim the tax benefit that we are putting in place, the SMEs would be required to raise capital on the Trinidad and Tobago Stock Exchange, through an initial public offering, with a minimum of 25 shareholders holding a total of at least 30 per cent of the company's issued share capital, up to a maximum of \$50 million.

Mr. Speaker, a similar approach was taken by the Jamaican Government which pioneered this initiative in the Caribbean in 2009 and gave SMEs a full tax exemption for the first five years, and a 50 per cent tax rebate for the next five years. The Jamaican experience reveals that it took some time for the Jamaican junior exchange to attract listings from SMEs, due in large part to the need for brokers to market the concept, and for SMEs to meet the governance standards required of a publicly listed company.

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In 2010, the Jamaican Exchange got its first listing, and there are approximately 18 companies now listed on the junior exchange from six sectors, including manufacturing, retail and finance. Although several SMEs in Trinidad and Tobago have expressed interest in being listed on the junior market of the TTSE, they are still in the process of satisfying the listing requirements of the exchange.

In addition, there is need to aggressively market this initiative to facilitate the growth and development of the local economy through the creation of established and transparent businesses, jobs and ultimately enhanced economic confidence.

Going public will provide SMEs with equity financing opportunities to grow their businesses and will lower not only the tax burden, but the debt burden of SMEs, thereby leading to reduced financing cost and healthier balance sheets. We have therefore; put in place the current incentive structures as follows: they must have a minimum capital base of \$5 million; your capital base must not exceed \$50 million—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Bourse Security.

Sen. The Hon. L. Howai:—you must have a minimum of 25 shareholders—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Bourse Security.

Sen. The Hon. L. Howai:—and you must own a total of at least 30 per cent of the issued share capital of the company; corporation tax at a rate of 10 per cent on taxable profits for the first five years of operations of the junior market;—[*Crosstalk*] those are Independent Senators—capital must be raised with the issuance of an IPO to be followed by a listing on the stock exchange junior market not later than 60 days after allotment of the issue.

Mr. Imbert: An IPO, boy. [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. The Hon. L. Howai: The majority of SMEs, Mr. Speaker, are family-run enterprises governed by the “keep it in the family” tradition, and are characterized by intertwined family and business dynamics; to safeguard family ownership—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: You brave, boy.

Sen. The Hon. L. Howai:—control and financial independence—I mean this is a totally innocent way. I do not know what you are talking about. [*Crosstalk*] It should be noted that SMEs generally often overlook growth opportunities and are

skeptical about plans which may be skewed in favour of external investors, and often entail relinquishing control.

Closely held family firms tend to have a wider base internally-generated equity, that is share capital plus retained earnings, as well as strong support from family and loyal associates. [*Crosstalk*] Therefore, in order to kick-start the junior—I have gotten legal advice on this thing—market initiative on the stock exchange, the following measures seek to balance the culture of owner controlled family businesses with the critical issues confronting the survival and growth of SMEs.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, an amendment to the restriction which currently provides for 30 per cent of the total issued share capital following the IPO, to be owned by a minimum of 25 unconnected shareholders, to 30 per cent of the new issued share capital being owned by the same minimum shareholder base of at least 25 unconnected shareholders.

Following discussions with the market, and secondly, Mr. Speaker, and in keeping with the definition of a small enterprise in the local context, the law needs to be clarified so that the SMEs should have a minimum issued share capital of \$5 million and should not exceed a maximum issued share capital of \$50 million following the initial public offering. So retained earnings, and amounts transferred from such capital or retained earnings to reserve account, will therefore, not be included in the minimum and maximum limits of issued capital.

So that is the key change that we are making, Mr. Speaker. What we are seeking to do—instead of using total capital, what we have done is amended the definition to refer to issued capital, that is the actual shares that were issued by the company. So this will allow a greater number of medium-sized companies, and some of the larger medium-sized companies, greater flexibility to raise additional capital from external investors, as well as to be able to access funding in a much more flexible way.

Mr. Speaker, we have also put amendments to section 10(F) of the Corporation Tax Act, and the reason for that, Mr. Speaker, is to curb some of the tax leakages which we have found arising from that particular piece of legislation. Basically what happens is that you have a bond that is issued and it is stripped, and what tends to happen is that these strips are then securitized and a new instrument is created. And when this new instrument is created, what was happening was that investors were claiming the principal amount of the new securitized instrument as a deduction, and claiming that it arose from a flow which represented the interest income flows arising from the bond which had

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been securitized. That is not the intention of the Act, Mr. Speaker. The intention was not that persons will be able to simply securitize and create a new instrument, and the principal of which would be treated as a tax deduction for tax purposes.

We had noted that a number of persons were doing that which impacted significantly on Government's revenue. And while we recognize the fact that the market needs to develop and we need to introduce new instruments, and now it is not our intention to certainly circumscribe the creativity of the market in developing new instruments to meet the financing needs of investors, it is also our intention to ensure that these new instruments are appropriately defined and that the individuals pay the taxes that are due, both where they are due and when they are due.

So to remedy these leakages, section 10F(1) of the Corporation Tax Act will be amended by inserting a new subsection called (1A), whereby:

“...all outgoings and expenses wholly and exclusively incurred by the company in respect of the acquisition of the income in relation to those debt securities whether or not such income is exempt from tax under this Act or any other written law shall not include purchase consideration paid.”

And what we are trying to do is to deal with the fact that purchase consideration is not a normal outgoing, and to be treated as a normal expense. We do have a further amendment which we will want to introduce at an appropriate time, Mr. Speaker.

I turn now to the customs sector; customs duties, where we have made some further adjustments to selected sections of the Customs Act. Basically what we are seeking to do is to address a number of issues relating to things such as illegal diesel, illegal export of subsidized diesel and a number of other related breaches of the Act.

As a result, Mr. Speaker, the Customs Act will be appropriately amended so as to increase penalties from \$4,000 to \$100,000; in conjunction, section 6 of the Petroleum Act will be amended to increase the fines imposed on persons engaging in petroleum operations without a licence from \$30,000 and \$1,500 per day for a continuing offence, to \$500,000 and \$50,000 per day, and to discourage the reconfiguration of vessels which facilitate illicit diesel smuggling, and a fine under section 196 of the Customs Act will be increased tenfold from \$4,000 to \$40,000.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, we propose to increase penalties associated with other related crimes as related to sections 154, 213 and 214, and, and these are

amended to conform to similar penalties for similar offences under the Dangerous Drugs Act by making them inclusive of any offence written under law, either customs or criminal law, essentially.

In addition, the penalties for the aircraft and vessels which take part in illicit activities involving the smuggling of narcotics, arms and ammunition, have been increased to ensure compliance with our customs laws. In so doing, the penalties under sections 57, 62, 67, 177, 178, 183, 196, 198(1), are further increased. Further, the forfeiture clause which was inadvertently omitted when the Customs Act was amended in 2007 is now added to section 213, giving customs the power to, again, seize contraband goods.

Sections 40 and 57 which deal with smuggling and fraudulent evasion of excise duties, are also increased, along with section 62 for bribery and collusion of customs officers from \$4,000 to \$125,000.

To create a transparent formula for the assessment of the quantum of bonds which are used as security for delivery of goods by the customs prior to the payment of duty, and for the observance of the conditions and obligations of the bond, we have included additional sections. The discretion left to the customs officer is removed, and replaced with a 25 per cent levy on goods by amending sections 45(2) and 64 of the Spirits and Spirit and Compounds Act.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I turn to the energy sector and the changes which we are making to accommodate the energy sector.

11.45 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, currently Trinidad and Tobago's fiscal terms are ranked as very uncompetitive by the major international consulting firms. For example, Wood Mackenzie ranks Trinidad and Tobago's fiscal attractiveness as 99th out of 103 jurisdictions. This has led to Trinidad and Tobago experiencing long-term declines in oil production. Significant long-term investment is required to increase oil and gas production. The past investment climate in Trinidad and Tobago did not give potential investors adequate returns from capital invested in new fields or enhancing production from existing fields, and this situation was exacerbated by tight global capital markets.

During the period 2007—2009, there were no competitive bid rounds at the time as the administration was seeking to revise the fiscal terms to improve incentives. Over the period 2010—2012, Government has completed three bid rounds which resulted in the award of ten new blocks. In August 2013, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs launched the 2013 deep water competitive

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bid round for six offshore block licences. These blocks are located off the north and east coast of Trinidad. The Ministry also closed its 2013 onshore bid round for oil and gas exploration on October 31, 2013. A total of 11 bids were received on the three blocks auctioned, namely the Rio Claro block; the Ortoire block and the St. Mary's block. Successful bidders were announced on February 24. These were Range Resources Limited, Lease Operators Limited and Touchstone Exploration Inc. This was the first successful onshore bid round since the late 1990s. Trinity exploration production announced the discovery of 50—115 million barrels of high quality crude oil in early December 2013. This represents this country's first discovery since Petrotrin's Jubilee find of 40 million barrels in 2012.

Mr. Speaker, the increase and upsurge in interest in the energy sector by international firms, as well as by local firms, has arisen as a result of the Government's focus on the fiscal incentives which are given to the energy sector. We have put in place very aggressive timelines for ourselves to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago's output of crude oil, which had declined from 143,000 barrels a day in 2006 to 81,735 barrels per day in 2012, was actually halted and reversed. As a result of the initiatives which we have put in place, many of these increased exploration and development activities have taken place.

We have seen in the past few years an increase in the number of rigs which are drilling offshore and which have been seeking to increase the output. During the course of the coming years bp has indicated the intention to spend about \$2 billion in Trinidad and Tobago, split evenly between capital and operating expenditure and BHP will invest a further \$1 billion.

Mr. Speaker, in order to attract this level of investment to achieve the stated aim, it is proposed to introduce the following amendments. At clause 11(d) of the Bill it is proposed to increase the wear and tear allowance for our facilities that are critical to boost gas production and gas deliverability, and natural gas compression facilities from 25 per cent to 33 1/3 per cent. As a result Class C of the Seventh Schedule to the Income Tax Act, Chap. 75:01 will be amended. Another targeted area is that relating to development activities in respect of work overs, maintenance or repair works on completed wells and qualifying sidetracks. This type of work is done on already producing or idle wells and is aimed at increasing production. Expenditure in this area will result in tangible cost and in tangible drilling and development cost being incurred by the producing company.

The law as it stands allows the company to expense 100 per cent of the intangible drilling and development cost. The law, however, provides that in

relation to expenditure of a tangible nature such expenditure will be written off over a five-year period. Mr. Speaker, it is proposed to allow the total cost of work overs, qualifying sidetracks and other works in the year incurred. It is expected that this measure will attract investment in already producing and idle wells. This measure will require an amendment to section 12B(1) of the Petroleum Taxes Act, Chap. 75:04 and is found at clause 13(a), of the Bill.

Mr. Speaker, I would now focus on expenditure relating to exploration activities. The existing incentives allow for an initial allowance of 10 per cent and 20 per cent is applied on the residue on a reducing balance basis. It is proposed that 100 per cent of exploration cost be written off in the year the expenditure is incurred. This incentive, however, we have sought to ring-fence and will only be applicable for the period 2014—2017. This is an incentive to ensure that there is a rapid ramp up of exploration activity and subsequent development activity which will see a significant uptick in output and revenue for the Government subsequent to 2017. At the end of this time, the allowances which are to be applied would result in cost being written off over a three-year period. So, initially we are doing it from 2014—2017 at 100 per cent and after 2017 it goes to a reducing balance over a three-year period.

Mr. Speaker, further to this part the existing legislation provides for incentives which allow persons operating in deep water and deep horizon to claim allowances on 140 per cent of expenditure incurred in exploration operations in these areas. In order to treat with this, we provided for an election whereby a person can elect to either write off 100 per cent of exploration cost in the year incurred or write off 140 per cent of their expenditure in accordance with the provisions of section 14 of the Petroleum Taxes Act, which effective this year will permit a write off over a three-year period.

Mr. Speaker, clause 13(b) treats with incentives relating to exploration operations and would amend the Petroleum Taxes Act, Chap. 75:04 by inserting a new section 12D. The next key area relates to development activity in mature marine and land oilfields as well as activity in relation to enhanced oil recovery projects. At present, a 20 per cent tax credit is applied to the SPT, which is a tax on the growth income from the disposal of crude oil. The taxpayer is unable under the existing legislation to carry forward or backward into any other financial year unclaimed tax credits earned in a particular financial year. The new position is that companies involved in crude production will now be able to carry forward excess credits into the immediately following financial year in which the expenditure was incurred and in no other financial year. But again, it provides

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another incentive for this type of activity by the oil companies. Mr. Speaker, this incentive is found at clause 13(e) of the Bill and will require a new subsection 26B(2) in the Petroleum Taxes Act, Chap. 75:04.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to exploration operations and development activities which fall to be treated, in respect of capital allowances, under Parts II and III of the Income Tax (In Aid of Industry) Act, Chap. 85:04, and found at clause 17 of the Bill, I will now seek to deal with those. As I mentioned previously, effective January 01, 2014, companies operating in the upstream sector will now write off capital expenditure over a three-year period. In respect of allowances for machinery and plant under Part II, the person carrying on production business can now claim an initial allowance of 50 per cent of the expenditure in the year incurred. In addition, in the second and third years immediately after the expenditure has been incurred, the person can now claim 30 per cent and 20 per cent in years two and three, respectively.

Mr. Speaker, at this point I will also deal with the provisions for persons carrying on a refining business. This is found in Part IIA of the Income Tax Act. The amounts of 20 per cent which is the initial allowance and the annual allowance of 20 per cent on a straight-line basis are to be applied on 120 per cent of the expenditure incurred. The problem is that Part II never made specific reference to persons carrying on refining business. In order to make the legislation clear in particular, now that persons carrying on production or refining business will no longer receive the same amount of allowances, the Income Tax Act will be amended to make specific reference to the persons carrying on refining business and such persons will receive allowances as presently exist in the Act. Mr. Speaker, in an event that a person carrying on production of a refining business has an unrelieved balance as at the end of December 31, 2013, that person's allowances shall continue to be calculated in the manner in which it was calculated prior to January 01, 2014.

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to Part III of the Income Tax Act, which provides for allowances related to exploration, operations and intangible drilling and development cost incurred by persons carrying on production business. The initial allowance will now be 50 per cent of the expenditure incurred. In the second and third years immediately after the expenditure has been incurred, the person can claim 30 per cent and 20 per cent in years two and three, respectively. It must be noted at this point, effective January 01, 2014, except for the three-year 100 per cent write off of expenditure relating to exploration of operations, the treatment of expenditure as it relates to capital allowances under Parts II and III for persons carrying on production business will now be the same. Further, to this incentive,

where the person under Part III has as at December 31, 2013 had unrelieved balance of expenditure, that person shall be allowed on the said balance an allowance of 20 per cent calculated on a straight-line basis.

Mr. Speaker, in summary, what we have sought to do, is to put a number of incentives in place, which the intention is to ensure that all the players, both in the upstream, in the midstream and also in the refining part of the business, feel that they are incentivized enough to put in place all the investments that are needed to ensure the continued growth and expansion of our petroleum sector. These incentives will have a cost to the Government and we have therefore sought to ring-fence that, many of these more aggressive fiscal benefits by ensuring that they fall away after 2017. As a result of this—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: I thank the Minister for giving way. Have you quantified the cost of all of these incentives?

Sen. The Hon. L. Howai: Yes. We have estimated—in response to the Member’s question—that the cost of this will be approximately \$1 billion. That is the cost that we got. It is actually less than that, it is about \$978 million, but I say \$1 billion. And we have therefore sought to put other arrangements in place, particularly with respect to dividend income which we seek to get from some of our companies in the energy sector in the short term to help compensate for that additional cost until such time as those incentives fall away.

Mr. Speaker, therefore, in closing, I note that I just have four minutes left. I want to say that what we have sought to do is to put some very aggressive incentives in place for the development of the energy sector. We have also put very aggressive incentives in place for the continuing growth of the SME sector on our local stock exchange. We have also sought to put arrangements in place, as I said, first of all, the arrangements to facilitate electronic payments by the Government to different entities and persons within the economy and outside of the economy, and therefore to make Government operations more efficient and effective. And we have also put very significant arrangements in place to begin the process of control of the gambling and gaming sector in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago—if I may be allowed to close with a quote from the IMF following their recent Article IV Consultation which was completed earlier this week. The IMF said:

“Trinidad and Tobago is experiencing more robust growth after several years of sub-par performance. With the end of maintenance-related outages in the energy sector, we project the economy will grow around 2½ per cent in 2014 after around 1½ per cent growth in 2013. The non-energy sector was fairly

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buoyant in 2013, which we anticipate will continue to be the case in 2014. Core inflation has been relatively quiescent, though it picked up to 2.7 percent in February 2014.”

12.00 noon

Overall, the mission felt that the performance of the economy was sound. The performance of the economy was solid and strong, and they noted in particular, the healthy reserves which the country continues to have. The mission also identified that there is:

“...a strong case to continue fiscal consolidation into the medium-term, but based on policy changes that durably improve the structure of non-energy-based revenues and spending.”

The mission went on to say that it:

“...welcomes the government’s efforts to significantly reduce or eliminate arrears on energy subsidies, VAT refunds and to suppliers.”

In general, Mr. Speaker, while the IMF as usual would have both positive and negative to say, I have to say that coming out of this particular consultation, I was pleased with the very positive pronouncements which they had to make, notwithstanding the areas which they had identified for further work by this Government.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think we are well poised as a nation to continue the growth trajectory that we have been experiencing over the past couple of years and to accelerate that growth trajectory and the momentum of that growth as we move forward. I know that the nation as a whole looks forward to the continuing strength of the Trinidad and Tobago economy, the continued buoyancy of this economy and the continuing expansion of Trinidad and Tobago as one of the most vibrant and dynamic economies in the western hemisphere. Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Mr. Speaker: I recognize the Member for Diego Martin North/East, but before you speak, earlier on, I did indicate to this honourable House that the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs has a statement to make. I would like to ask the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs, before the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East speaks, to make his statement at this time. The hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs.
[*Desk thumping*]

STATEMENT BY MINISTER**Trinidad and Tobago Detainees
(Venezuelan Intelligence Services)**

The Minister of Foreign Affairs (Hon. Winston Dookeran): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As Members may be aware, 23 citizens of Trinidad and Tobago were detained by the Venezuelan Intelligence Services on Wednesday, March 19, 2014. I have been advised that those persons who were detained by the Venezuelan authorities travelled there to obtain visas to visit Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, through our Embassy in Caracas, and the Minister of National Security have been collaborating in our efforts to have these nationals returned to Trinidad and Tobago. In this regard, I have been in touch with my counterpart in Venezuela, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Honourable Elias Jose Milano. In addition, and with the authorization of the hon. Prime Minister, a team of seven persons headed by Rear Admiral Richard Kelshall and which included legal and intelligence officers travelled to Caracas on March 27 and 28, 2014. The team was mandated to:

1. Establish facts surrounding detention of Trinidad and Tobago nationals;
2. Assist in the ongoing enquiry, if possible, by providing clarity to concerns of the Venezuelan Intelligence Agency;
3. Retrieval of the passports of persons who entrusted them to persons coordinating trips for Umrah (small Hajj);
4. Negotiate for the release of women and children being detained;
5. Identify problems leading to conflict if present;
6. Establish mechanism for further liaison and mutually beneficial exchange of information in the future, with the vision to avoid conflict through lack of understanding of Venezuelan criteria.

At the end of the mission, the team secured the release of 15 women and children, who have all since returned to Trinidad and Tobago. With respect to the eight persons who are still in detention, our Ambassador in Caracas has been liaising with the authorities to ensure legal access for the group.

The Venezuelan authorities have ruled that the defendants be held without recourse to bail. The Trinidad and Tobago Embassy is working with legal counsel and an appeal to this ruling has been lodged. I am informed that the appeal is expected to be heard in 10 to 15 days.

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The matter is still under the investigatory process and Rear Admiral Kelshall and I will continue to maintain regular contact with our Ambassador in Caracas in this regard.

Mr. Speaker, I have been advised that those persons who were detained by the Venezuelan authorities travelled to obtain visas to Saudi Arabia. I therefore wish to communicate the arrangements which have been put in place on this issue by the Government.

The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia established formal diplomatic relations in July 1974. The Embassy of Saudi Arabia in Caracas, Venezuela, is accredited to Trinidad and Tobago and the Trinidad and Tobago Embassy in Kampala, Uganda, is accredited to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Currently, we are in the process of appointing honorary consuls both in Trinidad and Tobago and in Saudi Arabia.

Over the years, nationals of Trinidad and Tobago have travelled to Caracas to apply for visas to visit Saudi Arabia for Hajj. In recent years however, arrangements have been made with the Government of Saudi Arabia to have immigration officers from Saudi Arabia travel to Trinidad and Tobago to process applications for Hajj visas.

Mr. Speaker, last year the Government of Saudi Arabia sent three officials to Port of Spain to issue visas for the 2013 Hajj. It should be noted that the pilgrims are required to adhere to specific guidelines outlined by that said Government for the issue of visas.

Mr. Speaker, as recent as last week, I met with the Saudi Arabian Minister in the Ministry of Justice, His Excellency, Dr. Fahad Al-Dawood on his visit to Port of Spain. Among the topics discussed were the strengthening of economic relations and the increase in visa allocations to Trinidad and Tobago for the purpose of the Hajj.

It is anticipated that for Hajj 2014, the Government of Saudi Arabia will again send immigration officers to Trinidad and Tobago to process the applications. As soon as the dates are confirmed, we will inform the public accordingly.

This issue has caused much anguish in our society, understandably so, and I empathize with those persons who have been affected. However, in our relations with other states, including Venezuela, while making representations on behalf of

our citizens, we must also abide by the laws of that state. I assure you that all diplomatic efforts are being made and will continue to be made, to provide support for citizens who in their lawful pursuits are affected by these developments.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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Mr. Colm Imbert (*Diego Martin North/East*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance and the Economy said so many things in his contribution that are cause for concern that I do not know where to begin. In fact, what the Minister chose to do was to only refer to certain favourable aspects of the IMF report—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Members: Exactly.

Mr. C. Imbert:—and not refer to the unfavourable aspects.

Hon. Howai: Balance.

Mr. C. Imbert: Balance—you know, Mr. Speaker, one cannot use unparliamentary language here, but you know the Minister is telling us that his failure to tell us the unfavourable aspects of the IMF report represents balance. [*Steups*] You know, I cannot use unparliamentary language here.

Miss Mc Donald: That is right.

Mr. C. Imbert: But there are so many things that the Minister said that are controversial, inaccurate, untrue, wrong, false, misleading and, Mr. Speaker, one of the first things I would like to deal with before I get into the meat of some of the more controversial issues—because he spoke a lot about IPOs and the SME sector, and the regulation of IPOs—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: Family business.

Mr. C. Imbert: And family businesses and interlocking directorates and connected parties. Mr. Speaker, it is a tragedy—and I will get to this in a while—that the first IPO that this Government has done has been such a fiasco, [*Desk thumping*] such a fiasco. I would like the Minister in his response to tell us what controls the Government is going to put in place in these IPOs to come, and any other IPOs to come? For example, the IPO for Phoenix Park, what controls are going to be put in place to allow the greatest public participation in the process and to avoid profiteering, racketeering, collusion, insider trading, lawbreaking,

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unfair advantage, enrichment of the elite of this country at the expense of the ordinary man. So I expect in the Minister's winding up he would tell us about that, but I will give you some details that you can focus on and you can tell us what you are going to do about these things, but in due course, I will do that.

Mr. Speaker, one of the first falsities that I would like to deal with, the Minister told us that the economy this year would have recovered all of the ground lost since 2008. Not true, and I had to correct him across the floor, and then he volunteered, well in real terms it would be sometime next year. Well, let me deal with the facts, Mr. Speaker, because I heard Members opposite who should know better, bang the table and say, yes, that is performance. Just not true!

Mr. Speaker, they do not know what that means. Your colleagues do not know what that means. But in real terms the GDP of Trinidad and Tobago in 2008 was \$92.92 billion, almost \$93 billion, in real terms. And the GDP of Trinidad and Tobago is still less than \$92 billion.

Miss Mc Donald: "Where he get 177 from?"

Mr. C. Imbert: You see, Mr. Speaker, through you, that is not corrected for inflation. It means nothing, it is an imaginary number. When the Minister comes into this Parliament and takes advantage of the lack of knowledge of Members on his side, it sounds good, you know; we have recovered all the grounds. Not true. I repeat, the economy in real terms was \$92.9 billion in 2008 and we are a long way from that figure.

Hon. Howai: How much are we now?

Mr. C. Imbert: "We eh reach 92 yet" and we will not reach 92 in 2014. So that is what you need to say instead of pretending that you are going to recover from the 2008 figure. Let us put this into perspective; you know what this means, Mr. Speaker? Our economy has not really grown since 2008. [*Desk thumping*] For six years our economy has been flat, and you see these are the facts, the real GDP in 2008 was 92.9, it is less than that now, it is not going to cross that figure this year, it means the economy has been in a—just stalled for the last six years. And the Minister at the end of his presentation told us about all of these wonderful projections by the IMF, but he did not tell us that for the last three years, for the last three years, the IMF had made predictions about an economy which have proven to be wrong. They said the economy will grow and the economy declined. Three years in a row the IMF has made predictions—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Howai: No, but the economy has grown.

12.15 p.m.

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, three years in a row the IMF has made predictions about the Trinidad and Tobago economy based, I assume, on information given to them by the Government, and three years in a row they have been wrong. All their figures were wrong.

So when the Minister comes and tells me that the IMF says that we will have 2.5 per cent growth in 2014, I am afraid I will have to take that with a bucket of salt. They have no credibility, as far as I am concerned, with respect to predictions about the Trinidad and Tobago's economy. Remember that famous year when they predicted growth and we actually had a decline? That was when Minister Dookeran was Minister of Finance. And then even under this Minister, the IMF predicts growth—no growth. I am sorry. Do not use them—[*Interruption*—you see how they just do not know what they are talking about, Mr. Speaker, through you? I hear the Minister of Education say, 2.5 per cent growth last year.

Dr. Gopeesingh: One point five.

Mr. C. Imbert: Oh, “yuh gorn to 1.5 now. By de time we finish it will be .5.”

But the fact of the matter is that I have heard some preposterous numbers here—preposterous numbers—from the Minister of Finance and the Economy. The Minister tells us that unemployment is now at 3.6 per cent. “Ah” mean, the joke of the year! If unemployment was 3.6 per cent in Trinidad and Tobago—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Warner: “What he say, 3.6?”

Mr. C. Imbert: Three point six per cent.

Miss Mc Donald: Imagine this!

Mr. Warner: Cuckoo land, in dreamland.

Mr. C. Imbert: Cloud Cuckoo land. [*Crosstalk*] If the unemployment was 3.6 per cent in Trinidad and Tobago—and, Mr. Speaker, when “yuh hit 5 per cent, yuh hit full employment, yuh know”, because below that there are a lot of people who are not in the system; they are not looking for work and so on. But this amazing Minister, and this amazing Government, has reached 3.6 per cent unemployment in Trinidad and Tobago. How come we do not have a labour shortage, Mr. Speaker?

Miss Mc Donald: Exactly.

Mr. C. Imbert: All the hundreds of people that come to see me in my constituency every week, and come to see all my colleagues, and come to see them, because they know; they go in their offices—some of them go, not all. The people who come to see them in large numbers with respect to employment, who are these people? These people are dreaming? You know, they all have jobs and they want a second job and a third job?

The construction sector is an indicator. Where is the labour shortage in the construction sector? Come on! And you see the Minister is being contradictory. He speaks about incentivizing the construction sector with respect to land developments, with respect to commercial office buildings, with respect to car parks and so on, providing incentives on rents, tax relief and so on. If you have 3.6 per cent unemployment—if unemployment is so low so that virtually there is nobody in Trinidad and Tobago who needs a job, why do you need to create incentives for the construction sector? Why? Because the reason why you try to boost the—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Howai: To keep the momentum going.

Mr. C. Imbert: *[Laughter]* The reason why any country gives up tax, gives up revenue and provides monetary incentives with respect to construction, is that construction is the largest employer, the easiest sector to stimulate in terms of boosting employment. But if unemployment is 3.6 per cent, where are the workers going to come from in order to work on all these construction projects that you are trying to stimulate? Mr. Speaker—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Warner: China. China.

Mr. C. Imbert: Yes. They have a lot of Chinese workers. I wonder if they are counting those, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if they are counting the Chinese workers on all of these hospitals and universities and so on. Are they counting them in the employment figures?

Mr. Speaker, it is just unbelievable. I am calling on the Government, stop fudging the figures! Nobody in their right mind will believe an unemployment rate of 3.6 per cent in Trinidad and Tobago when you have so much hunger and pain, distress and agony outside there on the streets. Why are those people protesting? Why are people protesting if you only have 3.6 per cent unemployment in Trinidad and Tobago? Why? You are fudging the figures. *[Interruption]* I am not afraid of that, “yuh” know. You have taken control of the department that deals with the figures and you are now manipulating. You have

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taken control of it; you are manipulating the figures and you are producing bogus figures, and I am not afraid to say that. I am not afraid to say that. You prove me wrong.

Dr. Moonilal: This is an attack on the public servants.

Mr. C. Imbert: No, it is an attack on the Minister of Planning and Development. The Minister is manipulating the figures. *[Interruption]* “Yeah, well he good at that, yuh know. He used to do dat at UWI, yuh know. He good at dat. Yuh doh want to start me up on dat gentleman, yuh know.”

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, 36(5).

Mr. C. Imbert: Thirty-six, five what?

Dr. Moonilal: Whatever it is.

Mr. C. Imbert: I did not say anything. Mr. Speaker, “wha he talkin bout”?

Mr. Speaker: Yes. Continue.

Mr. C. Imbert: You know, they are so touchy and so sensitive. *[Interruption]* I never said that! I never said that! I said when the gentleman was at UWI. He was not a Minister then. *[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, let me educate the neophyte Leader of Government Business. You cannot impute improper motives under the Standing Orders to a person when he was not a Member of Parliament.

Dr. Moonilal: You are saying now as a Minister he is cooking up—

Mr. C. Imbert: I never said that. *[Crosstalk]* Mr. Speaker, I have no time for “dem and dey nonsense. Ah ha no time for dem and dey nonsense. Yuh want me tuh say it?” No problem, Mr. Speaker. I will say it, Mr. Speaker, so the Members opposite will understand. I am of the view that the Minister of Planning and Development is exerting influence on the Central Statistical Office and as a consequence of his exertion of influence, bogus figures are coming out of that department. All right? You got it now?

Dr. Moonilal: That influence is not a negative influence.

Mr. C. Imbert: Now, Mr. Speaker, let us move on.

Dr. Moonilal: Let Bhoé come here and blast “yuh” out.

Mr. C. Imbert: He could blast anybody? Mr. Speaker, I told that Minister, do not start me up on that gentleman. “Doh start me up!” *[Crosstalk]* I was a Minister of Tertiary Education, you know. The gentleman had to report to me, yuh know. “Doh start me up.”

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Now, Mr. Speaker, let us deal with some facts. I heard the Minister talk about revenue; I heard him talk about deficits; I heard him talk about—[*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, everybody—

Mr. Speaker: Yes. May I appeal to Members to allow the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East to speak in silence, please, and I do not want to identify people at this time. I make a general appeal. Continue, hon. Member, please.

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, you know, I heard the Minister talk about expenses increased by 6.6 per cent, but these have been offset by a growth in revenue, and he spoke about foreign reserves, that the debt to GDP ratio is 40.6 per cent; things looking good. So why ministries have no money? Why is it every time a Member of Parliament asks a Minister to do a project in a constituency, the refrain is: no money; the Ministry of Finance has released no money?

If things are looking so good, why are Ministries not flushed with money? Why can they not build community centres? Why do they have to defer expenditure to next year? Why can they not refurbish health centres? Why can they not deal with road production? [*Interruption*] No, I mean, if you are doing so well, why are Ministries not flushed with money and why is it that when MPs go, the Ministers say, no money? [*Interruption*] Okay, I will smile.

Let us deal now with—no, but you see, Mr. Speaker, it is when I hear this kind of tomfoolery, I have to get vex: the economy is doing well. Why do the Ministries have no money? Employment at 3.6 per cent. How come? Where are all these people? Where “dey” working? You know, it is just throwing out numbers, throwing out figures, pulling them out of a hat.

Let me deal with facts. Mr. Speaker, the crude oil and condensate production in 2013, the latest figures available from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs, November 2013: crude oil and condensate production in Trinidad and Tobago in BOPD, 79,220 barrels per day. Let me read the whole of 2013.

January 2013, 82,989; February 2013, 82,850; March 2013, 79,074; April 2013, 81,000; 80,000; 76,000. In fact, Mr. Speaker, when oil production hit 76,000 barrels in June of 2013, that would have been the lowest figure in this country for more than 50 years. That 76,000 per day barrel of oil production in the middle of 2013, the lowest figure in this country for 50 years! Then you have 81,000; 84,000; 83,000; now 79,000 in 2013, averaging out the year, with the exception of December, of 81,000 barrels, Mr. Speaker.

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When they came in—and I have been saying this every year. I said it in 2010, 2011, 2012; I am saying it in 2014 and I will say it in 2015 just before we get rid “ah dem”. When they came in, the national oil production was 100,000 barrels; in fact, 100,851 barrels per day. Our national oil production now, Mr. Speaker, is somewhere in the vicinity of 79,000 to 80,000 barrels. There has been a 20 per cent decline in oil production in this country. I have said this every year for the last four years, and all we get from them is old talk! Old talk! What is this Government doing about stimulating exploration and production in our local oil sector?

Mr. Warner: PR, PR-ing.

Mr. C. Imbert: Just public relations! You are going to tell me, you are waiting until—what month are we in now, April?—April 2014. When they came in? May 2010? Four years after they came in—they took four years before they figured out they have to create incentives to stimulate exploration and production in this country? Four years? So what happened in year one, year two, year—were they sleeping? What was going on in this Government? Now you are putting in fiscal incentives?

What the Minister did not tell you, they waste four years before they do anything to stimulate production and exploration in the energy sector—four years they waste! It takes six to seven years after a bid round, after you award a production-sharing contract, before the country begins to see the benefits of the increased exploration and production.

So they have wasted the last four years. Instead of doing all of this in 2010, if they know so much—they are all so brilliant on that side, Mr. Speaker. They did not do it in 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013. You are now doing it in 2014. It will not be until 2020 before this country starts to see any substantial increase in its oil production. Ten wasted years because of this administration, Mr. Speaker. Ten years! It takes six to seven years after you incentivize the industry before—I see you are nodding because you know. It takes six to seven years after you incentivize the energy sector before you start to see the results in terms of your revenue stream. So four years wasted, and a next six years before we start to get revenue—10. Four and six is 10, if you did not understand. Okay?

So Trinidad and Tobago is not going to see any significant—we are not going to see a recovery—*[Interruption]* You keep talking about oil production, but these are the figures. We have dropped 20,000 barrels in the last four years and we are not going to see any recovery back up to the 100,000 and beyond, for 10 years.

Hon. Howai: Yes, but you did not make any investments.

Mr. C. Imbert: Yes, but the people elected you! And you see, Mr. Speaker, time is longer than twine. You see, this People's Partnership said they had all the answers. When they came in they appointed the Member for—*[Interruption]*

Miss Mc Donald: San Fernando West.

Mr. C. Imbert: The seating “arrangements changing so much, ah doh know wha going on”. They appointed the Member for San Fernando West as Minister of Energy. Now, at least the Member had some experience—some real experience—in the sector. Then because the then Minister of Energy went and interfered with National Petroleum; went and interfered with a contract awarded to the Gopaul group, they fired the Minister of Energy, and while all of that was going on, Mr. Speaker, the junior Minister was undermining the senior Minister. “And doh feel I doh—I know these things, yuh know.” *[Desk thumping]*

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, the Member is not even here. You know better.

12.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Member, do not make any personal charge as it relates to the conduct of any Member of Parliament, whether it is in the other place or in this place. You know that better than any one of us. And if you want to bring a substantive Motion to deal with the conduct of any Member, you are free to do that, but I call on you to refrain completely. You are in breach of the Standing Orders. Please, do not go there.

Mr. C. Imbert: Oh certainly, Mr. Speaker. I will not say that any more, but everybody knows it is a fact. The fact is, Mr. Speaker, I withdraw it, but everybody knows it is true. But, what I will say is that whatever the circumstances that caused the Prime Minister to make a change in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs by removing the Member for San Fernando West, that had a serious deleterious effect on that sector. The new Minister likes to talk—talk, talk, talk, talk, talk—but when you ask him what is going on, if it is an embarrassing thing, he is not speaking on that. For example, we have not heard yet what is happening with the exploitation, the monetization of the cross-border reserves in the Loran-Manatee field.

There was a big announcement over a year ago, fantastic day for the Caribbean and, you know, that they signed this wonderful agreement in Venezuela that will monetize—historic, that will monetize—cross-border reserves. And what happened? Not a single cubic foot, not a single barrel of cross-

border oil has been monetized since that announcement a year ago. Just “flim and flam” and public relations. The Minister tends—and I am not imputing improper motives now. I heard the Minister the other day boast that he is a qualified engineer. Mr. Speaker, I have looked on the register of registered engineers in Trinidad and Tobago [*Laughter*] and the name Kevin Ramnarine does not appear, [*Desk thumping*] and I object.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Mr. Speaker, 36(5).

Mr. C. Imbert: What 36(5)?

Dr. Gopeesingh: You have to quote where the Minister said he is— [*Interruption*]

Mr. C. Imbert: No, no, no. I am sticking to this. I am sticking—it is a fact.

Dr. Gopeesingh: You have to quote where the Minister said he is an engineer.

Mr. C. Imbert: He said it.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Where?

Mr. Speaker: Well, I was here and the Minister did say he was a petroleum engineer. [*Desk thumping and laughter*] No, no, no, no! No, no, no, no! I recall the Minister saying he is a petroleum, as opposed to being an engineer. Whatever it is, but I remember him saying that. What I would like to say, hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East, do not make personal charges. Yeah, I am saying do not make any personal charges against any Member. Do not reflect on a Member persona and do not raise the conduct of a Member. If you want to raise anything about qualifications, bring a substantive Motion. You are dealing with the conduct. You are reflecting on a Member’s character and that is not permitted in an ordinary debate. So you know this and I ask you to be guided by our Standing Orders, please.

Mr. C. Imbert: I will be so guided, Mr. Speaker. I will be guided. It is just— [*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. C. Imbert: You could say what you want—Mr. Speaker, I am a qualified engineer. I am a registered engineer in Trinidad and Tobago. I have been a member of the Chartered Institute of Civil Engineers of the UK.

Hon. Member: And the bridge fall down.

Mr. C. Imbert: You could say what you want. But you see, Mr. Speaker, they could say what they want.

Mr. Speaker: Please, please, Members! I know Members might be getting a bit—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: Hungry.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, I feel so. I feel Members are becoming a bit you know, but please allow the hon. Member to speak in silence and do not really make these remarks that impute and make charges, personal charges, against an hon. Member. Members know this because I just rose on this matter. So please, do not breach the Standing Orders. Even though you are not speaking, by making remarks, you are in violation of the Standing Orders. So do not make any personal charges against any Member of this honourable House or from the other place, please. Continue, hon. Member.

Mr. C. Imbert: Yes, Mr. Speaker. The point I was making is that I qualified to be a chartered engineer in 1983 after performing a course of training with a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Engineers in the United Kingdom, having graduated with my bachelor's degree in civil engineering in 1979.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Did you get special concessions?

Mr. C. Imbert: 1983, Mr. Speaker. *[Interruption]* Come on. "All yuh stop making a joke out of it. You want to harass people, eh. I not doing that now." And, Mr. Speaker, I also became a member of the American Society of Civil Engineers, a member of the Association of Professional Engineers of Trinidad and Tobago and a registered engineer.

As time has gone by, Mr. Speaker—they are not listening to you, you know. They do not understand the point. As time has gone by, Mr. Speaker, I have—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Please, please, Members.

Mr. C. Imbert:—simply sought to maintain my registration as a registered engineer in Trinidad and Tobago. Now, Mr. Speaker, the same applies to the medical profession. The Member for Caroni East knows exactly what I am talking about. It applies to the accounting profession and it applies to the legal profession, and I am fed up of people in this country with their false papers and their false claims of qualifications claiming to be members of a profession. *[Desk thumping]* Fed up of it!

Now, let us get back to the matter at hand because I am sure the Member for Caroni East would not be happy if some quack was claiming to be a medical doctor. In setting aside all the old talk, he would not be happy about that. I am sure the Member for Tunapuna would not be happy if some quack claimed to be an economist, because the Member for Tunapuna is a well-educated and distinguished economist.

Mr. Speaker: Please Members, please.

Mr. C. Imbert: So let us go back. As I said, there have been changes in the administration within the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs since this Government came in and it could be because of those changes in administration, and a mismatch of the skill set in that Ministry that we have seen this phenomenon manifest itself where in 2014 our oil production is now 20 per cent less than it used to be in 2010; and it is about time these fiscal incentives were put in place. Late! Four years late, but better late than never because one of the problems we have in this country is that there is inadequate oversight of Petrotrin by the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs, and these are things we need to talk about. That is why I welcome the new Standing Orders and that is why I welcome the new energy committee because we need to discuss these things.

There is inadequate oversight by the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs of the national oil company and, as a consequence of that inadequate oversight, for years this country has spent large sums of money improving, expanding refinery operations at Pointe-a-Pierre. The problem with all of that expenditure and all of that focus on refinery operations is that when the price of oil is high, the differential between the cost of refining and the cost you get for your refined products is very small.

In fact, I have heard the current president of Petrotrin, who by the way is over the retirement age for those of you who feel we do not know. The current president of Petrotrin who his past the retirement age—and perhaps the Minister of Finance and the Economy could tell us why you have someone who is over the retirement age running our national oil company and what special arrangements were put in place for that particular individual to allow him—[*Interruption*]

Sen. the Hon. Howai: You could ask him that.

Mr. C. Imbert: No, you tell us. You are the Minister of Finance and the Economy. But, Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: You still getting \$10 million too, you know.

Mr. C. Imbert:—the fact of the matter is—[*Interruption*]

Sen. the Hon. Howai: [*Inaudible*]

Mrs. Mc Intosh: You get it.

Sen. the Hon. Howai: I deserved it.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: You deserved it?

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, all this talk about who deserve \$10 million and who get \$10 million when they left the bank, I do not want to know. That is some other debate. I will bring that up under a substantive Motion. Would you tell the Minister of Finance and the Economy to stop talking about the \$10 million he got from FCB? It is he who brought it up. I do not want to talk about that here. I will talk about it in another forum, another place, another time. What happened? He brought it up, not me, but let us move on.

The fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker—oh God, stop. Mr. Speaker, what is wrong with them? They are like little children. Whenever you say something in this Parliament that hurts them because it is true, they behave like little children and all the heckling starts and all the cross floor chatter begins. But it is all right; it is all right. They could chatter all they want. They could laugh all they want. Let us go back to this thing with our national oil company.

For years our national oil company has been focused on refinery operations. The problem with refinery operations—and I think we need to have a national discussion on this—is that when the price of oil is high, there is not a commensurate increase in the price of refined products. So, crude oil price is high, but gasoline and all these other refined products do not keep pace with the increase in the price of crude. So the margin, which is the difference between what you get for your refined productions and the cost, is small. I am told by the president of Petrotrin or I heard him say—let us put it that way—that the refinery may very well be operating at a loss at this point in time. Now, how did we come to this place where our national oil refinery is operating at a loss with oil at \$100 a barrel? But that is how it is because there has been an absence of focus on exploration and production and increasing the national production of crude oil and condensate.

These measures that the Minister is now seeking to put in place, I assume there has been appropriate consultation, I assume that industry players are in agreement because the Minister was conspicuously silent about whether there had

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been any consultation with industry players, whether the industry is in agreement—[*Interruption*]

Sen. the Hon. Howai: Yes, it is.

Mr. C. Imbert:—whether the Energy Chamber is in agreement. Is the Energy Chamber in agreement? Is it that the oil companies are the ones who are asking for this and the Minister is pandering to the oil companies; or is it that this is something that needs to be done to boost oil production?

Sen. the Hon. Howai: Exactly.

Mr. C. Imbert: Yes, that is what you say.

Sen. the Hon. Howai: Thank you.

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, this particular Minister likes to talk a lot, you know. I understand he is now under a gag order from the Attorney General over the FCB/IPO. [*Laughter*] You like to talk too much, and I certainly hope that is not being done to protect friends and family—that gag order—but let us move on.

I have in my possession an article dated September 7, 2013, *Trinidad Express*, “Are we getting value from our oil and gas industry?” Analysis by the Energy Chamber, and this was just before the delivery of the last national budget:

“As Finance Minister Larry Howai prepares to deliver Trinidad and Tobago’s largest national budget...the Energy Chamber—South Trinidad most powerful business group—is asking Government to consider that international comparisons of oil and tax regimes suggest the country’s oil and gas sector operates within a high tax environment while the rest of the economy has a relatively low tax burden.”

However—and that is why I asked the Minister, did you consult with them?

“The Energy Chamber says it is convinced that Government revenue from the oil and gas sector is fairly set and fairly collected.”

That is what they said in September 2013.

So if the Energy Chamber is of the view that the tax rates are acceptable, collections are okay, then why are you giving these incentives to the oil companies? Please let us know because this article suggests to me that the Energy Chamber was of the view that we should not interfere with our oil taxation regime.

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Sen. the Hon. Howai: They do not agree with that.

Mr. C. Imbert: They do not agree with their own analysis?

Sen. the Hon. Howai: Probably not, because my consultation with them—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I am reading statements made by the energy—
following is the Energy Chamber’s full statement to the *Sunday Express*:

“One of the key questions on the public’s mind...is whether or not the country
receives value for money from its oil and gas resources.

While the overall revenue figures are impressive, a key question is, ‘Does the
Government collect a fair portion of the overall revenue generated by the
industry?’

The next question”—is—“Ok, so the official taxation rate is high, but is the
Government efficient in collecting all that is due to citizens?””

What they were talking here about is tax evasion and tax avoidance on the part of
the energy companies, and at the end of this press release, Mr. Speaker, what the
energy sector concluded is that oil and gas taxation in Trinidad and Tobago:

“...is fairly set and fairly collected.”

Are you trying to tell me that this release from the energy sector is wrong?

12.45 p.m.

Sen. the Hon. Howai: No, it is out of context.

Mr. C. Imbert: Out of context? They do not know what they are doing? Oh, I
see, out of context. A release that says tax:

“...is fairly set and fairly collected.”

—is out of context?

Sen. the Hon. Howai: It is not for incentivization.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, please. Two things: I would like the hon.
Minister of Finance and the Economy to take notes and I would like the hon.
Member who is addressing the House to address your remarks to the Chair and
not to engage in a discussion with the Minister of Finance and the Economy,
please. Could you kindly continue, please!

Mr. C. Imbert: No problem, Mr. Speaker. I was just involved in an
interactive discussion there, but I understand that you would like me to speak to

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you. So, let us look, the energy sector issued a release where it said that our tax system, with respect to oil and gas is fairly set and fairly collected. The Minister is saying that is out of context, so “they stupid; they doh know what they doing”. All right.

Let us move now to the Inter-American Development Bank and hear what they have to say and see whether they are out of context too, and they are foolish too, okay, like the Minister has implied: the energy sector does not know what it is doing. I have a document here, Mr. Speaker, which is for the 2011/2012 period. It is entitled, “Tax Regimes in Hydrocarbon-Rich Countries: How does Trinidad Compare?” and it is by the lead economist at the Inter-American Development Bank, Country Department Caribbean, and it is a presentation. It gave some information about the energy sector and indicated, in particular, that the economy of Trinidad and Tobago depends on oil and gas which account for 40 percent of GDP, 80 per cent of our exports and 58 per cent of fiscal revenues as of 2011. I presume, Mr. Speaker, through you, that the figures are relatively unchanged. We are still at about 40 per cent of GDP, 80 per cent of exports and 58 per cent of revenue, more or less, plus or minus a few per cent. I am assuming that is what it is.

Mr. Speaker, when one looks at what the Inter-American Development Bank had to say—they went through all sorts of things. They spoke about shale gas, for example—we do not have any shale gas in Trinidad and Tobago—and they looked at countries around the world like Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Canada, China, Libya, Mexico, Poland, South Africa, United States. Those are all the countries, I have listed there, are the ones that have large, technically recoverable reserves of shale gas and in trillions of cubic feet. For example, Algeria has 231 trillion cubic feet of shale gas recoverable; Argentina, 774 trillion cubic feet; China, the world leader, 1,275 trillion cubic feet of technically recoverable shale gas.

We do not have any shale gas and shale gas is the greatest threat to our natural gas production, and we need to start looking at these things as we go forward as a country. There are two things—I would even say three. There are three things that we in this country need to stop politicizing: the energy sector, crime and national security and macroeconomics. We need to stop politicizing these three things because all of us have to live here. So all the stupidity they have done in the energy sector for the last four years and what they will do for the next year, we now have to come in as a government and fix that.

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But, if we had a bipartisan group which will be reporting to the Parliament so that the Parliament and the public would get the benefit of wise counsel from all sides of the Parliament and experts in the sector, then some of the actions that are being taken today, in terms of providing incentives for write-off of capital expenditure, in terms of exploration, production, maintenance, work over, heavy oil—I mean it all makes a lot of sense but it was obvious and should have been done in 2010.

The Minister did say that the previous Government spent 2009, and the early part of 2010, working out what the incentive should be to deal with heavy oil recovery, to deal with costs of work overs and maintenance and also tax write-offs and carrying forward expenditure and credits from previous years into future years and so on. Therefore, it should have been easy for them, since most of it had been done in the 2009/2010 period, to implement, by earliest 2011, some of the fiscal incentives that we are seeing here.

You know, if we had a bipartisan energy committee, Mr. Speaker, we would not be having this discussion; we would be having it in committee somewhere, some argument in committee and—[*Crosstalk*] It is all right. I am making a point: these things are too serious. Because the IDB looked at our regime, we have a royalty of 12.5 per cent, 10 per cent from marine production, and then a sliding scale going up to as much as 15 per cent, production levy of 3 per cent on crude oil, supplemental petroleum tax that has changed over the years and so on; petroleum profits tax which is—correct me if I am wrong, Minister—currently at 50 per cent—Am I correct?—and of gross revenues and an unemployment levy of 5 per cent. So we have quite a complex tax structure: royalties, production levy, supplemental petroleum tax, petroleum profits tax, unemployment levy. Then, we have incentives such as a discount on SPT and an oil price below which the SPT will not be applied.

Let me go straight to the recommendations in this report. The IDB found—and this is a recent report. This report is not more than two years old. The IDB found that Trinidad's tax regime was average. I read that thing from Wood Mackenzie where they said we are somewhere by Albania, 99 out of 103. But, the IDB has concluded that Trinidad's tax regime, with respect to oil and gas sector, is average, and that it is not way out of whack, it is not bizarre, it is not extreme, it is not in any way an excessive tax regime. So how can the IDB come to that conclusion that Trinidad and Tobago's taxation system is average in terms of the world—and I will give you some of the countries they looked at. Let me just get the relevant page inside of here where they looked at things like SPT, PPT, income tax and so on. Just give me one minute; I had the table here.

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Mr. Speaker, look at what it says:

“Compared to other countries, Trinidad a little above average”

And they said that our 50 per cent income tax rate in the petroleum sector is just a little above average. If you look at other countries: Algeria is 50 per cent; Nigeria is between 50 per cent to 85 per cent; UK is between 40 per cent to 70 per cent; Venezuela is 50 per cent and so on. So, in terms of income tax in the oil and gas sector, we are just about average, and in terms of the other things, like the SPT, PPT and so on, Mr. Speaker, the report also indicated that we are just about average. So, if the Inter-American Development Bank, having done a reasonably exhaustive study of our taxation regime, in terms of petroleum profits tax, in terms of supplemental petroleum tax, in terms of the income tax, levies and so on; if they have come to the conclusion that our regime is just about average—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

Motion made: That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Mr. N. Hypolite*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, before you continue, I think it is a good time for us to have lunch. This sitting is now suspended until 2.00 p.m.

12.54 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

2.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

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

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Crosstalk*] No, I have 30 minutes more.

Mr. Speaker, just to summarize the point I was making before we went for lunch, the Inter-American Development Bank had found that, compared to other countries, in terms of global taxation of oil production, Trinidad and Tobago is a little above average, and they came to this conclusion by looking at royalties. Our royalty is 12.5 per cent. You have places like Kazakhstan up to 20 per cent; Libya is 16.67 per cent; Norway is 50 per cent; Algeria, 10 per cent to 20 per cent. So they found that our royalty level, if I look at this, is actually quite low compared to some other countries. In terms of our income tax rate, we were just above average. So, the Inter-American Development Bank had found that our global

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taxation of oil production is just a little above average to the major oil-producing countries in the world. So you have to ask the question—and I am sorry the Minister is not here—why are we doing this?

The Minister told us that the loss of revenue to Trinidad and Tobago from the incentives for oil exploration and production would be in the vicinity of \$1 billion. What I would like the Minister to tell us is, if we are going to lose \$1 billion, and he said he will make up that shortfall by calling upon state corporations that have dividends—that they are supposed to be paying to the Corporation Sole—and they would utilize some of the money that state corporations have, like the National Gas Company, for example—who I am told, is sitting on over \$10 billion in cash because they have not been paying dividends to the Corporation Sole—so they would take some of that money to offset the reduction in revenue of about \$1 billion caused by these new tax incentives—by this new oil and gas taxation regime.

I would like the Minister to tell us if we are giving up \$1 billion, because that money that is sitting in the state enterprises is taxpayers' money, it does not belong to national gas even though they behave as if it is theirs. Because, apparently, they are doing the WASA Waste Water Treatment Plant because they have cash, not telling everybody that is taxpayers' cash we are talking about. But, I would like the Minister to tell us, if you are going to give up \$1 billion, how much are we going to earn? They have to do a module. This is not primary school here.

We are giving up \$1 billion, how much do we expect to earn as a result of the reduction in taxes or the variation in taxes and the allowances which will allow oil companies to carry over expenditure from one year to another, to write-off the full expenditure on exploration, maintenance, work overs and so on or 50 per cent of it, as the case may be? So, I would like the Minister to tell us, okay, “we giving up ah billion, how much we going to earn”. Because, if we are earning less than a billion, we are wasting time, and really, I expect the Members opposite to be a little more sophisticated in their utterances.

Let me just go to this point the Minister made that he is going to offset the reduction in revenue caused by these tax incentives by using cash held by state enterprises. Mr. Speaker, you would have heard a lot of noise in the recent days about the decision of the Government to allow the National Gas Company to use \$1 billion of its cash. So that is \$1 billion of the cash that they have will be used up right away to construct a water reuse project at the Beetham.

2.05 p.m.

I have already dealt with the fact that we consider that project to be not commercially viable. We believe that it does not make sense, that the water is not required and that you can have a much better use of the dividends that this state corporation is holding, which is supposed to be given to the Minister of Finance and the Economy to deal with these reductions in oil and gas taxation, and we made the point that to go into a project like that, which is costing this country \$1 billion, when in fact all that was required to do was to increase the capacity and the output of the desalination plant at Point Lisas.

Mr. Speaker, I sat on a ministerial committee for infrastructure works in the last administration. There were several persons on that committee, but I was a member of that committee. In 2010, in the early part of 2010, in one of the meetings that we had in April 2010, just about five weeks before the general election, one of the projects we looked at in that infrastructure works ministerial committee—because you see Members opposite seem to think that time stood still after 2007 and 2008 but what happened after 2008, because we had to be very careful about how we were spending the country's money, the Cabinet appointed a ministerial committee for infrastructure works that looked at transportation, that looked at highways and looked at electricity generation and looked at water production. And that committee met from 2008, right through to 2010—2008, 2009, 2010. I think Mr. Hypolite was on that committee at one point in time.

The Minister of Finance was on the committee and various other Members of the Cabinet were on the committee and senior technocrats from the state sector, from the Ministry of Finance and from the Public Utilities Ministry, from the Works Ministry, and so on. We would meet every month and we would look at how we were using revenues that were earned from the oil and gas sector, the same revenues we are talking about today and the best use to put these revenues. I am tying this all back into the fact that the Minister said he is going to use surplus cash or dividends that state companies have, such as the National Gas Company. So we looked at the Beetham wastewater plant.

I am going to read now into the record, because it is necessary to educate Ministers opposite, because clearly they are uninformed. In the meeting of April 2010, the ministerial committee was looking at different usages for the water from the Beetham Wastewater Reuse Project. And I read as follows from page 7 of those minutes.

It was agreed that from a cost of upgrade perspective, the requirements for untreated effluent outlined by the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity

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Commission for the supply from the existing Beetham Plant of approximately eight million gallons of effluent water would be a preferred solution.

You see, Mr. Speaker, even though the 2007 Cabinet had taken a decision to use the water from the waste water plant, we spent the years 2008—because we were a responsible government—2009 and 2010 and concluded that the best use of the water from the Beetham Wastewater Plant would be to cool a new electricity power plant that was to be situated in Barataria on the edge of the Beetham dump. Those are the facts and it makes a lot of sense, because we are talking here about proper use of revenue and income and it makes sense that if you have a power plant on the Beetham, and you have a wastewater treatment plant on the Beetham, you do not have to construct 34 kilometres of pipeline, because the 34 kilometres of pipeline, in this new project, is accounted for some US \$70 million. Over \$400 million is going to be spent constructing a pipeline that we do not need, to Point Lisas, because the desalination company had agreed to expand their plant from 24 million gallons a day all the way up to 60 million gallons a day, at a price that is significantly lower than the price of water from this wastewater plant.

Mr. Speaker, I want this Government to tell us: why are you punishing the population of Trinidad and Tobago? Why are you putting us through all of this controversy with this wastewater plant? Why are you creating all this bacchanal?

Mr. Speaker: As you are aware, there is a Private Member's Motion that we have begun debate on that particular matter. I do not think that the Minister of Finance and the Economy made any reference to the Beetham. He talked about what you just mentioned. I thought you were just going en passant, but you seem to be delving into a debate on that matter and I want to advise you, I do not want the debate to be widened, and you are seeking to widen the debate. I want to keep the debate in the context of what is before us. So, you can make reference, but I do not want you to elaborate, in terms of a debate, because I do not think you have spoken yet on this Private Member's Motion. So, I would ask you to hold your fire for your contribution and let us focus on the matter that is before us. Thank you very much.

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will abide by your ruling. Hope it applies to everybody else.

Dr. Moonilal: Are you questioning the Speaker's ruling?

Mr. C. Imbert: Be quiet. All I would say is that as a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, when I look at our declining oil production, when I look at the fact that

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the national production of oil has declined from 100,000 barrels in 2010, to 80,000 barrels in 2014, when I quantify how much money you are talking about, because West Texas Intermediate is now at \$101; North Sea Brent Crude is \$106; and when I look at the lost earnings of this country, in terms of a reduction of 20,000 barrels a day, that is not per year, Mr. Speaker, that is a day, so we are talking about millions of barrels of oil that have been lost in production and billions of dollars in revenue that have been lost over the last 20 years.

As we now seek to put fiscal incentives in place, to stimulate new exploration and new production—something that should have been done four years ago and Members on both sides of this House are in agreement with that. Some of them may not want to say it, but Members on both sides of this House believe that the focus, in terms of our national energy sector, should have been on stimulating exploration and production rather than just focusing only on the refinery operations.

When I look at the fact that we will be stimulating new exploration and new production—because, Mr. Speaker, I was in a Cabinet back in 1993/1994, when Wendell Mottley reduced the supplemental petroleum tax and I saw the benefits to this country of that move later on in the late 1990s, Mr. Speaker. Because of the reduction in the SPT back in the early 1990s, there was a surge in exploration and production and oil production in Trinidad and Tobago and this is exactly what is going to happen.

Let me just say at the outset, we need to have a national discussion on this, because the Minister has said he is giving up a \$1 billion in revenue. We need to know how much we are going to earn: \$1 billion, \$5 billion, \$10 billion, \$20 billion. What will come out of this loss in revenue of a billion dollars? That is a one-off. That could be \$1 billion a year. But as we make these decisions today, which I support—I am talking about the new tax regime for the oil sector, I support it. As we make those decisions today—and this country puts itself on a path to earn increased revenues, well the next government, of course, because it is a gestation period, so they would not be around to see the increased revenues from the oil and energy sector, we need to be very careful about how we spend money, and we cannot earn money from oil and gas because of incentives and then squander it through corruption. That is why I brought up this thing, en passant, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

What is the point of going through all of this and then the money is stolen? We have to have a holistic approach to how we deal with matters. Yes, we need to boost exploration. Yes, we need to boost production. Yes, we need to replace our

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aging pipelines so we would not have problems, as we saw with that oil spill in the south area. We have antiquated infrastructure in the national oil company that has not been dealt with for years, and I say years because I am not afraid to say that. These things should have been attended to years ago, and the whole question of stimulating the production and exploration.

Let me talk about production, because Trinidad is a mature oil province. We have been producing oil here for 100 years, more than 100 years, and because we are a mature oil province it is becoming harder and harder to produce oil economically from our oil fields because they are mature. That is why we have to keep making new discoveries.

Let us take the discovery of oil off the east coast of Trinidad, the BHP Billiton discovery. Mr. Speaker, I was in the Cabinet when that occurred and the initial production from that field was 75,000 barrels a day. Within a couple of years, that dropped from 75,000 to 25,000 barrels a day and I now think they are averaging 22,000 barrels a day out of that BHP field, which started at 75,000. That is another feature of Trinidad and Tobago oil production. The oil production skyrockets initially and then it drops off dramatically. That is Trinidad and Tobago. All the geologists will tell you that is how our oil province behaves and, therefore, we have to give incentives, not just for exploration but incentives for production, because you have mature fields, heavy oil, you have to go to secondary oil recovery, enhanced oil recovery systems. We have to have a whole framework of policies, not just to discover new oil, but to produce more oil out of existing fields and that is why I am in support of what we are doing here. But I am not in support of earning more money for people to “tief” it and I just want to make that point, Mr. Speaker, en passant.

Mr. Speaker, let me move on to another matter. I heard the Minister talk about the FCB IPO and he told us that the FCB IPO brought in \$1 billion for the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, the revenues of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, \$1 billion from the FCB IPO and that is one of the reasons why the revenue is above budget. But what is the point of an IPO when people are manipulating the IPO, when people who are already rich are becoming richer, when the ordinary citizen makes an application for an IPO to get access to shares in a newly divested state corporation and they are limited to 5,000 shares or 6,000 shares or 8,000 shares, as the case may be, and the elite of our society is somehow getting access to almost 700,000 shares; one person. So all that billion dollars the Minister is talking about and all those IPOs that he is talking about, we have to,

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not just make new laws, because he spoke about making laws for gambling, he spoke about making laws for mining, for illegal quarrying.

But, Mr. Speaker, this Government is very good at lip service. They talk a lot, you know. When last was anybody held for illegal quarrying in this country? When last? You could increase the fine to \$10 million, as long as there is no enforcement capability in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs and in the other agencies that are associated with enforcement of illegal quarrying, you are just blowing in the wind, Mr. Speaker.

So, I would like the Minister—do not just tell us you are increasing the fines for illegal quarrying—to tell us how you are increasing and improving the enforcement capability of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs and the authorities, otherwise you are just going to be paying lip service to the whole idea of dealing with this issue; and the same applies to gambling.

I have heard Minister Dookeran come in this House and talk about gambling in 2010 and in 2011, and then Minister Howai arrives and he talks about gambling in 2013. “Is de same thing dey saying”, that they are going to regulate the gambling sector, they are going to deal with it, they are going to be proactive, they are going to be holistic. Four years later! “What dey doing?” They are just increasing fines here, a scattershot approach, a piecemeal approach. We do not have any gambling legislation here before us. There is no holistic overview of the gambling industry. You have all of these clubs operating as casinos. The Minister says they are illegal.

2.20 p.m.

“When last you hear somebody get lock up” for operating an illegal casino, Mr. Speaker? When last? And you know why they do not deal with them? Because these organizations are susceptible to money laundering and the proceeds of crime and organized crime, Mr. Speaker. You go anywhere in the world and you will see a direct link between the Mafia and casinos. For four years this Government has talked, and talked, and talked about bringing a holistic reform programme for casinos, and all they did, they increased the taxes on baccarat tables, on slot machines. Now they are allowing amusement machines in clubs and bars. In other words, they are condoning gambling while talking about illegal gambling.

I call on the Minister, before you leave office, it would not be long, [*Laughter*] bring legislative proposals to create a gambling authority, or something to regulate the gambling industry, to stop money laundering and to

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stamp out corruption and abuse of innocent people, who have to work in these casinos—Mr. Speaker, bring something, do not just talk. You increased the tax on a baccarat table by \$10.00. You increased the tax on a slot machine by \$10.00. Now you are allowing amusement machines in clubs and bars, and so on. That is not a holistic approach to anything, Mr. Speaker; it is just lip service. Lip service!

Let us look at some of the other things that the Minister told us about. You said you want to have IPOs for the small and medium enterprises. You said you had a successful IPO from FCB, that brought in \$1 billion. But, Mr. Speaker, a cursory reading of the laws that deal with the Securities Act, the Financial Intelligence Unit Act, the Financial Obligations Regulations, a cursory reading of sections 136 and 137 of the Securities Act, very superficial reading, will tell you that a connected party, which means a senior officer of a reporting issuer, which means in this case FCB, the one that brought in \$1 billion for the Government. So a senior officer of FCB, if he acquired shares in FCB, must report this matter to the Securities Commission within five days. That is section 136 of the Securities Act, and section 137 says, if that same person is acquiring shares on behalf of somebody else, they must report it within the same or similar time period, Mr. Speaker.

I have seen an email from the CEO of the First Citizens Bank to a former employee stating factually, not ambiguously or loose, he is stating factually: You did not disclose, and the due diligence was not done, and the source of funds was not identified. These are all breaches of the Financial Obligations Regulations, the Financial Intelligence Unit legislation, and the Securities Act; blatant breaches.

Why does the Attorney General have to put “ah” gag order on the Minister of Finance and the Economy? The Minister of Finance and the Economy went to school. He is an educated man. I know, he was at UWI, a little older than me, but he was there. So he has a university degree, and I believe he has a university degree in his field.

Just let me read into the record. I am not calling any names here. I have the list of engineers registered with the Board of Engineering of Trinidad and Tobago as of today. And I am starting with R: Ramnarace, Denesh; Ramnarine, Nela; Ramnarine, Ravi; Ramnath, Kemkaran. “Ah finish Ramnarine.” So I am not calling any name, but there is no Kevin Ramnarine here on the list of engineers in the Board of Engineering of Trinidad and Tobago. I am not casting any aspersions. But let us go back.

The Minister is an educated man. He knows very well that it is a prima facie case of breaches of 136 and 137 of the Securities Act; prima facie case of

breaches of the Financial Obligations Regulations; prima facie case of breaches of the Financial Intelligence Unit Act. Why do you need an accountant, an auditor, a lawyer, and the Attorney General to tell you that? And I call on the Government today, because they will be doing another IPO to collect revenue. They will be doing another IPO to collect revenue, and we are dealing today with revenue. I am calling on the Government today, restore confidence in First Citizens Bank. No cover up! [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, as a citizen, I am very proud of First Citizens Bank. “Ah doh” have much good to say about the Minister of Finance and the Economy, but he was a very good CEO of that bank. I will say that.

Miss Mc Donald: He should have stayed there. [*Laughter*]

Mr. C. Imbert: He should have stayed there. I will say that. And I will say when he was the CEO, that bank enjoyed tremendous confidence in Trinidad and Tobago. I am sorry to say it is not so now, and the share price is dropping, Mr. Speaker. When those shares were sold at \$42.00, that was some time ago; the share price today is \$34.00. The share price of FCB has dropped by almost 20 per cent since all this confusion has erupted with this IPO. I am calling on the Minister, restore public confidence in First Citizens Bank. It is one of our best indigenous banks. No cover up! Let “de chips fall where dey may”. Let “de” guilty pay. Prosecute those needed to be prosecuted. Get rid of the board, if you feel it is appropriate. Do something, Mr. Speaker, to restore public confidence in First Citizens Bank, because all this entire debate is about finance.

This entire debate is about confidence, not just in the bank, but in the Trinidad and Tobago economy. This entire debate is about the confidence of the oil companies, because one of the things in this IDB report, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that Inter-American Development Bank noted was that, what international investors in the oil sector in Trinidad and Tobago are most interested in, and I found it intriguing. What the international investors said, is that they are not so concerned about the taxation regime in Trinidad and Tobago. Yes, of course, they will want incentives. Yes, of course, they want to write off capital expenditure. Yes, of course, they want to carry forward credits and losses and so on, and as I said, I am supporting that, but what they said is that once the regime is settled, the investors care more about political stability than the tax take. I want the Minister to understand that.

We need to restore confidence in our banking system. And we need to let international investors have confidence in the political stability of Trinidad and Tobago. That is why I am in total support of these bipartisan committees, because when the international investors look on, and they see we have an energy

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committee of the Parliament, comprising Government and Opposition, and I assume, Independent people as well, and they see that Governments come and Governments go, but there is continuity in the Parliament, so that Trinidad and Tobago as a country, its position is known in the world and international investors will have confidence. So even if a Government changes, the policy will continue, because it is developed by way of bipartisan discussions, Mr. Speaker.

So I am calling on the Minister, when you are winding up, tell us how much money you think you will earn from these incentives you are giving the oil and gas sector, and tell us what you are doing to restore public confidence in First Citizens Bank.

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

The Minister of Works and Infrastructure (Hon. Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is really a pleasure for me to join this debate, and I do so at a time in the life of the People's Partnership Government, when the results of its well laid out plans and programmes have begun to bear fruit. Mr. Speaker, for a long time, the conversation was about where the money gone. Now the conversation is, look where the money gone, all the big projects, all the road infrastructure, all the bridges, the Children's Hospital on the Couva highway, the Aquatic Centre next to the Ato Boldon Stadium. One by one, two by two, four by four, eight by eight, 16 by 16, Mr. Speaker, the manifestation of projects that you are seeing now visible to the eye, has changed the conversation on the ground, and it has turned now to a robust series of congratulations from every corner of the society, as to the achievements of the People's Partnership Government. [*Desk thumping*] [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, in every town and village, rural and urban, voices are being heard that are congratulating the Government for having laid down the plans over the first three years, and now, Mr. Speaker, you are seeing the manifestations. Those who have eyes to see can see, but those who will ever be blinded, like my friends on the Opposition, will remain blind forever.

Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend from Diego Martin North/East, started his contribution this afternoon by talking about the IMF report and what was—that we did not speak about what was unfavourable about the IMF report. Mr. Speaker, when it suited their fancies and the reports were in their favour, they came to this very Parliament and boasted and boasted.

But, Mr. Speaker, why are they so angry if the country is doing well? I thought as a citizen of this country, you will be proud to know that the country is

doing well. You will be proud to know that we turned around a declining economy which we inherited from the PNM, and moved it to a growth rate of 1.5 per cent last year, and will move it to 2.5 per cent at the end of this year. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, why is it? Do they want us to forget that the economy was in decline when we took over in May 2010? Do they want us to forget that? We took over an economy in decline.

We knew what our responsibilities were then, and we have matched those responsibilities with the required actions, the plans and programmes and the results are beginning to show. This is why the IMF can come in this country and proudly say that they expect a growth of 2.5 per cent over the next year. Mr. Speaker, we are proud of that. We are proud of the fact that despite all the heavy borrowings that were done, and the massive debts that were left over for us, that the Minister of Finance and the Economy could have stood here today and said, that the debt to GDP ratio is just over—about 40 per cent. Mr. Speaker, that is excellent, and efficient management of this economy, that we can do that and continue having a debt rate that is so controllable, continue to expand this economy and expand investment in the country.

Mr. Speaker, I was very curious, but very keen in my listening when—I will try an Anil Roberts here—when at 12.14.45 p.m., the Member for Diego Martin North/East said, the economy had stalled for the last six years. Now, six years in my estimation is somewhere in 2008. So if you are talking about a stalled economy, you are not just talking about an economy stalling under the People's Partnership Government. You are talking about an economy that because of the kinds of plans and programmes and policies that were there, and were being implemented by the PNM, caused the economy to stall, and we inherited a stalled economy which we have now changed around into a growing economy. [*Desk thumping*] So it is good to listen, and I listened very carefully, and he said that, the economy stalled for the last six years.

Mr. Speaker, he then went on to say that he doubts the official figures of the Central Statistical Office, and he made particular reference to the 3.7 per cent unemployment rate in the country. Mr. Speaker, you know, you can accuse the public servants of all kinds of things as people are wont to do, of poor service, of X, Y and Z, but when you stand in the portals of this Parliament, as we say the hallowed walls of the Parliament—which was a term I learned from you, hon. Speaker, when you were a Member of the Parliament—and you stand here, and you denigrate the professionalism of our people who strive to hold up their professionalism, and do their work good, and when you do that for your narrow political interests, I think that is wrong, Mr. Speaker.

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I roundly condemn the attack on the public servants by the Member for Diego Martin North/East, when he talks about them forging the figures and so on, and so forth, because Mr. Speaker, when you say that, what you are doing is questioning the integrity of those people. You are questioning the honesty of fellow citizens in the country, and that is wrong.

Dr. Browne: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 36(5). The Member never said that the public servants forged any figures.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: He said the Minister; influence of the Minister.

Dr. Browne: He is imputing improper motives.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, I think that hon. Minister, from what I picked up, he was referring to the Minister.

2.35 p.m.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I am so guided, but I hope that the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin North/East was in no way implying that the public servants were engaged in any kind of subterfuge. I hope he is not implying that. I hope he is not doing that, because I respect, as my colleagues on this side do, the professionalism of the public servants.

Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend also said that it takes six to seven years before the country sees the benefit of oil exploration. It would be very, very interesting to go back to some of the statistics with respect to the production of oil in this country.

Very curiously, but very subtly and smartly as they say, the Member said that when they gave up Government, they left us with 100,000 barrels of oil per day.

Mr. Imbert: 108,051.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, what do the statistics bear out? When did the decline start and who was there presiding also over the decline? If it is that he said it takes six to seven years in order to see the benefits of oil exploration and to see the benefits of the new taxes and so on, let us go back to the statistics.

In 2006, who was in Government? Who was the Minister of Energy then? It was not the People's Partnership Government. It was the PNM. And, in 2006, we were producing 143,420 barrels of oil a day. In 2007, we went down by 22,000 barrels to 121,265 barrels a day. In 2008, we went down to 114,279 barrels a day; in 2009, we went down to 106,756 barrels a day; and in 2010, it was 98,179 barrels a day.

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So he is correct about 2010, nearly 100,000 barrels, but the hon. Member did not say that from 2006—2010, there was a decline of 45,000 barrels of oil a day and he and his administration must explain how come they sat there and presided over this decline.

Where were the incentives then? Mr. Speaker, between 2010 and 2013 the oil production has declined from 98,179 to 81,157, 17,000 barrels a day. I am very happy that the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East has seen wisdom in the policies of this administration and he very correctly, for the first time in a very long time, stood up and has supported the new incentives that are being placed by this Government in order to boost production. [*Desk thumping*] So they know the error of their ways and they know what caused the decline in oil production, but they presided over that decline and did not do anything to arrest it.

That is one of the major changes proposed by the Finance Bill—the improvement of the incentive programme for energy companies. Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy, whom I congratulate for his very lucid and clear presentation, indicated that the sector was unattractive to international energy companies; that production was consistently dropping and exploration had slumped drastically, which I am showing through the figures.

I agree with him, that crude production is a long-term initiative and requires years of planning and the perfect mix of initiative and incentive before output results are seen. But the Member for Diego Martin North/East, learned as he is and a storehouse of institutional knowledge, would perhaps be kind enough to explain how, under the PNM, bid rounds tended to be unresponsive and why is it that his Government did not have the foresight to develop marketing and fiscal incentives to attract large scale investment in the energy sector. Why did that happen?

Mr. Speaker, to build capacity, wells have to be drilled. The PNM incentive scheme did not attract investment, but since this Government came in, a conscious decision was taken to pursue the revitalization of the energy sector and it has been yielding positive results and let us look at the reality: three bid rounds between 2010 and 2012 and the award of 10 new acreages blocks. Between 2007 and 2009, no bid round was undertaken. None was undertaken, but within 2010 and 2012, 10 new acreage blocks resulted from three bid rounds and a new bid round in 2013 for six offshore block licences are on the way.

It is the first time since the 1990s also—and this will please the hon. Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, who has spent a lifetime

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in the oil industry, a distinguished life in the oil industry and in labour—an onshore bid round for three blocks yielded 11 bids. You cannot tell me that all this is happening if the private sector and the investment community does not have confidence in this Government, the People’s Partnership Government, and in this country. [*Desk thumping*] You would want us and the country to believe otherwise, but you cannot beat what the results are saying on behalf of this country.

Between October 2008 and September 2009, 30 wells were drilled. Between October 2009 and September 2010—that is years I am talking about—30 wells were drilled. What happened under the People’s Partnership? Between October 2010 and September 2011, 77 wells were drilled. Sixty were drilled under the PNM in the two years before that but, in our first year of office, 77 wells were drilled; October 2011 to September 2012, 96 wells were drilled; October 2011 to May 2012, 69 wells were drilled; and October 2012 to May 2013, 64 wells again.

Mr. Speaker, how is that happening? Why is that happening? Why is it that there is so much confidence? How is it that we were able to get the energy sector going and wells were being drilled? Mr. Speaker, it is because of a return to confidence in the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and to this country by the international energy sector companies.

It is true that we have not yet witnessed substantial increases in oil and gas production, but it is clear that substantial investments by international companies are signalling their confidence in oil and gas finds in the near future within our jurisdiction. That, you cannot deny because I am going to quote from the lips of the people who are investing here—what they are saying, not just when they are within the bounds of Trinidad and Tobago, but what they are saying internationally.

Trinidad Guardian, October 04, 2013, headline:

“BP chief optimistic about T&T’s energy future

...Chief Executive Bob Dudley...”—stated—“BP is in a good place in Trinidad. Below the ground, things are looking good—with scope to develop new fields and extend the lives of older ones. Above the ground...”—and this is important—“we continue to have good relationships with government and other industry stakeholders.””

—and that I underline.

When an investor of note, like bp, can come and say we continue to have good relationships with Government, then it means to say that this Government is managing both its domestic and international relations very, very well. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, listen to what he further stated:

“We have a lot of optimism about the prospects for Trinidad and Tobago’s offshore and onshore acreage. Investment decisions however, will also depend on the country’s attractiveness as a location for investment in a highly competitive world. This includes both keeping pace with fast-changing fiscal regimes globally and creating a market environment where risk and reward are fairly shared across the gas value chain, ...”

Mr. Speaker, we listen to them. They want to invest, but one of the hallmarks of this Government—and it is reflected also today in what the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy was saying—is that this Government, from day one, has embarked on creating a facilitating environment in order to attract business; that Trinidad and Tobago remains a place where people want to do business and will do business.

Sydney *Morning Herald* dated December 14, 2013. Headline, “Optimism flows as BHP eyes Caribbean waters”. According to the writer, and I quote:

“So there was a degree of surprise this week”—and I am quoting from the article—“when BHP executives suddenly started describing Trinidad as ‘unique’, ‘very exciting’ and capable of becoming the petroleum division’s third ‘core area’ beside the US and Australia.

So what’s changed?”—asked the writer.

“Until recently, the fiscal terms on offer in Trinidad did not allow us to make a satisfactory return on the risk of undertaking a deep water exploration program,’ explained BHP petroleum exploration president David Rainey.

‘Others clearly felt the same because during the last decade a number of bid rounds (for offshore acreage) were held and nobody came, nobody participated.”

But they came when this Government came into office because this Government gave a new hope. This Government gave a new perspective to the eyes of those who wanted to invest in Trinidad and Tobago. A new confidence, upsurge in confidence in this country came in with the leadership of Mrs. Kamla Persad-

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Bissessar as Prime Minister, and the People's Partnership Government, and that you cannot take away from us. When the confidence was declining, the country suffered under the PNM.

Mr. Speaker, one can go on to quote this article more and more, but what it says here is this:

“Trinidad”—and Tobago—“is a well-developed, educated parliamentary democracy, and Peter Landau of Range Resources—one of the few other ASX listed companies working there—reckons it suffered from over-governance.

‘From a stability perspective, it’s fantastic, but it was...considered too bureaucratic...[the costs] ‘probably didn’t justify the capital expenditure,’ Mr. Landau said.

‘What they’ve done now is introduce a whole lot of incentive measures that basically encourage increases in production, and exploration spending. The incentives...streamline the process for getting wells drilled,’ said Mr. Landau, whose company is already producing...in Trinidad.”—and Tobago.

Why I referred to this is because I am backing up what I showed you in the statistics of the number of wells drilled in the country. This is what the people in the business, the ones who are putting the money in, are beginning to say.

The Finance Bill, therefore, as I said, presented by the Minister of Finance and the Economy, is a manifestation of that commitment by the Government to ensure that the country’s continued attractiveness to direct foreign investment is there for the country’s energy sector.

Mr. Speaker, BHP Billiton has reportedly committed the company to spend US \$565 million in Trinidad and Tobago and a further US \$459 million in optional spending. That is about US \$1 billion and bpTT plans to spend about \$2 billion, split evenly between capital expenditure and their operating budget.

So, Mr. Speaker, what we have here is very correct. In that light, you know, hon. friend for Diego Martin North/East made a hullabaloo about the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs’ qualification. I just want to tell you that I saw a copy of the Minister’s certificate during the break. The Minister’s certificate is dated December 18, 2002 as a Master of Science in Petroleum.

Here is his certificate. [*Holds up document*]

Kevin Khrisna Ramnarine, having completed a course of study approved by the university and having satisfied the examiners, this day has been admitted by the Senate to the degree of Master of Science in Petroleum Engineering.

He has also completed a course of study by the University, a Bachelor of Science, general Second Class Honours and he completed a course of study approved by the university, satisfied the examiners and was admitted into the Senate by the said International Master's Degree in Business Administration.

2.50 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs is more than adequately qualified to hold the position of Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, because he has, not just the qualification of a Master of Science in Petroleum Engineering, but he also has an International Master of Science Degree in Business Administration which allows him to understand the international business environment, and that is why we have been able to put together the kinds of incentives and programmes that have regenerated the confidence that people have to invest in Trinidad and Tobago, and that is what they could not do. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin North/East went on an exploratory trip, but I wonder whether he should have gone on an exploratory trip to Dubai today. You know, this is a very important debate taking place in this House—Mr. Speaker, I do not need to cast aspersions on anyone neither do I want to interfere in the private affairs of anyone—but, Mr. Speaker, while my Prime Minister is here in the country doing work on behalf of this country and the Government and the people, in a debate like this, I do not see the presence of the Leader of the Opposition.

I want to know how the Leader of the Opposition will answer to the public who will ask him: did you contribute to this debate where major policy decisions and major changes are taking place to the laws of Trinidad and Tobago? What contribution have you made? If you want to lead this country, then you must be here and lead the country. And, therefore, every time he misses the Parliament like this and goes away—I do not know, some say to play golf—what he does, Mr. Speaker, is that he abdicates the responsibility of leadership, and he disqualifies himself from being a leader in Trinidad and Tobago. I am sure that the people of this country feel ashamed of the fact that in an important debate like this, the Member for Diego Martin North/East has to take the leadership in it. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend, the Member for Diego Martin North/East spoke about forging the figures. Mr. Speaker, does that include the Central Bank? On January 31, 2014, Mr. Speaker—I am quoting from Monetary Policy

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Announcement headlined: “Energy Sector Rebounds, Core Inflation Steady: Central Bank maintains repo rate at 2.75 per cent”—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Rambaran will say anything.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, you see, this is the point. When you say “Rambaran will say anything”, what are you doing again? You objected just now when I said that you are attacking the good character and name and professionalism of a public servant, and now you come here and you are saying, “Rambaran will say anything”.

Mr. Speaker, the Governor of the Central Bank is not the only one who determines these figures. He might be a spokesman, but he is one of a team in the Central Bank, I am sure, who are seeing over these documents that are sent to the public. You must understand that when the Central Bank speaks and it gives out its figures there, the international community uses those figures. When you have parliamentarians who are trying to sully the good name of people, and by extension this country, I wonder if they are really qualifying or disqualifying themselves from leading this country in the future, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, when you can debase yourself to that level; when you can degenerate to the level that they are degenerating for the sake of power—attacking the Central Bank Governor in this way—that disqualifies every single one of them from sitting in this Parliament, and from further being a member of a government in this country. Mr. Speaker, that is detestable. I am sure, Mr. Speaker, that the good spiritual man that the Member of Parliament for St. Joseph is, he would not really want to be part of that and share in that kind of thinking.

Mr. Speaker, and so, they attacked the Central Statistical Office, but I want to quote from this release from the Central Bank. It says here—by the way, Mr. Speaker, this release is dated January 31, 2014, so it is current.

“Growth in private sector credit remained relatively steady in November 2013, supported by a noticeable uptick in consumer lending.”

My hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy will tell you that consumer lending goes up when people feel confident that they can borrow, because they have a job and they can repay. So when he comes and says that the 3.7 per cent unemployment rate is wrong, Mr. Speaker, if people did not have jobs they are not going to borrow any money. They are not going to borrow money if they do not have jobs, Mr. Speaker.

“...private sector credit extended by the consolidated financial system rose by 3.4 per cent in November 2013, down slightly from 3.5 per cent in October

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2013. In recent months”—this article notes—“there has been a notable expansion in consumer lending.”

You are not going to borrow money unless you have the ability to repay.

“On a year-on-year basis to November 2013, consumer loans grew by 7.5 per cent, the fastest growth rate recorded in more than two years.”

That just does not happen by “vaps”; it happens because people have jobs. The jobs are sustainable; people are getting work; people are confident about the system. The banks are confident that if they lend this money they can get it back. So when the allusion is made that you have bad debt, yes you do have bad debt, but banks do not lend for bad debts, they lend because they want people to repay. Mr. Speaker, it goes further:

“Growth in real estate mortgage loans also remained robust, expanding by nearly 14 per cent in November 2013.”

Mr. Speaker, I am just quoting all of this to make the essential point that the economy of Trinidad and Tobago has been well managed over the last three and a half years by the People’s Partnership Government [*Desk thumping*] and we are returning to good fundamentals in the country when we examine what is happening. Whether you like it or not, it has been due to the visionary leadership of the hon. Prime Minister, Kamla Persad-Bissessar; visionary leadership. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, it is this leadership of hers, supported by her Cabinet and supported by Members of Parliament of the People’s Partnership that has brought Trinidad and Tobago to where it is now after we took office in 2010.

Mr. Speaker, maybe for a moment or two, I would go back to our inheritance in 2010. I will go back to the hand of cards that we were dealt, and which we had to play and we played it well, Mr. Speaker, we played it well. We know our responsibility, Mr. Speaker; we know the mess we inherited; we know where the blame for that lies and that would not change, but we know that we had to do something about that, and we have done what we had to do, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, we took a financial situation where we had, as the Minister of Finance and the Economy said, I believe yesterday, \$20.8 billion, US \$3 billion; we inherited that, Mr. McLeod, and we managed the financial system with that on our backs, and with even that and the HCU matter for another billion dollars nearly, we were able to bring this economy from a decline to 2.5 per cent this year. [*Desk thumping*]

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Mr. Speaker, if there is competence in this Government and if there is governance for all, in this country, it is this side that has to take the credit for that. [*Desk thumping*] The Prime Minister has not only held a coalition together, but she is the best example this country has ever seen of a values-based, principle-centred leader.

Mr. Speaker, they want to criticize the Prime Minister here and there, but the Prime Minister is one person who lives by the philosophy: “do that which is right”. She knows that when she was voted into office she was voted on the basis of integrity in public life; she was voted on the basis that people trusted her to do that which was right. And you know what, Mr. Speaker? Because she is doing what is right—not what is politically right but what is right for the nation as a whole for every citizen of this country—I tell you, Mr. Speaker, come 2015, the people of this country will vote her back into office with a new majority. [*Desk thumping*] They will, Mr. Speaker. They will do that, Mr. Speaker, because she is here in this country when matters like these are important, but where today is the Leader of the Opposition?

Where is the Leader of the Opposition? A leaderless bunch on other side!

Mr. Indarsingh: Divided!

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Divided! Some on this side, some on that side, Mr. Speaker, a divided bunch. Mr. Speaker, really speaking, I do not think that the people who follow the Opposition are going to be very proud today of their leader, they cannot be. Come and face the music; come and lead; do not run away.

Mr. Speaker, when we took over this country, what is it we took over, Mr. Speaker? What did we take over? Pothole riddled roads; water shortages. You have heard what has happened to the water situation in Trinidad; you have heard the improvements that are taking place. Mr. Speaker, you know, one of the differences between this Government and the PNM administration is this. Mr. Speaker, do you know what we do? We set targets; we set goals. We are not afraid to say that we are going to reduce poverty by 2 per cent; we are not afraid to say that we are going to try by the end of 2014 or 2015 to make sure that X percentage of the population has water 24/7. We are not afraid to say that. We are not afraid to put on the billboard that when you leave Sea Lots, Production Avenue, it takes you 12 to 15 minutes to reach on the Uriah Butler Interchange, because we know we are doing things right.

Mr. Speaker, massive flooding: the first day we came into office we had to go and take care of floods—the economy in recession; out of control inflation rate; a

withered agricultural sector. Today, agriculture, for the first time in 60-something years, is contributing positively to the GDP. Mr. Speaker, how can we forget, not only the \$20.8 billion debt, but how about the \$1.5 billion debt left to contractors which we had to pay? Mr. Speaker, we had to manage all that and still make sure that the Couva Children's Hospital is built; the aquatic centre is built; that the roads are fixed; that the drains are fixed; that 74 schools have been built by the Minister of Education; that the Oncology Centre is now off the ground. Mr. Speaker, 75 unsettled wage negotiations; a rundown outdated police service; now we are opening a police station almost every month.

Mr. Speaker, how can we forget 9,000 former Caroni (1975) Limited workers waiting on land; 6,000 canefarmers waiting on compensation. How can we forget the \$7 billion budget deficit; the \$4 billion WASA debt; the one billion incomplete Tarouba tsunami shelter; the \$650 million incomplete legal affairs tower; the \$700 million incomplete Chancery Lane Complex; the \$500 million incomplete South Academy for the Performing Arts, all of which we have been able to deal with while we continue to transform this economy into a growth economy. [*Desk thumping*] And you are still talking about this side of the Government, the Parliament not being able to manage the economy of the country?

Look carefully at what you can see on the faces of everyone on this side, it is competence. And do you know why competence is here? Because we have a philosophy of collaborating with the population and responding to the needs of the population. Mr. Speaker, how can we forget the \$30 million mystery church; the incomplete Scarborough Hospital, the Bombardier jet joke?

3.05 p.m.

I am very sad the Member for Diego Martin North/East is not here—\$576 million, rapid rail feasibility study. Members of the national community—\$576 million for a rapid rail study, Mr. Speaker, and where is it? If you really wanted to do something in the East-West Corridor you could have elevated a light rail system over the bus route and you would have gone straight to Sangre Grande, and you would have probably spent a little more than this. But \$576 million?

Mr. Speaker, a two-bedroom house in this country with one toilet and bath, electrical and plumbing; under the URP programme costs \$125,000; \$1 million will build eight; \$576 million will build you 4,800 of those houses. That is what we lost in this country. Four thousand, eight hundred poor people in this country

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could have had two-bedroom houses as part of that starter house programme. Today they do not have it. I wonder if the media will write about that, that the rapid rail feasibility cost this country 4,800 two-bedroom houses for people, and you are asking where the money gone. You are asking where the money gone, Member for St. Joseph. Where the money gone, Member for St. Joseph?

We did not build a condo for the prophetess. We did not try to build a deadly cancerous smelter. [*Interruption*] That is \$50 million? That is a further 400 houses you know, two-bedroom houses—a further 400 two-bedroom houses. Mr. Speaker, have we forgotten the \$100 million that had to be spent for shoddy work done for the EMBD with water pipes and electricity, together. Mr. Speaker, you ever heard you are running electricity lines and water pipes next to each other in a development? Under the PNM that happened. Eight hundred houses were gone, so now up to 6,000 houses lost.

Mr. Speaker, we also inherited, I am advised, about \$21 billion in debt at that time. You know what we did? We settled 75 outstanding wage negotiations—congratulations to the hon. Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development. [*Desk thumping*] You know, you can say what you want about labour leaders but the Member of Parliament and the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprises Development, hon. Errol Mc Leod, still remains the best labour leader, and [*Desk thumping*] now one of the best labour Ministers this country will ever know.

Here is a gentleman who has been able to transcend being a labour leader to being a man who is standing for what is right in terms of the nation's interest, and on balance is settling things that everyone is happy about. Mr. Speaker, that is leadership. That is leadership and he ought to be congratulated for it.

Mr. Speaker, we completed the Tobago hospital, the agricultural sector is turning around; poverty has been reduced by about 4 per cent, the single electronic window has been created for the ease of doing business. We built the Couva interchange. Mr. Speaker, by the end of this year you will be surprised what you will see at the Couva interchange. You will see a First World interchange. When people think that Couva interchange is finished, I want to tell you, you have more coming, because the Minister of Works and Infrastructure and this Government have more coming for you to see there. [*Desk thumping*] We are partnering with NGC to do something so fantastic it is impossible to believe.

Mr. Speaker, we replaced the Navet South Trunk Main which improved water supply to over 250,000 households. Mr. Speaker, Sen. The Hon. Emmanuel

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George, who was the Minister then, will tell you that in that project in 2005, under the PNM, they had estimated the project to cost just over \$300 million. When we did the project, using the internal resources of WASA, the very engineers and workmen of WASA, we did it for about \$165 million. Mr. Speaker, you tell me, how come in 2005 you are estimating something for \$305 million and we are coming here and doing it for just under half the cost? Six years after? And you are talking about corruption? You are talking about corruption? You are talking about corruption?

Mr. Speaker, when there was corruption and O'Halloran ran away from Trinidad and Tobago, it was the then Mr. Robinson who got \$7 million back into the country. This Government has nobody hiding in Costa Rica. Mr. Speaker, they failed. Anytime one of theirs was accused of corruption they let them flee the country and they never did anything about it. [*Desk thumping*] They never did anything. You should hold your heads in shame before this country to talk about corruption, when you did nothing when it was necessary to do something about corruption in the country.

Mr. Speaker, I can go on and on, you know, listing what we did. The thing is that the vision of this Government is "Prosperity for all", and that is what we have been working for, "Prosperity for all". "Prosperity for all" means that the role of the Government is to provide a facilitating environment for citizens to realize their dreams and maximize their potential. The Members of the Opposition feel, like the Member for Diego Martin North/East feels, that if he stands up here every Friday and propagandize and shout loud enough, and repeat loud enough and many times, that people will begin to believe his propaganda. Maybe he has a point, but I want to tell my hon. friend that the people of this country are far more intelligent than he thinks. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the vision of this Government is based around certain fundamentals, and on top of that, as number one, is the facilitation of knowledge improvement through education. We believe that an educated population is a competitive population, and we are living in a globally competitive world. Mr. Speaker, not us you know, they; every opportunity they have had, including the Member, the Leader of the Opposition, they have been denouncing the Debe campus of the University of the West Indies. Why are you building a campus in Debe? Well we also built a COSTAATT campus in Sangre Grande, where 800 students do not have to travel—a thousand now—to UWI, or travel to Port of Spain to be educated, but they could live home, save money and be educated, and have a future.

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To come to COSTAATT, they could get transferred from COSTAATT into a programme in UWI. Mr. Speaker, we brought about the El Dorado Nursing Academy—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Minister of Works and Infrastructure and Member of Parliament for Tabaquite, has expired.

Motion made: That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Before you continue, may I ask Members of this honourable House, you know sometime we need to engage in some light banter, but we cannot disrespect and disregard the rules of civility and our Standing Orders, in particular. So I appeal to all Members, when a Member is on his legs, show respect. You might disagree with what he is saying. If you have to speak, take notes. If you have spoken, remain silent or leave the Chamber, but do not interrupt the Member, continuously.

I am going to be invoking the Standing Order, and any Member who continues to interrupt a speaker on his legs, I am going to ask that Member to politely and humbly retire for three hours in the Members' Lounge. We cannot have this thing going on repeatedly, and I am fed up of Members getting up here and you have continuous interruption. It can take place for a little while, but you cannot continue throughout, and that is what Members have been doing.

Hon. Member, you may continue, please. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, facilitating knowledge, improvement though education—I made reference there to now 1,000 students, Sangre Grande branch of COSTAATT. Then the El Dorado Nursing Academy, the drilling school, the auto mechanic—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 36(1). Education is not included in any measure in this Bill.

Mr. Speaker: Overruled. Continue, please.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, we are debating the Finance Bill. The Finance Bill makes provision for the expansion of the economy and the growth in the economy. The growth in the economy—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, please. Member for Diego Martin North/East, if you continue to interrupt these proceedings, I am going to ask you to leave the

Chamber. This is my final warning to the Member for Diego Martin North/East, and any other Member who continues to flout the rules of this House, I am going to ask you to retire to the Members' Lounge. Do not disturb the Member who is speaking. Continue, hon. Member, please.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, you have to build an economy, by building an economy you gain taxes, you gain revenue, and I am showing where the revenue is going to be used in the enhancement of the lives of the people of this country.

Mr. Speaker, so when I say drilling school, for all these years we have an energy sector but we never had a drilling school. This Government has brought a drilling school. [*Desk thumping*] We have brought that in partnership with the energy sector. An auto mechanics school is being built right now in central Trinidad—the Debe campus of UWI. Mr. Speaker, this is the first Government that has laid as a goal—a goal you know—the achievement of universal early childhood education, and the Minister of Education, I am sure, is going to speak more about that.

You know, Mr. Speaker, when we were campaigning elections in 2010 there was propaganda that the GATE programme will be closed. The GATE programme has been expanded and, in addition to that, the number of scholarships given in the country has gone up, I believe, to 450 this year, if my memory serves me right.

Mr. Speaker, another plank of the vision of the Prime Minister and the Government is the alleviation of poverty levels in the country. To alleviate poverty you must have the resources to do that. What this Government has done over the last three and a half years, is put in place support mechanisms to help the poor to get out of their circumstances and not to fall through the cracks, and they are doing this through empowerment in communities.

Mr. Speaker, just this week in Couva South, I joined the hon. Member, Ms. Ramona Ramdial, in opening the Bank Village Empowerment Centre. [*Desk thumping*] That was a building built in 2000, and for 13 years it was left there. Mr. Speaker, I wish I had asked you permission to show the pictures of what that building was and, today, women and girls, and young men and women; their potential is being enhanced in that empowerment centre, and there are two more. Would you believe two more buildings like that I found, one in Dow Village and one in Whiteland in Williamsville, and those three buildings were locked up and dilapidated. Vagrants had taken over the one in Bank Village, and we did over those buildings, furnished them, and today they are empowerment centres.

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Mr. Speaker, you cannot do these things if you do not earn money, and what we are doing is creating a facilitating environment that will attract investment. Foreign direct investment increased by over 400 per cent since 2010, from \$3.5 billion to almost \$16.1 billion. [*Desk thumping*] We cannot do that if we do not make the changes that we are making in the Finance Act. So do not think I am not talking about the Finance Act here at all. I am talking about the importance of these changes we are making to the legislation as they will enhance and impact upon the lives of people.

Mr. Speaker, if we did not have this revenue stream we could not do what we are doing through the Self-Help Commission, which is making sure that people can get \$10,000 to \$15,000 to repair their roofs or build over their floors, and improve their housing conditions, or build over a toilet and move from an outhouse to a flush toilet in their homes—improving the quality of life.

3.20 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, this is how we can go with the Land for the Landless programme; this is how we can have the Workforce Assessment Centres. The Workforce Assessment Centres—a person—you know how we have artisans in this country and what it gives them to do, is an opportunity to go into one of the centres and say, listen, I want to be certified as a mason or a carpenter or what have you. That never existed before, Mr. Speaker. Now they have a certificate, now they have status, now they have worth, because this is what this Government is about. This is not about decrying people; this Government is about building people. You see, when we said in 2010 we will all rise, people did not understand what we were saying.

Hon. Member: Who is “we”?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: We meant “we” will all rise; all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, you know when people make comments like, “who is we?” it shows you how prejudiced they are, how separatist they are in terms of their vision for this country that is you and I. We speak of “we Trinidad and Tobago,” we do not speak of you and I. We do not speak of division. [*Desk thumping*] We talk of national unity in Trinidad and Tobago. This is why today the most diversified political party in Trinidad and Tobago is the People’s Partnership. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, third plan of the vision of this Government is affordable housing. Where joint incomes are now \$8,000, those persons can get a 2 per cent loan, to buy or build a house—2 per cent, over 30 years. So let us assume they borrow \$150,000 over 30 years—\$150,000 by 2 per cent a year, that is \$3,000, by 30 years, let us say \$90,000. We are not using a declining balance here, Mr. Howai, we are just going to use that; that is \$240,000, over 30 years, it is \$8,000 a year. Divide \$8,000 a year by 12, you get about \$775 about there, a month, that you are paying back on this loan at 2 per cent. Which Government did that for the people? This Government. So those who want to buy a home, young people—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Seemungal: That is for everybody.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Everybody, not “we” you know, everybody. Better health care. Mr. Speaker, what happens in this country is when there is a problem in the health sector, the bad news get out in the newspaper. But how about the good news, how about the good news. How about the hundreds of cases of good news. How about the hundreds and thousands of people who are being restored to life every day in the hospitals in Trinidad and Tobago. Do we not have to get that news out also, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker, good work is going on in our public hospitals and it is not very often heralded. But since we have come into office, let us face it, the Oncology Centre which they could not get a piece of steel outside the ground, on which they left steel to rot in Mount Hope, is now rising out of the ground looking towards the heavens.

The children’s hospital—“man you are driving up the highway”—and you see the high cranes in the air and you realize children who we call our future will have a First World class hospital.

Hon. Members: Yeah.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: You go to San Fernando and you have the teaching hospital. Mr. Speaker, we seem to have short memories. We have a dedicated eye surgery unit that was opened in the San Fernando General Hospital, you know. We also have that. I can go on you know, I am just listing a few, right, I can go on and on and list the many things that have happened in health.

Mr. Speaker, all of this will be enhanced and we will be able to do more so that when the Minister gives these incentives in the petroleum sector, and we get new investments in the petroleum sector, and we get new taxes from these

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investments, and when we amend the Bills and we get more from the gambling, taxes and so on, it is going to help develop a better quality of life in the country.

So, all of this is part of the vision of this Government and it is being realized. You know what happens, the anger I am hearing coming from the other side, the anger I am hearing coming, you know why it is coming, it is because they are disappointed. They thought that this Government would not achieve these things. They are worried that the people are beginning to see these achievements; they are beginning to feel these achievements; they are beginning to taste these achievements and they are worried. They are worried because 2015 is around the corner, and they also know that these projects are going to be completed.

So, at the moment in this country, if I may just go back to my own Ministry for a moment, we talked about what we inherited, and we talked about where the money from what we are going to earn is going to go. In his own constituency, the constituency of St. Joseph, the Member of Parliament is very happy to know that the St. Joseph river bridge is being fixed. Just to let you know, the \$15,424,000 is being spent on that bridge and the contract—construction contracts have been awarded not only there, but Calcutta Road No. 2, Talparo Main Road. I believe in Talparo Main Road, if I am well advised, for 70 years that bridge—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Seemungal: That is a wooden bridge.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: A wooden bridge, 70 years. Seventy years people have a wooden bridge, 50 of which you were in office. But the people of Talparo “eh” matter. That is why in 2010, La Horquetta voted out the PNM and they are going to vote back in the People’s Partnership. *[Desk thumping]* Seventy years. Valencia Main Road, *[Crosstalk]* Eastern Main Road Guanapo, Toco Main Road, we have two bridges down there. Mayaro Guayaguayare Road, Sisters Road—“bridge we had to build them, you all eh building it”. Cedar Hill Road, what is called the Bull Bull Bridge, for years nothing was done. Pluck Road, San Francique. Mr. Speaker, all of those bridges are being built at this point in time and they will all be finished before May next year.

Dr. Gopeesingh: What about St. Helena Bridge?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: The St. Helena bridge—and then they say, “we take the money and we only do work south of the Caroni”. Well, let me just tell the Members here something. Coblantz Road, St. Ann’s, design work has been completed, and we have confirmation of funds—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Seemungal: “Whey dat is?”

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:—from the Ministry of Finance and the Economy for the main tendering.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: The bridge between Cascade and St. Ann's.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Coblentz Road, St. Ann's two more bridges on Toco Main Road, another one on Talparo Main Road; Four Roads, Tamana; Cumuto/Tumpuna Road, Camden Road, Papourie Road, Debe; Torrib, Tabaquite; Southern Main Road, Cedros; Naparima/Mayaro Road. And you know why I am calling all of this? I am calling all of this for a reason, because I want to debunk this argument that we are doing work only in one part of the country. [*Desk thumping*] Let us finish with that. That kind of propaganda is false, really, really, false.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Minister, would you take a question?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Sure.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Minister, amongst your bridges, is there the bridge linking Cascade to St. Ann's, that very important bridge, linking where the Prime Minister and the President live, to Cascade, from St. Ann's to Cascade.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: What is the name of the bridge?

Mrs. Mc Intosh: It is a link bridge between Cascade and St. Ann's a very narrow restricted area to turn and to—

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: I will try to find out for you because I do not have that on my list here. But what I do know is that, at the moment, several other bridges are being designed, and I will check that list definitely, check that list and see what is also being designed in that area.

So, Mr. Speaker, work is being done all across the country and not just in one part of the country. So when we earn money from all these taxes that we are talking about, this is how we distribute it. We distribute it across the country.

Mr. Speaker, police station in Arima, fire station coming up in Mayaro. Dr. Moonilal, the Minister of Housing and Urban Development, said it so proudly, every month we could open a police station now for the next eight months. [*Desk thumping*] Police station in Piarco, park up and ready to open. Brasso, in 1990-something, the Brasso Police Station burnt down, 13 years after or 14 years after, this Government is building a police station back in Brasso. Why was that neglected? Thirteen years you ignored the people of Brasso, Tabaquite. What did they do so wrong that you are punishing them? What did they do so wrong that

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you are punishing the people of these areas, because they did not vote for you? How come we are doing work even where we lost seats, how come? You know why, because we have an equal vision for all the peoples of Trinidad and Tobago.

We govern for all. Let me put it this way, we do not govern for one, we do not govern for any one sector, we govern for all and that is important, because we have a Prime Minister who does not see the colour of your skin, she does not see the tilt of your nose, she does not see the shade of your eyes, but when she looks she sees citizens, all of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] That is what is important.

We laid in this Parliament our manifesto as a policy document; we laid it in this Parliament, and very soon you will see that we will account for all the things that we have achieved in that, and we achieved them because we had the right policies that led to the right programmes and led to the right results. Slowly but surely, we are reconstructing Trinidad and Tobago, and we are doing it for all.

Mr. Speaker, these are some of the things I wanted to share with this honourable Parliament this afternoon and at the same time, to indicate that there has been no Government that has performed as well and as competently and effectively as the People's Partnership Government [*Desk thumping*] under the principle-centered leadership of Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar.

I thank you.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Joseph.

Mr. Terrence Deyalsingh (*St. Joseph*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, thank for allowing me the opportunity to engage the Parliament in a debate on the Finance Bill. The Member for Tabaquite, inadvertently or deliberately as we may say, widened the debate to such an extent. He spoke about the empowerment centre in Couva North and that is excellent. I also want to congratulate the private sector, in Brechin Castle, for following suit and not only developing an empowerment centre, but also building a disaster relief warehouse in Brechin Castle, Couva. I would just like to congratulate all those, and if you would allow me to just read:

SIS stands up in time of need

The country has witnessed an unbelievable beating by the elements that has resulted in a number of citizens being affected by flooding. SIS Limited, on learning the plight of the people, decided to come forward and offer, built a disaster relief warehouse which was handed over by the chairman of SIS, Mr. Roop Chan Chadeesingh.

Hon. Member: Who is that?

Mr. T. Deayalsingh: Should I read it over?

Hon. Member: Please, yes, yes.

Mr. T. Deayalsingh: I will just go over the last line.

SIS Limited, on learning the plight of the people, decided to come forward and offer, built a disaster relief warehouse which was handed over by the chairman—that is the chairman of SIS—one Mr. Roop Chan Chadeesingh.

I would like to congratulate the chairman of SIS, Mr. Roop Chan Chadeesingh for building this disaster relief warehouse. And he is also now—the hon. Minister spoke about NGC and NGC will be building something in the Couva interchange. The chairman of NGC is also Mr. Roop Chan Chadeesingh. I would like to congratulate him, Mr. Roop Chan Chadeesingh, the then chairman of SIS, and this is in the SIS literature, “Infovision, A Publication of Super Industrial Services Limited, October 2010”. I do not think he ever took out a disclaimer back then that he was or was not the chairman of SIS, but he is to be congratulated and now that he is the chairman of NGC, you know, he is going to be using NGC’s money to build interchanges. I really want to congratulate Mr. Roop Chan Chadeesingh, Chairman of SIS and chairman of NGC.

3.35 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Tabaquite had a big song and dance about where is the hon. Leader of the Opposition. But where is the Member for Siparia, where these big decisions are being made? But I am sure that she will now appear in the Chamber. Right. Good. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, let me deal with something that the hon. Member for Tabaquite brought up, the qualifications of one Mr. Kevin Ramnarine. He opened the door for that. Mr. Speaker, the issue of qualifications, as you know, has become a cause célèbre in Trinidad and Tobago since the advent, unfortunate advent, of this Government. To be called a professional in your sphere of knowledge you have to have a first degree in that field. Mr. Imbert has a masters in law, but he cannot practise law. He cannot be registered as a lawyer because he does not have his first degree in the relevant discipline.

I will read from the list of engineers registered with the Board of Engineering of Trinidad and Tobago. It goes from A—Aanensen Kirk, right down to R—Ramnarine Neila, Ramnarine Ravi. The reason why, he does not have a first

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degree in his field of study. That is all that we are saying. Leave it at that. Leave it at that. Therefore, he cannot call himself an engineer because he does not have a first degree in his discipline; he has a masters.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: In science.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: His first degree is in chemistry; chemistry. He is not an engineer no more than Mr. Imbert who has a masters in civil law, can call himself a lawyer. This thing about qualifications escapes this Government—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Mc Intosh: He is dishonest.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh:—from Resmi Ramnarine, Shafiq Kool, whatever—it just escapes them. Sandra Bermudez—it just escapes them.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Tabaquite was at pains to talk about what they inherited, and I do not know if they understand that what they inherited was partially or wholly due to the world financial crisis of 2008—2009. And the IMF and all the international rating bodies have said, when the PNM was in power that we survived it pretty well; Clico notwithstanding. But look at what is happening now. The hon. Member for Tabaquite will have you believe that it is due to Government's action that the economy is so well.

Mr. Speaker, I read from the Henry Hub Natural Gas Spot Price chart. Our budgets for the past couple of years have been predicated on a natural gas price of 2.75; 2.75. Do you know what the average price of gas has been? And they have nothing to do with that. No Government in Trinidad and Tobago controls the price of gas. We are price takers, not price makers.

December 13—just below \$4. January 14—went up to above \$4. February of this year it peaked at \$8. It peaked again at \$8 in February. Between February and March, it went down to about \$6, way above \$2.75. That is where the money comes from. Not because of anything you did; because of the international price for gas.

Miss Mc Donald: Exactly.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: It has nothing to do with you; absolutely nothing. And today now it is back down to about \$4.33. That is what the price of gas is today; absolutely nothing to do with you.

So the fact that you have high income is because of international uncertainty which leads to higher gas prices. And when you look at the *Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago Economic Bulletin*, January 2014, Volume XVI, No. 1, it

talks about the international global rate of recovery. And they are saying that the rate of recovery is slower than anticipated, and we in Trinidad and Tobago, we are a big player of the international scene. And they also go on to say, Mr. Speaker, that the Caribbean will therefore have a slower rate of growth and recovery than anticipated.

This brings me to the issue of consumer confidence that the Member for Tabaquite spoke about. There are different types of confidence that we need to speak about; business confidence, local business confidence, local consumer confidence and international business confidence in Trinidad and Tobago. We have, and continue to have, an abnormally and unhealthy high rate of excess liquidity in the banks.

Miss Mc Donald: That is right.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: It is about \$7.1 billion now.

Miss Mc Donald: Lack of confidence.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: And the report says that there is lukewarm credit demand for business. The fact that we are buying luxury cars and spending on consumerism is not necessarily a good thing. It means that the money being borrowed is not being put to productive use. We are buying Mercedes because the report speaks about a huge chunk of that demand being taken up by luxury cars; luxury cars. So it begs the question, what is the Government's monetary policy to sop-up this excess liquidity? It has been there for four years now; it has been there for four years now.

The hon. Minister when he piloted, and everyone else who spoke after, who was the Member for Tabaquite, spoke about unemployment rates; unemployment rates. Mr. Speaker, one has to be careful when one speaks about unemployment rates. And I will draw parallel between the US unemployment rate and the Trinidad and Tobago unemployment rate.

The US unemployment rate has been characterised by two things. Whenever President Obama and anyone else speaks about the US unemployment rate dropping, which is a good thing, but when one analyzes the US unemployment rate, two startling and disturbing facts come across.

Disturbing fact number one: a great part of the sopping-up of US unemployment has to do with people being engaged in menial jobs, minimum wage jobs—which is not good. But the second most disturbing trend which came out just today is that the average age of the person working menial, minimum

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wage jobs has now increased to 35 years; that is disturbing. It means that people who are married, who have children, who have mortgages, that more and more of them are now working in McDonalds and elsewhere. And I will come back to discuss our own unemployment rates just now, because that is a very important issue. Because you cannot separate Trinidad and Tobago from what is going on abroad.

Earlier we had the good folks from the Chinese Embassy. You would have heard recently that China, for the second time since 2008, has to implement a huge stimulus package so that they can maintain their targeted growth of 7.7 per cent. They are doing that. But what is interesting, their first stimulus package of a few years ago was financed by bank lending. Now they have gone and issued bonds, and that is a huge difference in philosophy. So it means to say that we are not. China is one of our major trading partners. We import a lot from them, and we have benefited from the one China policy which the PNM instituted since 1981—*[Interruption]*

Miss Mc Donald: That is right.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh:—when we did not go with Taiwan, as opposed to some of our Caricom neighbours.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Tabaquite spoke about all this confidence, but what about Trinidad and Tobago's standing in the Corruption Perception Index? And what is that an index of? It is an index about the corruption in public sector procurement.

Our country—and let us be honest—we never performed in a stellar manner on that index, but in 2010 our standing was 73, and they came to power, on a wave of corruption talk about the PNM. As soon as they took power, one would have expected that we would have gone up in the rankings. Do you know what we are today, Mr. Speaker? They inherited a position of 73. In 2012, after two years of governance—of their governance, PP style—it dropped to 80; we lost seven spots. But there is more bad news, Mr. Speaker. The bad news does not end in 2012. Because of their corrupt procurement practices, we have now dropped to 83. So we have had two declines under their stewardship. And they have the unmitigated gall, the unmitigated gall, to talk about governance. And what are we judged on? The issuing of public contracts. Just recently it came to light; just recently it came to light.

NP is once again embroiled, as they were embroiled in 2010 with Ralph Gopaul, for which a Minister was fired because she wanted to have an

independent investigation. The independent investigation was frustrated. She was moved. She was fired. And today we hear about Sasha Singh having a contract to clean glass in NP.

Hon. Member: What?

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Who is Sasha Singh? What glass is she accustomed cleaning? That is what we have today in NP, again. NP has become one of the most corrupt state enterprises in Trinidad and Tobago under this Government, and our perception on the corruption index has been declining since 2010. We have dropped twice: explain that to me. Explain the good governance.

Just now, Mr. Speaker, this Government will run out of Ministers. We are going to run out of Ministers. You have one Minister—if you want to talk about governance—who is now Trade, Industry and Investment. What he is? Communications. He is also the de facto behind the scenes, Minister of Agriculture, and I say that with no apologies. Sen. Vasant Bharath has to be hand-holding the Ministry of Agriculture where he once worked. He is in charge of four Ministries; four. He is in the Ministry of Communications, the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Investment. He is in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, [*Crosstalk*] and he is also involved there. And that is what you call policy drift.

You have policy drift when you change Ministers so often; four Ministers of National Security, three Ministers of Tourism. And just today in the newspaper one of the tourism stakeholders is actually rejoicing that a particular Minister is no longer there. Imagine that.

Hon. Member: Wow!

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: A tourism stakeholder today, in the newspapers, not me, is rejoicing over the fact that somebody is no longer in the Ministry of Tourism because nothing—according to them—happened: ministerial policy drift under this Government; drift.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, when he was piloting, spoke about energy at great lengths, and also did the Member for Tabaquite. What they did not tell us was all the failed projects under this Government; the SABIC deal, the Sinopec deal, the Ghanaian project.

But I want to ask a question. The hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs when he gave an address in the Regency Room at the Hyatt at 10.00 a.m. on Monday, April 08, 2013, spoke about the construction of the Mitsubishi/Neal &

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Massy wood energy project—supposed to be this wonderful project and we have no problems with it. It is a good project. But at the launch of that project, he spoke about construction to begin in the second quarter of 2014, if all goes well. We are now at the end of the first quarter of 2014. Can the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy, when he is closing, please tell us, is this project on stream for the beginning of construction in the second quarter of 2014? Because at that same meeting, the second Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs spoke about construction to begin second quarter 2014 with production by 2016. We eagerly await it. What is the status of the Neal & Massy/Mitsubishi joint venture? Tell us a little about it, because it has gone off the front burner and we need to know. We need to know.

Mr. Speaker, on energy, my colleague from Diego Martin North/East just mentioned the Loran-Manatee affair. I want to go into a little detail on that, because we had the Minister spoke about energy, the Member for Tabaquite spoke about energy, and the whole thing has been blown open. We have 30 per cent of that cross border field, and this Government negotiated one of worst MoUs to see the light of day. It was an MoU which gave both parties the power of veto over the other. So in other words, we do not like what the Venezuelans are doing or want to do with their 70 per cent, we could veto it. Venezuela does not like what we are going to do with our 30 per cent, they can veto it. But as I have said over and over, Venezuela is fifth on the world gas reserves; we are 30-something. Who needs the gas more? If Venezuela has no access to their 70 per cent, it is no big deal to them. But 30 per cent of Loran-Manatee is a huge deal to us.

How do we get access to our 30 per cent of Loran-Manatee, when this Government has negotiated the worst MOU in history? How do we do that?

3.50 p.m.

Mr. Imbert: Change the Government.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: But they talk about energy policy. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, at that same function when Minister Ramnarine spoke about the launch of the Mitsubishi/Neal & Massy deal, he spoke about natural gas policy. I would just read you five lines from what he said would govern, would dictate and would inform the Government's natural gas policy:

- “Reform of the fiscal regime for upstream natural gas development;
- Energy efficiency...”

And we have heard nothing—nothing about the Government’s plan to introduce solar heating and other forms of renewable energy.

- “Diversification by going further downstream;
- Increased ownership of assets through Government equity or public listings...”

And this has to do with the whole IPO fiasco, where institutions of independence are now being called into question; but my colleague, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, dealt with that sufficiently. Mr. Speaker, this is where the whole corruption of NGC’s morality and the corruption of the National Gas Company’s philosophy, vision and mission come into play.

He talked about—and this is Minister Ramnarine speaking:

“Redefinition of the roles of NGC and the National Energy Corporation.”

NGC is now building interchanges in Couva, and NGC is now building waste water plants. Is that the role of NGC? Is that the proper use of the rents and the moneys and the billions of dollars situated and coffered in NGC?

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Taxpayers’ money.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: That is the same NGC where the Chairman was Roop Chan Chadeesingh at SIS and the same NGC where the Chairman is Roop Chan Chadeesingh. [*Interruption*] It is here in SIS’s newsletter.

Mr. Imbert: Read it out!

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: I am not making this up. The Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs in his natural gas policy, point No. 5, let me repeat it:

“Redefinition of the roles of NGC and the National Energy Corporation.”

Is it that Minister Ramnarine perceived that NGC should now enter into the construction business, as part of that redefinition? Because the Member for Tabaquite boasted that NGC is going to be involved in the interchange in Couva. Is that the role of NGC? Then the Chairman of SIS, Roop Chan Chadeesingh, in 2010, is now also the Chairman of NGC.

Mr. Imbert: Is that an SIS newsletter you have there?

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: This is the SIS newsletter of October 2010, about a disaster relief warehouse handed over by the Chairman of SIS, Mr. Roop Chan Chadeesingh. What is going on here? What is going on here?

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This seed for the use of NGC was planted by Minister Ramnarine when he gave his speech for the Neal & Massy/Mitsubishi deal. That was planted then, because we were told by Minister Ramnarine that part of the strategy was to redefine the role of NGC. So the fowls are coming home to roost; the chickens are coming home to roost, and we see where Mr. Roop Chan Chadeesingh—who is my friend of forty-something years. I know him well.

Dr. Moonilal: That is your partner?

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: “Dat is meh partner. Dat is meh boy.” I know him well. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: And you are talking so much about him?

Dr. Moonilal: With friends like that—[*Laughter*]

Mr. Imbert: I am ashamed.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: I know him well. No, no, no. [*Laughter*] “I know de man well. I know him since I was a teenager.” [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Roberts: “So he owe Jesus 25 cents too?”

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Mr. Speaker, let us leave Mr. Roop Chan Chadeesingh, his chairmanship of SIS, his chairmanship of NGC alone.

The Member for Tabaquite spoke at length about Tarouba, SAPA, whatever. I want to ask the Member for Tabaquite, through you, Mr. Speaker, because I always speak to you: What has become of the pork barrel project of the tunnel from Tunapuna to Maracas spoken about in the first budget of this Government? Are we any closer to having that tunnel? Where is the tunnel? Where is the tunnel? Member for Arima, do you want to enter the debate?

Dr. Khan: It is in the PNM manifesto. Check the PNM manifesto.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Where is the growth pole? What about the funding for the Point Fortin Highway, \$7 billion out of our savings? What about that?

Mr. Speaker, I promised earlier, after I spoke about the US unemployment figures and two alarming facts about it, one, a lot of that unemployment is being sopped up by minimum wage jobs and, two, the age cohort of people in minimum wage jobs is going up and is now 35 years of age. That is disturbing.

This Government boasts about the fact that we now have a 3.5 per cent unemployment rate—3.6 or 3.7. Question: When one goes to the document, *Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, Summary of Economic Indicators*,

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December 2013—this is not an old publication; this is December 2013, this is just three months old—and you turn to page 13 of that document under appendix “Major Economic Indicators”. Do you know what we find for unemployment rate? Do you know what you find, Mr. Speaker? You find, 2008, 4.6 per cent; 2009, 5.3 per cent. So in 2008, who was in power? The PNM. Mr. Speaker, 2009, 5.3; and 5 per cent is normally the benchmark to consider it to be full employment. Mr. Speaker, 2010, 0.9; 2011, 4.9; 2012, 5.0, and as the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara just said, “Is de same people doing it.”

Do you know what the Central Bank report has for the figure for 2013? “NA”—not available. The Central Bank—the Central Bank has figures for unemployment for 2008—2012, but for 2013, the Central Bank is saying, “not available”. Could I ask Members opposite—and I will give way—from whence and from whom is this 3.7 coming? I will give way to anybody. Tell me what is the source of your 3.7 per cent.

Mr. Roberts: Kappa Drugs!

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Kappa Drugs? So the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara says the 3.7 comes from Kappa Drugs. That is the flippancy with which he deals with this.

Mr. Roberts: “Dat is where you going back after election.”

Dr. Moonilal: What is Kappa Drugs?

Mr. Roberts: Because you are not making sense.

Mr. Speaker: Members, allow the Member to speak in silence, please.

Mr. Roberts: Sorry, Sir.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: So can any Member opposite tell me: Where do you get your figure of 3.7 per cent? Because the Central Bank does not have it—does not have it, Member for Oropouche East. It does not have it.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Central Statistical Office.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Central Statistical Office, good. Let us go to the Central Statistical Office.

Dr. Moonilal: What about Balisier House?

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: The Central Statistical Office, as we know, is not in good shape. I would be the first to admit that the Central Statistical Office is in need of repair, and that is why we brought in Statistics Sweden back in 2007/2008 to fix

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it. But the hon. Member for Caroni East said to go to the CSO. Here I have the CSO website. [*Mr. Deyalsingh lifts iPad*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: What year do you have there?

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: What year I have here? Member for Caroni East, let us see. When you go under labour force statistics and you press: “Labour Force Employment Status by Age and Sex”—and you go for the report, do you know what you get? The last report is the third quarter of 2012.

Mr. Imbert: So where the 3.6 come from?

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: I do not know, but that is just one parameter. Mr. Speaker, if you go to “Employment Status by Industrial Group Female—this is the CSO website, and it is a statistical document:

Table V: Labour Force by Employment Status Educational Attainment and Sex, Third quarter 2012.

We are now at the end of the first quarter of 2014. Where does the hon. Minister get his unemployment data from?

Mrs. Mc Intosh: From a hat.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: If one goes back, “Employment Status by Educational Attainment and Sex”—and you go to the statistical document, Mr. Speaker, there is no prize. I am giving away no prize for telling you how old this data is—third quarter 2012, and Mr. Speaker, that is the pattern of the CSO.

So when the Member for Diego Martin North/East speaks about the Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development fudging the figures, that is it: they do not exist. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: That a Member of the House is fudging the figures—Mr. Speaker, please, 36(5).

Mr. Imbert: Member of which House?

Mr. Speaker: It does not matter which House, once it is a Member of Parliament. Member, you would know that we cannot impute or make personal charges against a Member of Parliament.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: I thank you. But could the Member for Oropouche East, who is the Leader of Government Business, tell me where do you get the 3.7 per cent?

Dr. Moonilal: I am speaking later in the debate, I will deal with it.

Dr. Gopeesingh: It is here. [*Dr. Gopeesingh lifts document*]

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Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Mr. Speaker, 3.7 per cent. Where does it come from? All the figures are old. So what, only the Government has access to these figures? It is not on the CSO website; the Central Bank does not have it.

4.05 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy, when he was piloting, took—*[Interruption]*

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, for the record and for the benefit of the Member for St. Joseph, and for the House, in an *Express* article, March 21, 2014, titled, “Lowest recorded unemployment rate”, it states and I quote:

“The unemployment rate in Trinidad and Tobago fell from 4.7 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2012 to 3.7 per cent in the first quarter of 2013.”

Dr. Gopeesingh: Repeat it again?

Dr. Moonilal: “The unemployment rate in Trinidad and Tobago fell from 4.7 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2012 to 3.7 per cent in the first quarter of 2013.

This is the lowest unemployment rate ever recorded in Trinidad and Tobago, the Central Statistical Office (CSO) said yesterday as it released the Labour Force bulletin for the first quarter of 2013.”

What the Member is suggesting is that the labour force bulletin is not yet on the website, but it is the labour force bulletin we will seek at this hour to summon the CSO to get a copy of this labour force bulletin first quarter of 2013. The information contained in this bulletin is based on data collected in the continuous sample survey of population conducted between January and March 2013, says the CSO. Now this is the same—*[Interruption]*

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: No, no; I just gave way—you are giving a speech!

Dr. Moonilal: But, I am helping you. You asked me, I am helping. Mr. Speaker, the continuous sample survey of the population is the same—*[Crosstalk]*

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: No! No! No!

Dr. Moonilal:—sample survey that has been done for several years.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: I am not giving way.

Mr. Speaker: That is the problem when you give way.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Yes, but decency.

Mr. Speaker: “Yeah, yeah”, but the Member is on his legs because you have given way. So, continue Member.

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Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, I understand the Member's position and I would not read the next four paragraphs here.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: "Nah, nah, nah."

Dr. Moonilal: Suffice it to say that later in the proceedings I intend to intervene and I will give you the rest of the information. But it is the labour force bulletin, based on continuous sample survey of population, and we will get some more information for you as the evening progresses.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: So, in March 2014, we are quoting a figure from a year ago. How does that make it any better?

Dr. Moonilal: Would I explain?

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: No, no, no. So, you are privy to information which the rest of the public is not privy to, and that is good governance. [*Interruption*] Where is the data for the end of 2013? Where is it? [*Crosstalk*] So you are quoting a figure in 2014 which is a year old and we are expected to believe that. Right, we are expected to believe that! [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy, spoke at length about the Electronic Transactions Bill, he spoke about the wonderful things happening in the Electronic Transactions Bill. There is something called the amendment to the Exchequer and Audit Act. An Act to amend the Exchequer and Audit Act, Chap. 69:01, to provide for payments into and issues out of the exchequer account and for payments of other public moneys howsoever held by means of electronic funds transfer and for related matters. Mr. Speaker, you cannot separate this amendment to the Exchequer and Audit Act from the Electronic Transactions Bill.

The amendment was first moved by the Member for Tunapuna. Bill No. 2011, Mr. Dookeran piloted the Bill and it lapsed on June 17, 2011. It lapsed! It was reintroduced to the Senate by the hon. super Minister Vasant Bharath on February 19, 2013. This is a year ago. At that time I occupied a different position and we on the Opposition Bench pointed out to the hon. Minister at that time, that the Bill he was intending to introduce in the Senate was possibly a money Bill. That was the second time this Government attempted to amend the Exchequer and Audit Act.

The first time, piloted by the Member for Tunapuna, the Bill lapsed on June 17, 2011. This is an important piece of legislation to make it possible for electronic transfer of funds. Same thing the Minister of Finance and the Economy was speaking about, reintroduced in the Senate by Sen. The Hon. Vasant Bharath. It was pointed out by the Opposition then that it was possibly a money Bill.

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Do you know what the fate of that Bill is, Mr. Speaker? Lapsed on July 13, 2013, never to see the light of day again. Could anyone on that side tell us what is the fate of that Bill? Do you plan to bring it back? Do you plan to lay it in the proper House which is the House of Representatives? Because the Senate cannot, under the Constitution and the Standing Orders, start a debate on any money Bill. The Senate is not so empowered; they are not the elected members. Only the elected members, the elected House, which is this House, which is the superior House to the Senate can start a debate on any money Bill.

So, it crashed and burned on two occasions—both, two occasions. But again, we hear about electronic transfers, and nobody speaks about this. Nobody speaks about this. None! None! So that is a—*[Interruption]*

Dr. Gopeesingh: You want to give way?

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Oh Lord! *[Crosstalk]* No, no; go ahead, go ahead.

Mr. Imbert: “Whey yuh doing?”

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: I am an honourable person and I expect people to behave honourably, but that is all right.

Mr. Imbert: He would talk for an hour. *[Interruption]*

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: So, you were going to tell us why the Bill lapsed? *[Interruption]* No, I am just saying, we pointed out it may have been a money Bill, but the question is, why has it not come back in either the Senate or the Lower House? So make sure that is answered. If your answer is it is not a money Bill, we accept that. But, tell us why from 2011 to 2013 it has not been on the front burner of your non-existent legislative agenda. Tell us, and tell us when you intend to bring it back.

Mr. Speaker, in the few minutes I have left, I intend to speak in detail about the part of the Bill that deals with the municipal police. This has to do with the granting of the \$1,000 allowance to municipal police under the Municipal Corporations Act, Chap. 25:04. And just like the Member for Diego Martin North/East had to correct some untruths, it was the Opposition in both Houses of Parliament that advocated for SRPs to get the \$1,000 allowance. It was not an oversight, as the Minister of Finance and the Economy said, because in those days there was the “blue flu”. The police were going to march, the police were going to strike and in an effort to curry favour with the police they gave them \$1,000 to prevent anarchy and mayhem within the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

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Remember the blue flu? The police were going to catch “blue flu” which would have led to mayhem, breakdown of law and order, and the Government’s response was to give them \$1,000. No problem, if that is your response, that is fine.

It was never the intention of the Government to extend it to SRPs. It was the Opposition in both Houses, whenever an opportunity came up, said well, what about the SRPs? What about them, they are people too? They protect us in Parliament. They would have been here during 1990. And this issue of SRPs and municipal policing needs some clarification, because it has to do with crime, crime control, law and order.

Mr. Speaker, it is no secret that whenever this Government is faced with a spike in crime, it resorts to unintelligent measures. Seven murders in Arima in 24 hours, the Leader of the Opposition responsibly wrote to the Prime Minister saying, “let us get together”. The Prime Minister rejected that, they had the famous state of emergency.

You had a recent spate in murders in August, September last year; the Leader of the Opposition sent a delegation of which I was a part, the Member for Diego Martin North/East was a part and ably led by the Member for Port of Spain South, including then Sen. Fitzgerald Hinds, led by, as I said, the hon. Marlene McDonald, myself and the Member for Diego Martin North/East.

This whole issue of policing, we told the Government—and the Member for Diego Martin West—is it?—Dr. Rowley, in his very first appearance in this Parliament as Leader of the Opposition, told the Government, told the Prime Minister, we have a chance to do things differently. We agreed with your first budget, never before in the history of the Commonwealth, I think. We sent a delegation to those talks with a 10-point plan. We told the Prime Minister, we told the hon. Attorney General, then Minister of National Security—I cannot remember, you all have changed national security Ministers so often. Anyhow, the then Minister of National Security, planned item No. 1, we are willing to come to the Parliament and have a—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for St. Joseph has expired.

Motion made: That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Mr. N. Hypolite*]

Question put and agreed to.

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Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, thank you hon. Members on all three sides.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Three sides?

Mr. Warner: You mean my side.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: The Member for Chaguanas West is a side. You have the Opposition, you have the Government and you have the hon. Member for Chaguanas West, you have three sides.

Mr. Warner: I thank you, Sir.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: You are most welcome. [*Laughter*] And we told the Government, Mr. Speaker, this convoluted way of appointing a Commissioner of Police, which was a UNC creation back in the 1990s, because they said back then they did not want to have political control over the appointment of a Commissioner of Police, and they said then and many Members here were also there, that the only way we will support the PNM's anti-crime measures is if you agree to that. PNM was held to ransom, we agreed.

We have now agreed to help the Government to say, "let us come to the Parliament, we could have a guillotine debate, one speaker each, five minutes each, 10 minutes, wrap up this whole thing and done". [*Interruption*] So that we could appoint a Commissioner of Police quickly, without having to go through a university, an international search and all that. The Government is not interested in that. No interest. None! Absolutely none! We said, "let us have an independent manpower audit of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service", and it is not only to count men, but to see if we have the right people doing the right things, with the right qualifications, with the right training and recruited correctly. That is what we suggested. Nothing!

On the issue of municipal police, we said, the legislation already exists under the local government legislation and the Trinidad and Tobago Police Act, for the corporations to immediately hire trained municipal police and put boots on the ground. Let each corporation hire 150—300 persons, so that you can have a linkage between municipal police and central police.

Every single crime-fighting measure we put on the table was rejected, and I am particularly annoyed, and peeved, and saddened that the main one which was the appointment of a Commissioner of Police, where we agreed to have a guillotine debate, 10 minutes, 5 minutes each, was not even considered. And, here today we are hearing, it is Government stated policy now to have an acting Commissioner of Police so you can have him at your beck and call, that he is under pressure, that he would never be made permanent.

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4.20 p.m.

But the issue of municipal policing, Mr. Speaker, in the constituency of St. Joseph, we are governed, or looked after, by two corporations: the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation and the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation. Approximately about 80 per cent of the constituency really falls under the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation. Tunapuna/Piarco really sees about Champs Fleurs, Valsayn and Bamboo, but the rest of the constituency, about 80 per cent, is looked after by the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation. But any comments I make about the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation municipal police also apply to the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation police, and I have the permission of Inspector Guzman to use his name.

The area covered by the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation municipal police—and I was shocked when I sat with Inspector Guzman and asked him: “What is your area?” You know, when you are in St. Joseph and you hear San Juan/Laventille, you think about San Juan and Laventille. His area of influence—his area to patrol—stretches from La Fillette to the Munroe Road Flyover, to Beetham, to St. Clair. That is it. It is over 200 square kilometres—huge area.

What he has responsibility for is general policing. But hear his manpower complement—and this will shock you, Mr. Speaker, as it did me: one inspector, one sergeant and 20 SRPs. That is it. But the 20 SRPs can be removed at any time with a simple phone call from the Commissioner of Police—one inspector, one sergeant and 20 SRPs. He is telling me his required complement is about 60, starting with an assistant superintendent.

But it gets worse. You know what his vehicle complement is, to cover La Fillette in the north coast, Munroe Road, St. Clair, Beetham, Mount D’Or, Mount Lambert, Aranguez, Barataria/San Juan? Do you know what his complement of vehicles is? Three vehicles, one vehicle being nine years old which is now down for repairs. So he is down to two vehicles. But here is where things get even—could I say “worser”?

Hon. Member: “Worserer.”

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: “Worserer.” “Worser” or “worserer”. It gets worse. It gets “more worse”. Municipal police in Trinidad and Tobago, as I understand it—and I am subject to correction—over the years have no wireless communications with central police. Could you imagine that? Municipal police, who should be

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your first line of defence, if they spot something, or know something, cannot instantly communicate through secure police band wireless with the Commissioner of Police.

Inspector Guzman related a story for me about 1990, during the attempted coup. For those of us who knew about the coup, well fine, but if you did not know about the coup, you want to know what all the bacchanal is about. He was charged with the responsibility of accompanying somebody into Port of Spain, but because he had no wireless he did not know there was an attempted coup taking place, and drove down Maraval Road by TTT, in the midst of a hail of gunfire and was shot in his leg—1990.

Through successive Commissioners of Police and successive administrations, the case of wireless communications between municipal police and central police has not been adequately addressed. The hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy spoke about the fact that SRPs do the same work as members of the police force. Let me inform the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy that that very issue: do SRPs perform the same functions and duties as a regular police, is a matter before the courts in a case called *Oswald, Alleyne and 152 others v The Attorney General*. And the issue of regulations, both before the High Court and the Court of Appeal, has suggested and begged that the issue of regulations to allow for wireless communications between municipal police and central police be addressed.

So I would just like to advise the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy that when he says the work of SRPs is the same as the work of regular police, it is a matter of court proceedings because both sides are producing evidence, one to show that it is the same and the other to show it is not the same. I say no more on that, Mr. Speaker, because that case is now before the Privy Council, as I understand it.

So my concern is, we have a municipal police force in San Juan/Laventille with two vehicles, 20 people, and let us just take policing around the Aranguez Savannah, which is in my constituency, and the Member for Barataria/San Juan will know about it well. The Aranguez Savannah, to people up in the east, is the equivalent to the Queen's Park Savannah. The Aranguez Savannah is not only used by people from Aranguez; it is used by the entire constituency of St. Joseph, from Champs Fleurs, Mount D'Or, Spring Valley, Maitigual, Mount Lambert and Aranguez. It is also heavily trafficked by people from Barataria/San Juan. It is a meeting place: sports, Phagwa, everything. But they can only, at best, at optimal capacity, patrol the savannah from 2.00 p.m. to 10.00 p.m. if they are lucky. What happens to all the joggers there on a morning?

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So I want to make a case today for the SRPs to be strengthened in numbers, to be given wireless communication. Let us bring the regulations. Bring it by negative resolution. The SRPs are also asking for increased fire power. Right now they only have pistols and shotguns. That is all they have, but in St. Joseph they arrest people on cocaine charges; they get people with their scales. Right? So we need to have that.

So I want to make a serious plug for the SRPs to follow the PNM's local government manifesto of having more SRPs patrolling the neighbourhoods, boots on the ground, first line of defence in crime, building relationships with the boys and the children to guide them, let that be seen so you could have respect for law and order which we all had here when we were young. We had it.

Mr. Speaker, in the couple of minutes remaining, I would like to talk about the type of respect we all had. When I was a young boy in Curepe, I was riding my bicycle along the pavement. In "dem" days you had to get licence for your bike, eh. You remember the little metal tags that you had to screw up on your bike—riding a bicycle around the Curepe pavement to turn down to go to church on Linden Street? "Well, who tell me do dat." I reached halfway down Linden Street, which is off the main road, a policeman on a motorbike follow me down and braced me for riding on the pavement. I never do that again.

But that type of policing is gone, where you build respect for community policing, where children grow up seeing figures of authority in their neighbourhood, and we need to go back to those days in some form or fashion. That is why I feel our local government reform, what it had to do with the hiring of SRPs was advanced. It was a good plan and it needs to be implemented, so the SRPs could be that link between the community and central police. I would urge all of us here to look at the regulations, bring the regulations that both the High Court and Court of Appeal have recommended.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would really, as I wind to a close—really compliment—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Roberts: Wind to a close? [*Laughter*]

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: I would really like to compliment, as I started, the chairman of SIS, Mr. Roop Chan Chadeesingh and the chairman of NGC for the wonderful work that they are doing.

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

Mr. Speaker: I think it is a good time for us to suspend for tea. This sitting is now suspended until 5.00 p.m.

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4.30 p.m: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Caroni East and Minister of Education.
[*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Tim Gopeesingh): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour and a privilege for me to join this debate on this Finance Bill presented by the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy, which incorporates amendments to about 19 different Acts, but small amendments which are very meaningful. The Minister went into detail on each one of these amendments, and therefore, I would not reiterate some of these issues. Since it is a Finance Bill, the nation as a whole expects of the Government to give an account of itself in terms of its fiscal policies and what we have been doing in relation to the governance of the country.

When we came into office in 2010, we would have employed and ensured that there are certain policies that were put in place to ensure there was positive economic growth and development in the country, which would bring about prosperity for all. Those had been our watchwords on our Manifesto: “Prosperity for all”.

Mr. Speaker, we adopt fiscal policies as a Government and Central Bank adopts monetary policies for the management of the country and gives advice to the Government in terms of what they see are some of the issues related to the financial sector and the economy as a whole, and the person who does this is the Central Bank Governor who, with his team, work on monetary policies, and the hon. Prime Minister, with her Minister of Finance and the Economy and her team, work on ensuring that the fiscal policies are in sync with national development.

So, former Central Bank governors—we have one with us, the Member for Tunapuna, the distinguished Minister of Foreign Affairs, who was once Central Bank Governor between 1996 to 2000, and then subsequent to that, we had Governor Ewart Williams, and subsequent to the end of Governor Ewart Williams’ term, Mr. Jwala Rambaran had become the Governor of the Central Bank. So when the Governor of Central Bank speaks, and speaks to the country, he represents the views of what his team has been seeing and puts the fiscal policy that the Government adopts in the contextual framework of the monetary policies that he sets for the Central Bank.

I just want to quote from one article in the *Newsday* of December 26—that is just three months ago: “Governor optimistic about 2014”, by Vashtee Achibar—

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Thursday, December 26, 2013:

“Central Bank Governor Jwala Rambaran sees bright prospects in store for Trinidad and Tobago for the new year.”

This is the head of the Central Bank indicating that he sees bright prospects in store for Trinidad and Tobago for 2014:

“Declaring that Trinidad and Tobago economy has shown tremendous resilience against a turbulent global backdrop,”—that the world experienced from 2008—“he told members of the southern business community, ‘we are seeing signs of gradual recovery from the sharp downturn that started in late 2008’.”

5.05 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, we would remember that in 2008 there was the highest price of crude oil at about \$148 per barrel and the administration at that time—the PNM administration—had a very massive budget beyond \$60 billion at that time. Subsequent to that 2008, everything began to fall apart, and:

“Governor Rambaran added that preliminary estimates suggest that TT’s economy grew by 1.3 per cent in the first nine months of 2013...”

So TT’s economy grew by 1.3 per cent in the first nine months of 2013. He did not have the figures for the last quarter of 2013 because he was making this speech on December 26. He goes on to cite:

“...the completion of ‘significant maintenance work in the energy sector’ as one reason for his optimism in the economic outlook for 2014. ‘Output in the upstream and downstream energy industries is expected to return to normal in 2014, providing a strong boost to overall economic growth.’”

This is the vision of a distinguished financial sector expert, the Governor of the Central Bank. He says:

“...completion of ‘significant maintenance work in the energy sector’ as one reason for his optimism in the economic outlook for 2014...”

In addition...”

He said:

“...drilling in the shallow water blocks which were awarded in 2010 should commence in 2014.”

Here it is the Member for Diego Martin North/East was speaking about we wasted four years and what we start now in 2014 will take another seven years to show

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some degree of success, but here it is the Governor of the Central Bank is saying that in 2010:

“...drilling in the shallow water blocks which were awarded in 2010 should commence in 2014.”

So, that seven years he is speaking about is really three to four years, Mr. Speaker.

“Further the recent onshore bid round attracted 11 bids representing the highest level of interest in 30 years.”

The most amount of bids in 30 years; highest bid rounds.

“Awards for these bids rounds will lead to increased exploration activity in these blocks in late 2014.”

So, here it is they have bid rounds in 2013 and the Governor of the Central Bank is understanding that increased exploration activity will take place in a short period of time, in one year, in 2014 or early 2015, he said. So, where did the Member for Diego Martin North/East get the idea that when you give bid rounds and you award the exploration contracts, that the thing comes into effect seven years later? This is an expert, Mr. Speaker. He goes on to say, the Central Bank Governor:

“Seven rigs are now operating where in previous years there was only one...”

That is the strength of the energy Minister and the Government, in its energy policies.

‘Seven rigs are now operating where in previous years there was...one, and another is expected to join as well, so that would be eight.’

In light of these developments he said he expected a bullish performance in the economy over the next three to five years.”

The Governor of the Central Bank is expecting bullish growth performance in the economy over the next three to five years.

“In terms of possible competition from shale gas...”

which the Member for Diego Martin North/East spoke about and the number of countries that have X amount of shale gas and so on.

“Rambaran responded that it does not pose a ‘significant threat’ to the country.

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In any event he said it would take at least five years for a plant to be completed...”

And he said:

“Another factor being cited for Rambaran’s optimistic outlook for 2014 is that of ‘...improvement in the pace of project implementation’ on the part of central government.”

Improvement in the pace of project implementation. The Governor of the Central Bank is telling this country that this Government has moved with a pace in project implementation and that gave him optimism for the improvement in the economy and the strong resilience of the economy.

“The ongoing public sector projects include the Point Fortin Highway...”

Let me speak about that at this time. The last administration had a habit of saying that they will construct a number of highways and they will construct seven highways. They did not start one and they want to comment on the one that we have started. It is for the first time in this country that a major highway will be done to that extent. We had the Solomon Hochoy Highway—that ran into difficulties in previous years—by a foreign company. That was thwarted over a period of time but this one is going very well. The first part of this highway was done in less than the time that was allocated for its completion—the first part—and at a cost that was within budget. That is just the first part of the highway.

So, the Governor of the Central Bank is saying that:

“The...public sector projects include the Point Fortin Highway, Accelerated housing programme...”

The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Development has been accelerating the housing programme and we have had to deal with the issue of receiving houses, that had been constructed by the previous administration, which were breaking down; which were cracking; which were sliding off the areas that they were built; had no water connection; no electricity connection; no infrastructure to the area where these houses were built. The Minister of Housing and Urban Development, through the HDC, had to deal with these problems; a massive housing accelerated programme.

He goes on to speak about:

“education modernisation programme...”

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The tremendous work that my colleague, Minister Fazal Karim, is doing and even myself, if I may say so; the work that we are doing in education. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the country is quite happy about the work that we are doing in education. The fact is that we are not telling the country as much as we should be telling them about the work that we are doing. My colleague, the Minister of Works and Infrastructure, the Member for Tabaquite, spoke about the tremendous work that Minister Karim has been doing in the tertiary education and skills training sector.

“and the roads and bridges construction and rehabilitation project.”

The Governor is speaking about the improvement in the pace of project implementation;

“ongoing public sector projects...the Point Fortin Highway, Accelerated housing programme, education modernisation programme and the roads and bridges construction and rehabilitation project.”

The Member of Parliament for Tabaquite gave the information on the number of roads and bridges being constructed under his watch. The Governor spoke about:

“The Caroni Green Initiative was also listed as a plus for the Agriculture sector.”

And:

“The central bank Governor stated a ‘final resolution to the long standing CLICO matter, if successfully negotiated should give a captious boost to overall confidence and reinforce the positive economic growth trend.’ Adding, ‘on this basis, the central bank is projecting real GDP growth of around 1.5 percent for all of 2013...’”

That was the first three quarters which had a growth of 1.5 per cent.

“We expect economic growth to strengthen to 2.5 percent in 2014.”

Mr. Speaker, we must not fail to tell this country that this administration and this People’s Partnership Government inherited a quagmire and a massive debt on the Clico matter of close to \$20 billion. In addition, was the HCU matter and, in addition, we inherited close to \$5 billion being owed to contractors in different sectors of the expenditure by different ministries over the period of time. So, we had to deal with about a \$25 billion debt; Clico and the contractors.

I want to congratulate the Member for Tunapuna, as our first Minister of Finance, for the tremendous amount of work that he did in bringing us out of that

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difficulty and then the tremendous work that Minister Howai is doing to carry the economy forward in a positive manner.

Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago is doing so well, I want to quote an article from *Caribseek Life*, “Trinidad and Tobago—An Innovation-Driven Economy?” by Ronald Ramkissoon Ph.D, October 24, 2013. It is termed “i2i idea2 innovation”:

“According to the World Economic Forum’s, Global Competitiveness Report 2013...”

The Prime Minister just came from a global economic forum in Panama and it was a tremendous inspiration to us all to hear the speech by the hon. Prime Minister and how she spoke positively about what Trinidad and Tobago is doing. Mr. Speaker, it was really—I sat and listened to it and I felt very inspired by our distinguished and honourable Prime Minister when she made her contribution to that economic forum.

“...the World Economic Forum’s, Global Competitiveness Report 2013, Trinidad and Tobago is now in the category of ‘innovation driven’ economies...”

We are now in the category of innovation-driven economies.

“the most developed group of countries in the world.”

We are now categorized in innovation-driven economies, the most developed group of countries in the world. We are no longer a developing country, we are no longer a Third World country. We belong now to one of the most developed group of countries in the world. That is the world economic forum. That does not come by guess, it is the hard work that the Ministers of Education and the hon. Prime Minister, supported by her team, have been doing in the various ministries.

“The Report explains that countries that are innovation driven, have firms that are designing and developing cutting-edge products and processes in order to maintain a globally competitive edge;”

Our work that we are doing is globally competitive edge processes and business processes:

“and have sufficient investment in research and development with collaboration in research between universities and industry.”

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Our two main universities, UWI and UTT, and even our private tertiary institutions—about five of them—the tremendous amount of work that is being done by them, in terms of research and how we are moving forward as a country.

“The category includes countries such as the United States, Australia, Qatar, Singapore...”

Mr. Speaker, we belong to those countries—the grouping—in terms of our competitiveness and, according to our economy—innovation-driven economy. This is the brainpower of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. This is the brainpower of the members of Government led by our distinguished Prime Minister, with her vision and with her mission statement, “Prosperity for all”, and our vision for a well-educated society with human capital development for sustainable development.

“This new status comes on the heels of the country’s graduation to developed country status by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)...”

The OECD countries are the big eight countries of the world, and they have graduated us to developed country status.

“and the UN’s classification of Trinidad and Tobago as a country of High Human Development.

5.20 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, this manifesto of the People’s Partnership Government, “Prosperity for All 2010”, speaks about human development, inclusivity, diversity, wellness and competitiveness, and I will come back to that pretty shortly.

“...the”—United Nations—“classification of Trinidad and Tobago as a country of High Human Development.”

All being achieved by this administration over the last four years. They said that:

“The other two categories identified in the Report are factor-driven economies and efficiency-driven economies.”

We are above those categories now. So, Dr. Ramkissoon who is a distinguished finance person says that:

“This, at our 51st anniversary of Independence, might be reason to celebrate—and perhaps rightly so.”

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So, Mr. Speaker, we have reason to celebrate as a Government of the tremendous work that we have been doing over the last four years—nearly four years—and the dividends are paying out now, that improved economic performance all around. Even Arthur Lok Jack Graduate School of Business on September 04, 2013, gave a press release and an immediate release on this matter:

“Trinidad and Tobago playing in the major leagues in”—World Economic Forum—“Global Competitiveness Report 2013.”

They gave a release from the Arthur Lok Jack Graduate School of Business at a special event hosted at the school. That is an institution that many of us have come through, and that is an institution that is providing leaders in society—in the business sector and in other areas—and they were very proud of this where we are as a country. They went on to say that:

“The...”—World Economic Forum—“classifies economies into three stages of development; Factor-driven, Efficiency-driven and Innovation-driven. This year Trinidad and Tobago was placed into a higher category with respect to its stage of development, moving from a transition stage between Efficiency-driven and Innovation-driven completely into the Innovation-driven category.

The results of the 2013/14 World Economic Forum”—this is update, Mr. Speaker—“Global Competitiveness Report places Trinidad and Tobago in”—that—“new category. This classification is based on the GDP per capita, which is projected by the IFM to be about \$19,000 US... The current re-classification signals a recovery”—a recovery from 2008—“to that which preceded the finance meltdown.”

It is a recovery from 2008.

We have been in Government from 2010 to 2014. Who has created this recovery, Mr. Speaker? It is the People’s Partnership Government. It is Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar leading her team to be moved by the United Nations and the OECD countries to classify us as a developed country.

“In the new league,”—that is the Arthur Lok Jack School of Business speaking—“we are comparing ourselves to the best and most productive countries in the world, like Norway, Singapore, Germany, or Canada.”

This is no fly-by-night country, Mr. Speaker. Trinidad and Tobago is no little country, and I can tell you from the education perspective we are leaders in the world in the education sector. [*Desk thumping*] We have universal primary education, universal secondary, universal tertiary, and beyond the undergraduate level, we give 50 per cent of help to students doing their masters and Ph.D, and

those who have first class honours get scholarships to go on to do their masters and Ph.D. And I assure this country by 2015, this Minister of Education will ensure that this country has universal early childhood education by 2015. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago, from the education perspective which I happen to have the privilege of leading, will have universal early childhood education, universal primary, universal secondary, universal tertiary, and even up to the postgraduate and doctorate levels. There are very few countries in the world, probably none, that can boast of such an achievement as a country. And so, this human development, inclusivity, diversity, wellness and competitiveness which we spoke about in our manifesto pledge, is well on the way to achieving what we set about. Human capital development for sustainable development; education and development of the human capital are core to the continuous development of our country.

“Trinidad and Tobago is the only Latin-American and Caribbean country in this Innovation-driven category. The country is classified even higher than Chile, Mexico and Brazil.”

We are classified higher than Chile, Mexico and Brazil.

“With this new categorisation, Trinidad and Tobago has become a benchmark for the Caribbean and Latin America.”

Many times you see the statistics around the world and they lump the Caribbean with Latin America. So it is Latin America and the Caribbean, and even in the area that I represent Trinidad in from time to time, in UNESCO, they call us the GRULAC group, the group of Latin America and the Caribbean. But we are leaders now, Mr. Speaker, not only within the Caribbean, but in Latin America and the Caribbean and we can boast as a country for moving to that level by the work that we are doing and continuing to do.

“It is important to note that out of 37 competing economies in the Innovation-driven category, Trinidad and Tobago is the smallest country in terms of GDP and size.”

Thirty-seven countries and we are the smallest, and that is where we are poised in the world’s scenario, Mr. Speaker.

A lot of debate took place on the energy sector today, and the Member for Diego Martin North/East spoke about the production of oil and made a big scenario about 2010 we had 91,000 barrels production and so on, and now we move down to 80,000 production, or they had 100,000 barrels per day production

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in 2010 and four years later we are down to about 81,000. That is 19,000 barrels per day less, and the Member for Tabaquite and Minister of Works and Infrastructure dealt adequately with that. But it is important to reinforce the fact that in 2006 there was a production of almost 148,000 barrels per day, and by 2010 that had gone down to 100,000 barrels per day. So 48,000 barrels per day less in production over their administration during the four-year period, but we had a 19,000 fall and we are working towards that now with all these bid explorations and the increased explorations taking place.

I want to comment on an article from *Guardian* MEDIA, “Natural gas outlook positive for 2014”, Thursday, December 12, 2013:

“In the third quarter of 2013 the energy sector underwent a series of planned maintenance interventions”—planned, Mr. Speaker—“that involved bpTT and BG taking bpTT Cassia B hub and”—British Gas—“Dolphin facilities offline. These turnarounds were co-ordinated with Atlantic’s Train 3 and nine major plants at the Point Lisas Industrial Estate. This constituted the largest co-ordinated maintenance effort in the history of the national energy sector. These maintenance events were planned well in advance with planning works in some cases dating back to 2012.”

Mr. Speaker, we are a responsible Government. The Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs is a responsible, distinguished, brilliant, young engineer—petroleum engineer. He has his masters in petroleum engineering and nobody could deny that. He has it in petroleum engineering. He has international MBA and he has a bachelor’s degree in another area, and he was at the lead of this in coordinating the efforts between bpTT, British Gas and so on. And:

“...the co-ordinated efforts of the ministry,”—British Petroleum, British Gas. Very brilliant young man. Very brilliant colleague of ours, and it is unquestionable he is a very brilliant person and I am very proud to be associated with Minister Ramnarine and the work that he has been doing.

“...co-ordinated efforts of the ministry,”—British Petroleum, British Gas—“Atlantic, NGC and the Point Lisas Energy Association...”

Mr. Speaker:

“The maintenance programme is now completed and has surpassed expectations in terms of performance.”

This is the coordination of the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs and the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs with all these major energy companies.

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“In the case of the largest installation, the BP Cassia B hub the maintenance programme was completed 25 days ahead of schedule.”

That is the coordination.

“The ministry wishes to emphasise that these maintenance events were critically necessary for the long term integrity and sustainability of the energy sector.

...The maintenance programme in the upstream natural gas sector is now largely completed.”—and—“This augurs well for natural gas supply in 2014.”

Mr. Speaker, if this was not done and if it was not undertaken by the Minister and the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs, we would have a number of shutdowns for maintenance programmes which will affect the production of natural gas over a period of time, and that will give rise to some instability in the production and, of course, decrease earnings and revenue stream. But a well-coordinated shutdown or maintenance programme was done and the rewards are there to allow for 2014 a positive outlook for the natural gas production.

Mr. Speaker, when we speak about macroeconomic indicators, we speak about a number of areas, we speak about inflation. Headline inflation, as had been spoken of by the Minister of Finance and the Economy, was around 5 per cent, core inflation was down to about 2.5 per cent, reduction in the repo rate—Central bank reduced the Repo rate from 3 per cent in August 2012 to 2.7 per cent in September 2012, which remained constant in June 2013, and that is an important consideration in keeping the interest rate down to allow for borrowing and for allowing for development by small, medium size and large sector business companies.

So the interest rate has remained relatively stable at a 7.5 per cent lending rate, Mr. Speaker, which is well within the ability and capability of businesses to manage. At one time during their administration, interest rate was as high as 16 per cent, and sometimes when you went to borrow money you had to pay almost 18 per cent at some times. One-fifth of the amount of money you borrowed you had to pay back per year in addition. The interest rate is now 7 per cent, the repo rate is 2.75.

There is an increase in agricultural production. Agriculture is also expected to expand by 5.1 per cent in 2013, which exceeds its 2012 forecast of 4.9 per cent as outlined previously. Mr. Speaker, the agricultural sector is growing. The increase is as a result of output. The Government seeks to reduce the nation's food import bill which also results in surplus for export

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So we have growth in the manufacturing sector. The manufacturing sector of Trinidad and Tobago is projected to grow in real terms by 6.1 per cent during 2013. Manufacturing sector is growing by 6.1 per cent in 2013.

5.35 p.m.

Increase in services: the services sector is expected to experience a slight increase from 2.4 to 2.6 per cent in 2013.

These are some, Mr. Speaker: overall increase in growth of the economy which we spoke about. So interest rate is stable, the exchange rate is stable by 0.02 or 0.03 per cent fluctuation in the exchange rate.

Foreign reserves, Mr. Speaker: under the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, we have approximately US \$5 billion. The foreign reserves is approximately US \$10 billion and the current account surplus reserve is approximately US \$3 billion. That is \$18 billion in savings in this country. That works out to about TT \$115 billion. That is the health of our economy.

Our annual budget/expenditure is about \$55 billion to \$60 billion, but we have TT \$115 billion in reserve. We can withstand any shock, Mr. Speaker, and that is the work of what we have been doing to ensure that the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund brings forward the maximum capacity for the interest. We continue to save and have our foreign reserve there, and the people of Trinidad and Tobago are also saving, and there is a saving of close to US \$3 billion in the current account and current account surpluses in the country in the banking sector. So, we have about \$115 billion saved in this country, for this country, for the people of this country. That is no easy feat. How many countries in the world can boast that they have this? Very few, not even the developed countries of which we are there now, as one of the 37 countries in that range and we are the smallest country in that grouping.

“MOODY’S REVIEW OF THE ECONOMY”. Mr. Speaker, in your previous incarnation, you would have sat with the groups of Moody’s and Standard & Poor’s and so on, and given them your thinking on how—they would come and ask questions, and you would give them your thoughts and ideas of what is happening at a national level, and they would go around to people all over the country and they ask them—the business sector, the private sector, the public sector—and they formed their own opinion.

“MOODY’S REVIEW OF THE ECONOMY”—in 2013.

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“Trinidad and Tobago Economy:

Trinidad and Tobago has earned a reputation as an excellent investment site for international businesses and has one of the highest growth rates and per capita incomes in Latin America.”

You see, we are still grouped with Latin America but we are there to the forefront.

“MOODY’S INVESTORS SERVICE

Following its ratings review exercise in January 2013, Moody’s Investors Service (Moody’s) reaffirmed Trinidad and Tobago’s ratings at Baa1...for Government Bonds in both foreign and local currency together with a Stable Outlook.”

In the other arena, we are grouped A, under their aspect, from a national perspective:

“The affirmation recognised the strengths of the Trinidad and Tobago economy...”

That rating is given because of recognition of the strength of our economy.

“...as reflected by the sustained flexibility of the government’s fiscal operations...”

So, Central Bank has their monetary, we have our fiscal and they are saying here:

“...by the sustained flexibility of the government’s fiscal operations...significant fiscal savings in a sovereign wealth fund...”

That is the Heritage and Stabilization Fund.

“...a strong external position reinforced by consistent current account surpluses...”

That is in the banking sector.

“...and a large foreign exchange reserve buffer; and a challenging growth outlook contingent on the resumption of activity in the energy sector following”—some—“recession.”

In one of the quarters in 2013 because of the maintenance programme.

So, Moody’s is speaking about our sovereign wealth fund, our current account surpluses and our exchange reserve buffer; that is TT \$115 billion.

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“Moody’s also highlighted that approval of fiscal reforms that incorporate limits to public sector wage growth, the divestment of state owned enterprises, and reforming subsidies could positively”—continue to—“impact the rating.

...its current account surplus and international reserves as a share of GDP - are superior to most Baa1-rated peers, including commodity exporters such as Russia and Bahrain.”

We are rated superior in our Baa1 rating to countries like Russia and Bahrain. Bahrain is a wealthy, oil-producing country and Moody’s is rating us superior to them. That is the health of our economy in Trinidad and Tobago, beautifully managed by the distinguished Prime Minister and her previous Minister of Finance and the present Minister of Finance and the Economy, and her brilliant and hard-working team. Not only hard-working, but a smart team that is residing on this side of the House.

The brainpower that is residing in this Government, Mr. Speaker, I have been in politics for 22 years, and I cannot compare it with what was there before but what we have now. The brainpower that we have in this Government far exceeds anything that has ever been in this part of the country for years. I am telling you that and this is why we have the ratings that we are getting. We are not only hard-working, we are not only diligent workers, but we are smart workers. [*Desk thumping*] Smart workers! We get the job done.

We may be quietly getting the job done because people who are doing the monitoring of what is happening in the country are telling us that we are not putting out the messages, and we are too quiet about the performance of our Government, but the people who know what we are doing, speak about it and this is one of our weaknesses that we have not been able to put out our performance as much as we should be doing, and we are going to do that.

Mr. Roberts: Going to get it better! [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yes, get it better. So when the Minister of Finance and the Economy speaks about a “very positive outlook for 2014 economy”, he is basing that on statements made by these international institutions—Moody’s, IMF, et cetera. [*Continuous crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Please, Members, please. Continue, hon. Minister.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you. So the Minister of Finance and the Economy speaks about:

“Based on normal performance and reasonable expectation we expect next year to see a much stronger return...”

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...very positive outlook for the economy in 2014.”—a possible—“...2.5 per cent growth for 2014.”— and so on.

The non-energy sector: the diversification of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago is taking place. The energy sector still plays the most important role, but:

“The non-energy sector, which had at the end of September recorded eight consecutive quarters of growth,...

Two years

“...has been fairly buoyant and recording growth rates in excess of two per cent...”

So the non-energy sector has been growing by about 2 per cent per year.

“Next year will be better because we expect the continued strength of the non-energy sector; the energy sector would be back up to 100 per cent capacity so our expectation will be a much stronger year for the economy.”

This is the Minister of Finance and the Economy speaking:

“In 2015, we expect, based on some of the investment we see starting to materialize—Mitsubishi for example”—in the downstream energy sector—“and increased exploration and production activity, in 2015 we expect to see that increase more to 2.5 to three per cent’...”

That is the growth of our economy. So:

“...What to Expect.”

The *Trinidad Express* newspaper business says and I quote:

“Following two consecutive years of positive economic performance, the non-energy sector is anticipated to remain on its growth path over the period 2013-2014. Several projects undertaken by both the public and private sectors are expected to boost the non-energy sector...”

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

Motion made: That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Hon. E. McLeod*]

Question put and agreed to.

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Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Members; even my colleague from a long time, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, voted to continue.

Mr. Imbert: No, I did not. [*Laughter*] I voted against.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I would remember the days when he tried to stop me from speaking.

Mr. Imbert: I did not try, I succeeded.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: So, Mr. Speaker, the article speaks about:

“Several projects undertaken by both the public and private sectors are expected to boost the non-energy sector, while spill over effects from improving activity in the energy sector should also positively impact non-energy growth. On-going public sector projects”—such as—“the Point Fortin Highway, the...Housing Programme, the Education Modernisation Programme and the Roads and Bridges Construction and Rehabilitation Project.

The report added: ‘In addition, the Caroni GREEN Initiative is expected to continue the enhancement of production in the agriculture sector...’”

So, the expectations of 2014 were massive and we continue to deliver on what is expected from us.

Mr. Speaker, when we speak about economies and we have to try and trace back some of the difficulties that we have had in trying to come to terms with how money was not properly spent—value for money. Permit me for a period of time here now, we have to reflect a bit on what went on and why we have come to this situation at a period of time in 2008/2009, and why we had to come out of this major difficulty. Why was that difficulty created? This is a government that is doing projects—not mega projects to say that we are doing mega projects. The largest mega project we have, probably, is the highway. But when we compare value for money in expenditure of the dollars of Trinidad and Tobago, let us trace our minds back. To some extent, I may be accused of going too far back but it is important for us to trace our economic progress over a period of time.

ISCOTT was built by that administration for close to TT \$1 billion at that time in the 1970s in Point Lisas, and it was sold for less than \$100 million, almost given to ISPAT; almost handed over to ISPAT. They were losing US \$1 million per day for a number of years and eventually they had to give it up. Then, the Eric

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Williams Medical Sciences Complex, I happened to be working at the Mount Hope Women's Hospital in 1981 when the medical complex was being built next door by Sodeteg and that was supposed to cost close to about \$400 million; that ended up costing \$1.1 billion. And even today, the thing is so badly done, you cannot go from one area of the hospital to another area without getting wet when the patients are being transported, and you are rolling a trolley across the corridor and you are hearing, "bam, bam, bam" because the floors, the tiles are individual tiles with partitions between one tile and another, so as we roll, you are hearing noise and that was an overrun there.

The Brian Lara Stadium which the hon. Minister of Sport speaks about from time to time, that was supposed to cost 200 and something million dollars, it is now \$1.1 billion.

Mr. Roberts: One seventy-five.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: One seventy-five and, Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that the welding in it is also badly done now that everything will crumble pretty shortly. If we have to do anything in that building again, we have to go back and do some welding and all of that to keep the structures in place.

5.50 p.m.

The performing arts centres, under their administration, China to Trinidad and Tobago Government, the two performing arts centres were supposed to cost US \$200 million—NAPA and SAPA. The north complex alone cost \$1.1 billion and the south cost much more, close to about \$600 million or \$700 million. You go back and search and you will get the information, so massive cost overrun, not value for money, Mr. Speaker.

The Tamana InTech Park—the very brilliant Mr. Ken Julien, he had his role to play in Point Lisas and we commend him for that. But when he decides to open a university quite up in Wallerfield, which students will travel through—come to north and then go to the east—to go to Wallerfield for a university education? The Tamana InTech Park, what happened? Close to about \$1.5 billion has been spent on the Tamana InTech Park and very little can be accomplished. Now the Minister of Trade and Industry is fighting to be able to get e TecK to bring business operators in technology to that centre. It is proving difficult, because the whole thinking behind it was wrong.

Mr. Roberts: Ken Julien.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Ken Julien. Then UTT, they want to put part of UTT in Tamana Park. That will not succeed. Now, in the energy sector, we must not forget that the last administration engaged in a gas-to-liquid (GTL) programme. They put in hundreds of millions of dollars in the World GTL and the gas optimization project, two projects, the GTL and the GOP, hundreds of millions of dollars, and leaving Trinidad and Tobago with a legal suit close to \$12 billion. If we had lost that, you could imagine what would have happened to Trinidad and Tobago losing \$12 billion on the World GTL legal suit, Mr. Speaker? That is what they left for us.

When the Member for Diego Martin North/East spoke about the age of the Chairman of Petrotrin now and he has gone past his age, we have to remember—I am not in the habit of speaking ill about people at all, but Mr. Jones was 67 years when he was the head of the entire process down in south. So, when they make statements, they must remember where they come from. They cannot accuse people on this side. Mr. Malcolm Jones was 67 years.

In addition to the World GTL and the gas optimization programme, the Petrotrin refinery upgrade was about \$3 billion. What has happened to the upgrade, Mr. Speaker? It has been a mess. The upgrade has not really taken place and right there in Petrotrin, as we drive down the highway, there is a building, a shell, that was started by Mr. Jones and \$187 million spent on it and what do you see? A shell.

Dr. Rambachan: What is the opportunity cost for that \$187 million?

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yes, what is the opportunity cost? Thousands of homes for people and a number of schools for people.

And then we must not forget the Summit; \$2 billion in the Summit. What has it brought for Trinidad and Tobago, except we had some world leaders coming into Trinidad? Not \$1 billion, but \$2 billion spent and a ship outside there leased for a number of things, \$2 billion spent.

Then the National Oncology Centre started. At the National Oncology Center, there was grass growing over it and the steel that was in the foundation rotting. The sum of \$100 million was spent and the steel was rotting.

Then the Scarborough Hospital—in 2001, the Scarborough Hospital was supposed to cost \$120 million. That ended up costing \$1.2 billion, 10 times the amount. And it took this Government and the Minister of Health and the Prime Minister to ensure that we opened the Scarborough Hospital. We had to complete

it and we did it and we are continuing to improve the facilities, the infrastructure, the equipment and even the human resource personnel. Many more doctors from Trinidad now are going across to work, to help the people of Tobago to improve their health conditions. This is the tremendous work being done by the Minister of Health. [*Desk thumping*] These are silent things. Not much is being heard about it.

Then, I would not go into the blimps and the OPVs and the Prime Minister's residence and Diplomatic Centre when curtains alone were costing \$17 million.

They had a design where they were going to put up—they put the building for Mrs. Peña up in the east but that was going to be attached to the cost for the Diplomatic Centre. It is only when it came to our knowledge, and the Member for Chaguanas West knew about it as well, and you had discovered part of the reason—[*Continuous interruption and crosstalk*] yes man, that was going to be a part of the attachment.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, please, may I appeal to you to allow the Member to speak in silence? Continue hon. Minister.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. They know full well that in the design, Mrs. Peña's church up in Guanapo was going to be costed under part of the extension of the Diplomatic Centre. There was no question about that. If you translate the Chinese writing that was on the plan, you would see that is what was occurring. That was the deception and that is why one of the reasons why that administration lost, you know. That is one of the major corrupt areas.

Every day, as I am on that, the Opposition is talking about corruption and corruption and corruption by this Government. Mr. Speaker, they hope that this thing will stick, but let me tell them today—[*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: Mr. Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 36(1). Could you please link it to the Finance Bill, please?

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Are you daft Mc Donald?

Miss Mc Donald: It is wide.

Mr. Roberts: Too wide?

Mr. Speaker: Yes.

Miss Mc Donald: Pull it together.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, Member for Port of Spain South. Yes, Minister of Education, I know where you are going but, again, if you could probably—it is a Finance Bill and I know it is a wide and broad area but try to connect, please.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Mr. Speaker, I am speaking about the fact that the ill-expenditure and the expenditure without value for money and the wasteful expenditure that lasted for a number of years under their administration had caused this country major difficulty and this is why, in our Finance Bill today, we are showing that we are doing changes and amendments, small amendments, to various Acts, 19 Acts of Parliament, and we are able to do things to bring about meaningful change in a number of different areas and which the Minister of Finance and the Economy spoke about.

So, I would not delay too much on this, but we must remember the blimps; the OPVs; the Hilton upgrade, more than \$400 million; Alutrint; Alutec; the bamboo software at \$20 million; the waterfront complex, which is now \$4.2 billion we have to pay for this waterfront complex. Mr. Speaker, it is \$256 million per year for 17 years this waterfront complex is costing, and then the Hyatt deal that they put in. Hyatt gets 7 per cent to the top, not 7 per cent of the profit. So if somebody just goes and checks in to Hyatt at US \$200 per night or something, they get 7 cent of that up front. So whether Hyatt loses or they do not lose, whether the hotel loses, Hyatt makes—that is the deal that they did for the Hyatt Hotel.

The leases for buildings that we inherited—Ramsaran Street in Chaguanas, leased there for years and nobody occupied. Millions of dollars paid in rental. The Tragarete Road lease, we inherited from them. That was valued at about \$800,000 per month. We were able to get it less than \$600,000 and we are doing some work to make sure that we can get in there.

Then there is the Johns Hopkins contract, where they put cardiology in the University of Trinidad and Tobago and diabetes. Those things are not supposed to be there in UTT. It was not built for medicine. It was built for technology. So these are some of the issues, Mr. Speaker, I thought were important to bring to the attention of the national community and in our discussion.

Mr. Speaker, how we have gone on to spend our money properly so that this country can be termed as a developed country, let me just quote some of the things that we promised to the people and where we have delivered. This is the Finance Bill. This is how we are spending our money and this is where we are going for human capital development, for sustainable development.

We said here:

“Education and Human Development”

Page 29 of our manifesto.

“Early Childhood, Primary and Secondary Education
Building the Foundation for an Intelligent Nation and a Creative Economy
...literate, numerate...critical thinking skills...curriculum reform...”

Mr. Speaker, all of that has been done. We have ensured that there is critical thinking with the reform of the primary school curriculum. Their administration, I must give them their credit, they did some work on the early childhood education curriculum and we did not have to do much work with that, except to tweak here and there. But the primary school curriculum reform has been completed.

The secondary school curriculum is under way and will be completed shortly. The primary school curriculum brings in the whole question of literacy and numeracy and critical thinking by the continuous assessment component and bringing in physical education, visual and performing arts, morals, ethics, citizenry development, character development, agricultural science, health and family life education. These have been implemented in the primary school curriculum and we are going guns with that.

In fact, the literacy in students in Standard 3, done by PISA has shown that we have climbed by 35 points, but with an added advantage of improving our literacy by at least six months from where we were previously.

Creative writing has improved by 10 per cent. Language Arts has improved by 12 per cent. The number of students getting beyond 50 per cent in the SEA is now 72 per cent and the number of students getting less than 30 per cent has come down from 13 per cent now to 6 per cent. That is the work in the primary school education.

The primary school must ensure that our children are literate, numerate and aware of e-learning. Three hundred of our primary schools have computer labs, Internet-based opportunities. All 134 secondary schools have computer labs ranging from two to six labs. Some have up to six labs in their schools, 60 computers in the school, Mr. Speaker. We have given close to almost 80,000 laptops to our students moving from primary school to secondary school. That is the vision of the hon. Prime Minister and we have kept our promise.

Principals—476 primary school principals, 134 secondary school principals, and 61 supervisors have all been given laptops as well. Five thousand teachers have been given laptops and more than 5,000 teachers have been trained in various aspects of ICT, with the infusion of the curriculum with ICT at different

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levels. That is the work of this Government, Internet-based opportunities, critical thinkers, creativity and entrepreneurship, focus on all learners not just the academically-gifted.

Last week I had to answer a question. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, you were not here but I am sure you would have read my answer from the *Hansard*, showing that we have moved technical vocational education and CVQs from 42 schools—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Browne: Point of order, 36(1).

Mr. Speaker: Yes, that was raised a short while ago and I appealed to the hon. Minister to connect.

Dr. Browne: Has he?

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yes, I have shown how we are spending our money and how the financial sector is growing because of the human capital development for sustainable development and improvement of the economy, Mr. Speaker.

Curriculum reform: early childhood, finished; primary, finished; secondary school curriculum is going to be finished shortly; responsible citizenship, including talent in the arts and sports: physical education; visual and performing arts; problem-based learning. That is in the continuous assessment component.

“We will expand the number of guidance counsellors...”

Seven hundred and thirty-two people have been employed in the student support services: guidance counsellors, guidance officers, school social workers, clinical behavioural, educational psychologists, et cetera, Mr. Speaker.

“...we will establish a system of psychological support for children in schools.”

This is it, the student support services division.

“Improve the Administration of Education”

Filling the backlog of vacancies: We have very few vacancies now for principals and vice-principals but still there is a little weakness by the Teaching Service Commission not to fill the heads of departments and deans.

6.05 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the seamless replacement of teachers: We have trained close to 6,000 teachers. Repeatedly, we have been training and training in different

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aspects; strengthen the administration of our schools; school-based management system; local school boards; strengthen the partnership between State and denominational boards. We have 18 denominational boards and we continue to work with them; decentralize the current education system by establishing autonomous regional authorities and so on.

We will expand the public transport system: We spent \$50 million to transport students to schools; participatory democracy and participatory process; we have national consultations on the curriculum; we have national consultation on parenting; we have national consultation and stakeholder consultations with a number of other stakeholders.

So, Mr. Speaker, quality in teaching and learning: Teachers are trained; retraining is going on; addressing weaknesses students may have such as poor eyesight, dyslexia and other challenges. We have done a research project in schools; eight primary schools and eight Early Childhood Education Centres. We have researched 3,000 students, tested them and found that there was about a 30 per cent functional, cognitive disability in these students, and it emanates from the students who were specially challenged, either dyslexia, autism, visual, auditory, Down's syndrome, attention hyperactive disorder, cerebral palsy, et cetera.

So the 30 per cent of students who are there with some special needs, we continue to work with them, and we are moving now to construct more schools. There are 22 special needs schools in the country—12 government and 10 primary schools—which look at almost 3,000 students in various aspects of dysfunctionalities. We are continuing to work with the stakeholders to make sure that these students who have special needs, are brought back into the mainstream of education. We will diagnose them early, by training our teachers, so that we will detect the problems early, and manage them with our team of student-support services division.

So, Mr. Speaker, I can safely state that at this time, when we have probably just—we have another year to go before the general election, a year plus. At the Ministry of Education, we would have completed more than 80 per cent of the things we promised that we will do in this manifesto; more than 80 per cent. So what we promised, we have delivered and we continue to deliver. [*Desk thumping*] We spend our money properly, Mr. Speaker, in doing the things that are of value to our people, and it is value-based spending as far as our finance is concerned.

In the closing moments, Mr. Speaker, I cannot go without indicating the work we have done in infrastructure, and how we have spent money in the

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infrastructure. We have built 74 schools. Never in the history of Trinidad and Tobago—for nine years they built 22 Early Childhood Education Centres and five primary schools. In three and a half years, we have built 74 schools already, Mr. Speaker. We have built 54 Early Childhood Education Centres, six secondary schools completed, 14 primary schools. We are starting another 31 ECCE Centres and my colleagues, my word is my honour, you all have requested Early Childhood Education Centres in the various areas, we will try to construct them, and I hold myself responsible for assisting in ensuring that these schools are built all through the country.

Mr. Speaker, there is no politics in education, no politics, absolutely none. Every child must have an equitable basis to move with their education. No child must be left behind. We are ensuring that there is no discriminatory process occurring in any part of our governance in this country. The Minister of Works and Infrastructure spoke about the number of drains for Tabaquite, and bridges, and the road paving and so on, throughout the country. You all try to give the impression that we are only doing this for UNC areas and so on, but that is not so.

I have read it out in *Hansard* where we have built these Early Childhood Education Centres and schools. Mr. Speaker, we are now doing—17 primary schools are under construction, and another 21 are about to start; 15 secondary schools are under construction now, and we have a number of centres and administrative blocks to be done.

So, Mr. Speaker, by the end of this administration, the first term in office, we would have built possibly close to 150 schools in this country. So primary schools, 14 and 17, that is 31; and 21, that is 52; Early Childhood Education Centres: 54 plus 31, that is 85 and another 26, 107; and secondary schools, six built already, 15 under construction, that is 21, and we have a few blocks to do. Add that up, Mr. Speaker, that is the work of this People's Partnership Government, as far as infrastructure is concerned; one of the areas in education, Mr. Speaker, one of the areas.

I prioritize—we have a strategic plan 2011—2015, to know how we are spending the money that the Prime Minister ensured that the Minister of Finance and the Economy gave to education, the largest budget for three years so far. Close to 18 per cent of the annual expenditure, and close to 6 per cent of our GDP, and it is way beyond what other developed countries—we are developed—are doing. The United Kingdom and the United States give 14 per cent of their annual expenditure, and about 4.5 per cent of our GDP. Our Prime Minister has ensured

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that education gets the biggest budget to ensure that there is sustainable development for our country. So I am showing how we are spending our money.

Our strategic plan 2011—2015: Universal early childhood education; special needs education; improvement in infrastructure; the laptops; career guidance; human resource management; information system; institutional strengthening of the Ministry, Mr. Speaker. Career guidance; teacher training and development. It just makes me show that technical/vocational education expands; 16 prioritized areas, and we have completed about 80 per cent of that, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to echo the sentiments of the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy, when in closing we can safely say, that Trinidad and Tobago is experiencing more robust growth after several years of sub-par performance. The economy will grow around 2½ per cent in 2014, after around 1½ per cent growth in 2013. The non-energy sector will continue to be buoyant with a growth of about 2½ per cent per year. That will continue to be the case in 2014.

The country's external position remains healthy with the following reserves I spoke about, with external reserves of more than TT \$115 billion, while the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund assets continued to grow. The mission projects a fiscal deficit of about 1½ per cent of GDP in 2013/2014, closer to balance than envisaged in the budget statement. We see a strong case to continue fiscal consolidation in the medium term, but based on quality policy changes, that durably improved the structure of non-energy based revenues and spending. The mission said that they welcome the Government's efforts—that is the IDB mission—to significantly reduce or eliminate arrears of energy subsidies and VAT refunds to supplies. The foreign exchange market has been relatively tight and constant.

So as a Government, we continue to build on recent successes in implementing structural reforms, to unlock the country's full growth potential. There has been measurable and significant progress in easing the impediments to doing business as being done by the Minister of Trade, Industry and Investment, and in financial sector reforms.

So, Mr. Speaker, it is with these closing words that I feel proud to be associated with my Government, and to be a part of the Government doing the work for the people, to ensure prosperity for all.

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

Mr. Jack Warner (*Chaguanas West*): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank you for the privilege to speak on the Finance Bill, which seeks to

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amend 19 pieces of the parent legislation. But before doing so, Mr. Speaker, I want to just respond to some of the points raised by the last speaker, the Member for Caroni East and the previous one, on the other side, the Member for Tabaquite.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say again for the second time, that the Opposition is on this side because of what the people perceived to be the misdeeds of the PNM. And, therefore, coming here session after session, to tell us about the PNM, does not add one iota to the public who has put them here; their knowledge. I would have thought, Mr. Speaker, that the Member for Caroni East, the Minister of Education, would have told us something about the numerous schools which have remained closed for weeks, with children being out of schools, but not a drum was heard, not a funeral note. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, I thought the Minister of Education would have told us about the Ministry's inability to build, to date, the Paramin RC School, Mr. Speaker, but nothing was heard about that. I sat here and I listened with some degree of anxiety to hear what the Minister would have said about why to date, the Longdenville Presbyterian School, a school that is over 50 years old, has no building and the children are going hither, thither and yon. And why is it, up to this day, the school which is supposed to be built in Cashew Gardens has not been built; not a single word, not a funeral note.

I would have loved to hear him say something about the failing education system, Mr. Speaker, but nothing about that. I listened intently to hear what we would have been told about the school curriculum, which in many ways, to date, remains fixed in a time warp, but nothing about that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to hear what was being told about the Charlieville Presbyterian School, which was burnt—part of it was burnt a few weeks ago, months ago, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Will you give way, now?

Mr. J. Warner: No. [*Laughter*] And, Mr. Speaker, nothing—in fact, yes. Go ahead. [*Laughter*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Mr. Speaker, the Charlieville school that was burnt recently, the debris has been removed. Designs have been done for a double storey for that block, and it will start probably within about two weeks; a contract has been tendered.

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The Longdenville Primary School, we are awaiting the Board, the Presbyterian Board, to give us an alternate site to build the building, and the Paramin school is about 60 per cent constructed at the moment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. J. Warner: Thank you, Member. I thought I would have heard that in your contribution, but thank you all the same.

Mr. Speaker, I continue, not a word about the plan, the request of the Arima Government Secondary School, they asked for the land, where the new Arima Government Primary School had been. To this day, Mr. Speaker, they have not been given the land. They have not been given the hall they asked for. In fact, there are rumours to whom the land has been given, but we wait—wait Dorothy, wait. We wait, to see more about that, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: In the *Sunshine*.

Mr. J. Warner: Mr. Speaker—yes, that is correct.

Mr. Speaker, I sat and I wanted to hear—I saw TTUTA complaining about security in schools. There is a rumour outside there, that the Minister is trying to dismantle the MTS, to give small security contracts to small security firms and so on, of friends and family. It is outside there. Is it true? I do not know. Tell us. You want to take it again? You want to say so?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Mr. Speaker, let me assure the Member, that we are doing a rationalization of the security services. We have now 176 health, safety and security officers placed in the schools. So each one of the Government secondary schools has in addition to their security officers, at least two additional officers, that cost us \$20,000 a month, for the two health and safety officers, but the security officer, one alone, costs \$30,000 a month. So when a school has six security officers, that cost the State \$2.1 million for the security system for one school. Therefore, we are trying to rationalize that, because we have to spend about \$250 million annually for security systems in the schools. So we give the assurance that no school will be without the security system that they require.

6.20 p.m.

Mr. J. Warner: Again, Mr. Speaker, thank you. I will give my response in the *Sunshine*.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister goes to Norway. He goes to Germany. He goes to Bahrain, but he does not go to Paramin; he does not go to Maraval; he does not go

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to Longdenville; he does not go to Charlieville, and so on. You know something? What is worse, I sat here and heard the Minister say—I quote and I hope I am wrong:

“The brainpower...in this Government far exceeds...”—whatever was there before.

I shudder. I ask myself: is the Minister trying to insult our intelligence? Mr. Speaker, I ask the question—and I say so because I was there. [*Interruption*] I am saying so; I was there and though I was there, if even I was still there, I cannot say that at all, Mr. Speaker. [*Interruption*] That is okay. The fact is you also have to weigh this brainpower against the fact that a Government has 18 Ministers who have either been fired or resigned.

Mr. Speaker, behind here is getting crowded and I am afraid that my seat might be moved down a little just now. I am worried, so I am saying, therefore: where is this brainpower? Eighteen people have left one way or the other. Where is the brainpower, Minister? Do not do us that!

At the same time, I do not want to spend too much time on what you have said, but I could not let this pass. I do not want to argue if Mr. Ramnarine is an engineer or not—I do not think that is even important or relevant. I would not spend time on that. He is what he is, but I know how he reached there and I saw when you all were speaking about his qualifications, everybody on that side was thumping the desk except the Member for San Fernando West. I would not say more because I was there and I know how she was moved and how he is where he is. So enough of that for now.

Mr. Speaker—and you built 74 schools, that is okay, but tell the people what they want to know. When a child is at home for one week, two weeks and three weeks and cannot go to school—whether it is in St. Augustine, in Williamsville or in Princes Town—they want to know why. For a sewer, a toilet, in this day and age? They want to know why. For electricity? They want to know why. For Aranguez?

Minister, I will tell you this here in *Hansard*, and I say it and you are my friend still, but I have checked again and again. I do not know of any Minister of Education under whom more schools have remained closed than under you. If I am wrong, I stand to be corrected.

Because I do not have much time, I will go to the Member for Tabaquite.

Mr. Roberts: Jack, remember Le Gendre?

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Mr. J. Warner: I will go to the Member for Tabaquite.

Mr. Roberts: Remember Le Gendre?

Mr. J. Warner: Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara, remember your—

Mr. Roberts: Remember Le Gendre?

Mr. J. Warner: I will not bother with you this evening. No, no, no.

The Member for Tabaquite, in all his fury and glory, said that everyone can see the manifestation of the Government's work and he made the point that he took over—*[Interruption]* I was there; I will never stop saying I was there. In fact, in some ways, I have you there. *[Laughter and desk thumping]* So do not worry; I am not bothered about that. I was there.

The Government took over an economy in decline, but I am saying to the Member for Tabaquite, that is why the PP was elected. The people were against the economy; it was in decline; they were against corruption; they were against Calder Hart, they were against A, B and C and, therefore, they said, "Okay, time for a change." The same kinds of things they are saying now. They were saying this, of course, at the time, because of disgust and displeasure.

What the Minister has failed to say and, of course, he spent a lot of time talking about what he inherited and so on. The Minister says that this country, if you listen to him, is a country of milk and honey and everything is hunky-dory.

I want to remind the Minister of an *Express* editorial of April 26, 2013, titled, "Economic problems cannot be ignored". I will read into the *Hansard* what is said in that article:

"...economist Dr. Roger Hosein"—stated:

"Over-reliance on the energy sector; disregard of agriculture,"—disregard of—"tourism...high levels of government transfers and subsidies; troubling trends in labour productivity..."—and further

"Age-old hindrances like port and customs inefficiencies, along with road traffic congestion and the high cost of crime, add to the frustrations and wipe out gains in other areas."

I continue.

"And there are the"—UNC—"programmes propagated by the politicians,"—which are—"government-funded, make-for-work projects", which are doing more harm than good."

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I go further. He says:

Corruption depletes national wealth, increases cost of goods and services, funnels scarce public resources to uneconomic high profile projects, leads to unhealthy competition and inflation and adversely affects the work ethic and market structures.

Dr. Roger Hosein, April 26, 2013. That is almost one year ago and that is as relevant today as it was then.

Let us go to critique of a fella called Terry Rondon. Terry Rondon, on January 19, 2014, in an article by Cleveon Raphael—this country that is so nice, milk and honey, I mean happiness oozing from our pores and so on—hear what he is saying:

“Trinidad is an angry society and, sooner or later, that anger is going to reach Sangre Grande. Newly-appointed chairman of the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation Terry Rondon sounded this warning, as he claimed that the area was neglected by successive governments, and the people were already upset over the poor garbage service, bad roads and unemployment.”

This 3.6 per cent, you see, unemployment.

“Rondon...said nothing has changed since a group of desperate residents from Sangre Grande, Toco, Matelot, and other areas hired two buses and went to see the then prime minister Dr. Eric Williams in 1972.”

Forty-one years, Mr. Speaker, almost 42 years, he is saying, nothing has changed. I am saying therefore—you can laugh—when the people voted in 2010, they voted because they wanted to make a change. In other words, Mr. Speaker, I am saying, for 42 years you had no change, why, in the last four years, could Rondon not say something different about Sangre Grande?

“Nobody shall be left behind; all shall rise.” Mr. Speaker, why is Sangre Grande not rising? Or Toco? Or Matelot? Or Manzan? Or Cumuto? Or Dades Trace? Or Flanagin Town? Or Brasso? The list can go on and on. Why are they not rising? The fact is, if even we want to bypass Terry Rondon, I want to go to another statement the Minister made, the Minister of Works and Infrastructure. I used to be there at one time.

He says that we are doing work in areas where we have lost seats. That may be true, but I know that the Government lost a seat in Chaguanas West—*[Interruption]* “Gih me a chance, nuh. Bossman, gih me a chance please, nuh.” I

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want to ask the Minister, having lost in Chaguanas West, how come you have stopped fixing Bocal Road and the drain in Bocal? Why are you not fixing Asraph Road? Why are you not fixing Akbal Trace, putting the basket drain to prevent the land from falling into the drain? Why is Akbal Road not paved? Why is General Junction Road, the bridge, not paved, Minister? Why have you not fixed—[*Interruption*] I listened to you, listen to me, man! Listen to me! Why is New Settlement not fixed? Frederick Settlement, why is that not fixed? In Caroni, Alligator North, off Monroe Road, why is that not fixed?

Mr. Speaker, in Chaguanas West, where people, of course, are not supposed to be neglected because of who they voted for, nothing is being done because the fact is the MP is Jack Warner, ILP. They went so far to tell the people in the area—I have been told by the people—that if by chance they do anything in the area, say, of course, it was done there by Vasant Bharath. Mr. Speaker, of course, I have no problem with that. I do not care whose name they call, but do it.

They have been told that a lot of bridges are being built all over the place, bridges like hell. When I was the Minister of Works and Infrastructure, I began to build a bridge for the people of Sea Lots over the river. The material had been given by Bhagwansingh Hardware and a businessman had given the funds.

I was then moved and the Minister then, after me, was Minister Emmanuel George and he said, I quote him here, that the Ministry of National Security, where I was then, could continue with the project if the Minister sees it fit to do so, but I was not the Minister so I was told then that I had to get permission from the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure.

I wrote the Permanent Secretary asking for permission to finish the bridge for the people in Sea Lots. To this day, not even an acknowledgement. So the people of Sea Lots have no bridge.

Mr. Speaker, again, listen to this Minister of Works and Infrastructure—this lovely country where, of course, people are happy, there is no anger outside there at all. People are not anxiously waiting for the next election. They are happy.

Let us look and see a point raised by the Governor of the Central Bank who they quoted here today extensively. Mr. Rambarran, Jwala Rambarran. Mr. Speaker, on April 30, 2013, he said, I quote:

“‘The dream of owning a home is posing a challenge...’”—It has become—
“‘increasingly difficult for lower-income earners...’”

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He went on. Let me say, very quickly, the HDC can never build by itself enough houses for the people who need houses. Never! And in fact, I would be the last person to be critical of the HDC. Me, Mr. Speaker.

He said, Mr. Speaker, that there is a demand that shows a waiting list, in 2009, of 107,000 people who want homes and he listed those people in four categories. We shall not go into that right now. He said:

“‘If this trend continues, by the end of this decade, median prices’”—for homes—“‘could be \$1.3 million’ . . .”—outside the reach of the average man.

Mr. Speaker, beside what HDC is doing, what else is being done to help the people? I planned to come here and ask that question, but because I have some written questions, which are about one month overdue, no answer, I said I would wait.

The Land for the Landless, we had a draw where there were 500 people—a lot of PR, razzmatazz and so on. What happened after that draw? What happened to those people who won the draw since then? When is the next draw taking place? What is the status of those people who have been successful? And the questions go on and on and on—but this country is a land of milk and honey.

Any country that has crime as its number one problem can never be a happy country. I will not look at the murder rate for 2010 because 2010 was part PNM and part PP, 485, but I will not look at that. Mr. Speaker, 2011, 354; 2012, 383; 2013, 407; to date, 121, which is far over what it was last year and the trend continues.

6.35 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, what did the UN say about this land of milk and honey? The UN said that:

“T&T continues to rank in the top ten for homicides per capita around the world.”

Top 10! When I was a little boy, on 610 Radio, we used to have a thing called Top 10. I never thought that years after, I would talk about crime as being one of the top 10. Look it here! This land of milk and honey and so on! We—and I said “we”, I was there, Mr. Speaker—we made a pledge that when we came into office, in the first 120 days we will do A, B, C and D. One of the things, we said, Mr. Speaker, is that crime will come down. Mr. Speaker, we said so and it has not.

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Mr. Speaker, I could go on and on, but I want to spend some time on the Finance Bill. I believe I raised some of the issues that were raised by the two previous speakers on the other side. Mr. Speaker, when the Minister of Finance and the Economy was making his budget speech, I want to remind the House what he said. I am quoting him, Mr. Speaker. He said:

“...gambling is emerging as a substantial industry in Trinidad and Tobago with consistent growth in unlicensed and unregulated gaming...”

Mr. Speaker, he continued:

“...under the current legislative framework prevailing in Trinidad and Tobago all casino operations conducted by self-styled private members’ clubs and all gaming machine operations in recreation clubs, in pubs, in arcades and in shopping malls are illegal activities.”

He said so. He went on further, Mr. Speaker, and he said:

“Gambling has the potential to lead to criminal activity”—and he said—
“There is a clear public need for regulation.”

Mr. Speaker, he went further to say in his budget speech:

“...we have developed a comprehensive governance structure for this industry. It will entail the establishment of a Regulatory Commission with the power”—he is talking still—“to license premises, operators, suppliers and key employees. The new legislation will control the operations of what will be referred to as registered casinos.”

Mr. Speaker, I do not believe that the Minister of Finance and the Economy has a registry for casinos in this country. I do not believe that the Minister of Finance and the Economy knows how many casinos there are in this country. Mr. Speaker, he went further to say:

“...in the interim and to ensure that everyone meets their full tax obligation”—listen to him—“all pool betting shops will be required to computerize their operating systems to allow the Betting Levy Board under its operating authority to determine the taxes which are due from the bets being negotiated at those pool betting shops”—so therefore—“I propose to increase the license fee for betting offices which conduct betting at fixed odds.”

Mr. Speaker, what did he say? He said, in a nutshell, that there is widespread proliferation of illegal gambling; he said that, of course, the gaming industry is illegal; he said it is unregulated; he said, of course, this leads to crime and he drew

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a connection between the gaming industry and crime, especially organized crime; and he said that this industry, as is, can have harmful social effects on citizens, especially minors, but, last of all, the activity robs the State of tax revenue.

Mr. Speaker, as we stand, we are almost six months in the fiscal year. Where is the comprehensive governance structure for the industry? Where is the regulatory commission after six months, Mr. Speaker? What the Minister has brought for us today here are interim measures, not substantive measures and, therefore, I am saying what is missing here are provisions for these things to be enforced. Who will do the enforcement, Mr. Speaker? Who? No one! And I ask the question: why is nothing being done about it?

Mr. Speaker, I ask again, where is the regulatory commission? I agree that illegal gambling must cease, but if tomorrow somebody who is doing it illegal says, “I want to legalize my gaming industry”, where do they go? To whom? What do they do? How does one make oneself legal today, one who was illegal yesterday? There is nothing in place, Mr. Speaker. Nothing! And then, Mr. Speaker, we will pass the Bill today, because they have the numbers and next time, of course, the poor guy would find himself on the wrong side of the law, but he will be none the wiser to know what to do to correct the situation.

Of course, we could say, we have the BIR, the Board of Inland Revenue but, Mr. Speaker, you and I know that for the last two weeks even the BIR has been non-functional; for the last two weeks. Besides being overworked—which I will come to just now—it is non-functional.

Mr. Speaker, Michelle Loubon in an *Express* article on April 02, 2014 titled “BIR workers staying away till all-clear”:

She says:

“About 1,500 employees from about six Board of Inland Revenue...offices in Port of Spain, South and Central will not be working until they get a clean bill of health from the Occupational Safety and Health authorities...(Cariri) and a fire certificate.”

Mr. Speaker, that was what their PSA President said and they all walked off the job, Mr. Speaker. “The Treasury building is a ghost. It has been closed since a couple days ago. In fact, if you pass there on Monday or anytime—yesterday or the day before—you will see a sign marked “Closed”. I want to put a sticker and say, “The last person must take off the lights”. Mr. Speaker:

“...all three BIR buildings, including Trinidad House, the District Revenue Office and the Treasury Building at Queen Street”—all of these have been closed.

“...The Siparia Magistrates Court has been shut down for about a week.”

And Duke said he is taking it even further. There are problems at BIR.

I am advised that there were five or six persons who have died at Trinidad House, between 40 and 45 years of age over the past year, and they have tried to form a link between the conditions under which they are working and the fact that they have died from blood clots and so on.

Mr. Speaker, I am saying, therefore, if you do not take care of these conditions, how will you get the Bill implemented? You come here, you pass a Bill yes—you have the majority—but how will it be implemented? Mr. Speaker, how will the BIR be able to cope with this additional workload that they will have. Their workload will be increased by over 300 to 400 per cent? How will they cope, Mr. Speaker? I ask the question.

Mr. Speaker, what is even worse, to show you how the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing, they come with this Finance Bill which has to be implemented and which calls for warm bodies to do it, yet for all, in January 2014 this year, they sent home 125 tax monitors. In January! I am advised that these monitors went to the Member for Couva South, I am advised.

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes.

Mr. J. Warner: Thank you very much and he said yes.

Mr. Indarsingh: Yesterday.

Mr. J. Warner: That is correct. Mr. Speaker, he was surprised, he did not know. He is a Minister in the Ministry of Finance, he did not know. And, they felt they would go to him—being in finance, a former trade unionist—to talk to him, because they do not see why they cannot be retrained and so on to assist in the BIR because, Mr. Speaker, they came in during the Panday administration.

When they came in, their job was to go into field, visit taxpayers, do minor audits, inform taxpayers about discrepancies and liabilities and prepare data for garnishee orders and tell customers about the laws and so on. But, Mr. Speaker, when Panday imposed the amnesty to encourage people to pay taxes and so on, their work was reduced, and they went into the BIR to work, and they have been there for the last 15 to 16 years, and they were sent home, Mr. Speaker.

And, you know, I am hearing the Member for Caroni East talking about the achievements: what he said about Clico and how, of course, we inherited \$20 billion in Clico, and one of the things they did, the Member for Tunapuna used his

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acumen and skill to settle Clico—of course, not HCU yet—and how, of course, what a fantastic job he did and so on. He worked so hard to settle Clico and you moved him. What did you move him for if he is so good? If he is better than sliced bread, and he solved the CLICO problem, what you moved him for? To put him, of course, to go all over the place in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs! If he is that good, let him stay in finance as a former Governor—and that has nothing to do against the present Minister of Finance and Economy, though I know that, of course, I know him better as a banker. If he was so good, let him stay there and settle Clico as well as HCU. Those people are people too, many of whom are from Chaguanas West.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know if one could say that the BIR is being sabotaged or whether, of course, the Minister of Finance and the Economy does not know what he is doing—I do not think so—or whether, of course, the system is being undermined and he is not aware.

Mr. Speaker, I am advised that the Field Collection Unit has been practically dismantled, just like the tax monitors. This unit was designed to go to businesses to conduct inspections and to deliver VAT certificates, Mr. Speaker. That has been disbanded. Mr. Speaker, I am advised that the Criminal Tax Investigations Unit is under immense pressure because of discrepancies in the VAT online registration system, because there are a lot of cases, Mr. Speaker, where people are trying to manipulate the system and they are getting away with it, and yet all these people have been sent home. So, you find therefore, Mr. Speaker, that in every area, those different channels, those institutions, where you can have checks and balances, they have been dismantled or sent home.

Mr. Speaker, another area I want to talk about today concerns the area where, of course, it talks about the system of payment and the collection of taxes. Mr. Speaker, I am talking about the payment and the collection of taxes, especially with regard to immigrants from Caricom and other countries, especially China.

Mr. Speaker, it is an established fact, this country is overrun with individuals—Chinese, Caribbean, you name them, non-nationals. There are restaurants all over the place—where I live have 14 restaurants in a half mile—Mr. Speaker, I am advised that the vast majority of these persons do not even have a BIR number.

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Mr. Speaker, I am advised that these workers are not even registered for taxation. I am advised that there is no monitoring of these businesses, so nobody

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knows exactly how many persons there are, where they are working, how much they are earning, and how much PAYE they must pay to the State and, therefore, the tax revenue that is not being collected is lost. Mr. Speaker, it means that the burden of providing services and infrastructure is being carried out by the bona fide citizens of the country, by the law-abiding people and the immigrants of Caricom or, should I say, the non-nationals are not paying taxes. They have no BIR number, no checks and balances. They are paying no NIS. They are paying no health surcharge, and we come here to listen to the Finance Bill and nothing is said about that.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make the point that what we are seeing here today is the cart before the horse. What we are seeing here today in this Finance Bill are cosmetic measures to fool the people. I want to suggest, again, that it makes better sense to establish the Regulatory Commission to perform the functions which the Minister said they would perform in the budget speech. The Minister of Finance and the Economy's budget speech, page 4, spoke about the social and financial implications of illegal gambling on minors and compulsive gamblers. How does he propose to address those things? What has he done to tackle those issues? What has the Minister of Finance and the Economy said to tackle the issue of compulsive gamblers, or minors who are involved in gambling?

In fact, Mr. Speaker, I would have thought that it made more sense to ensure the Regulatory Commission and the BIR are functional before coming to Parliament to increase fees, increase penalties, talk about licensing. Put the BIR to function. It is dysfunctional. Establish the Regulatory Commission and then come to the House and talk about fees and licensing, and penalties and so on, and that is why I said they are putting the cart before the horse.

Mr. Speaker, we are told this afternoon about some fines being increased for the Litter Act, \$2,000 to \$4,000, \$4,000 to \$8,000, and so on. If you have an old vehicle on the road, a derelict vehicle—from \$2,000 to \$4,000, \$400 per day and then \$800 per day, and so on. Who is there to enforce these laws? Mr. Speaker, I just heard that you are going to find litter wardens and I am saying, if there are 105 litter wardens then it is the best kept secret, because the Minister said that the money collected for littering so far was \$459 to \$1,000, and so on. The fact is, I am saying to you, that whatever is happening it is not working. It is not working. All you have to do is take a drive around the country. I mean, with your tinted vehicle it is hard for you to see outside, but put down your glass, take off your air condition, take a drive around the country and you will see, of course, with all the litter wardens you are talking about, you will see coconut shells all over the place.

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You will see chicken feathers. You will see entrails of animals dumped on the roadside. You will see old washing machines and fridges.

You will see them still and I am saying, therefore, what you have to do is to have a sting operation, catch some persons, and once you catch some persons and they are penalized, then others will fall into line. Mr. Speaker, I do not even think the number of litter wardens the Member for Tabaquite is saying is adequate in any event for what has to be done.

Mr. Speaker, I come to the Municipal Corporations Act. I am happy to see that the police officers there are getting their \$1,000 Special Duty Allowance. I was trying to get that for them over a year ago. I took a note to Cabinet for the SRPs, and I made the case that these people deserve their \$1,000 too. The SRPs got theirs, but theirs were put on the back burner, and today I am happy to see that they are getting their money. Mr. Speaker, that is one thing, but these officers are overworked. There are overworked because there is a very severe shortage of municipal officers in these corporations.

I listened to the Member for St. Joseph a while ago and he was speaking about St. Joseph or San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation. I want to tell the Member today about the Chaguanas Borough Corporation, where the former Mayor is now the Minister of Works and Infrastructure. I want to tell him about the Chaguanas Borough Corporation. Mr. Speaker, I want to tell the Member that at the Chaguanas Borough Corporation—currently there are four officers: one inspector, one sergeant acting, one corporal and one corporal acting, and there are four SRPs. That is it! And what they are asking for since 2003 to today is 51 officers. They have eight, they want 51, but you said that, of course, these officers got \$1,000 more. That is not the issue. The issue is to increase the strength, make them more effective. At one time, Minister, when you were mayor of Chaguanas they had motorcycles and, of course, no riders, no police officers. Five of them they had there and no police officers. Nothing has changed much then.

Hon. Dr. Rambachan: I had 16 officers when I was there.

Mr. J. Warner: How many you had?

Hon. Dr. Rambachan: Sixteen.

Mr. J. Warner: Sixteen. You better go back then, [*Laughter*] because I heard the fact is right now they only have eight, four by four. I am saying therefore, that cannot be done. [*Crosstalk*]

If you look at the San Fernando City Corporation, Willa Straker, the CEO told the JSC that in San Fernando there were currently 33 officers employed and they

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needed 85. In Point Fortin, Mayor Clyde Paul said this is a sore point for him. He said his strength is now 30 but he wants 65, and the list goes on and on. So I am saying therefore and, I repeat again, what you have to do is to make sure that you increase the strength. Yes, give them their \$1,000, but increase the strength.

Mr. Speaker, I come to the Customs Act. The Customs and Excise Division is short by more than 50 per cent. I want to say it again. It is short by more than 50 per cent. Super Minister, Vasant Bharath, the Minister of Trade, Industry and Investment, Information and Finance, on January 24, 2014—in the *Express* he said:

“Manpower issue at Customs and Excise”—

will introduce—“more technology,”—to fill the—“vacancies...”

I quote him:

“(The Division requires) 460 officers; currently there are only 200, so there is a manpower issue,...”—he says.

He said:

And these—“vacancies...have been existing for years”—and are not filled.

Today we come here to listen to a Finance Bill talk about the Customs and Excise Division, and the Minister has not said a single word about the manpower shortage. Not a single word. So therefore, I am saying, where would you get the manpower to do those inspections that he is asking for? Where will they get the manpower to improve the efficiency and the effectiveness at the ports, and to close those gaps as you have? Mr. Speaker, just PR, smoke and mirrors; and I am saying again, the time for that is over. It is over. People expect to get substance, not form.

Mr. Speaker, if you go to the Cocoa and Coffee Industry Act, that Act is being repealed. I quote:

To facilitate the disbanding of the Cocoa and Coffee Industry Board.

And the Minister says—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Chaguanas West has expired.

Motion made: That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Hon. A. Roberts*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Continue, hon. Member. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. J. Warner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank my colleague from D'Abadie/O'Meara and my other colleagues. The Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara, if ever you want to come on the ILP next year [*Desk thumping & Laughter*] we have a few cards, because you "eh" going COP, you "eh" going UNC, so come to the ILP. Yes, thank you very much, Sir.

The Cocoa and Coffee Industry Act: The Minister said he could only repeal the Board, disband the Board, and the Minister told us today the Board shall be replaced with a new state enterprise which will focus—I quote:

On the marketing, sales, internal quality control, and commercialization of the research and development initiatives.

That sounds good on paper, nice words. But before you ask us, this Parliament, to shut down the Cocoa and Coffee Industry Board, do you not expect us, out of respect, to know what we are replacing it with. So you ask that we shut it down, but tell us, Minister, what would be put in its place. So we here have to buy cat in bag. Right?

Therefore, I am saying that for me to dismantle the Cocoa and Coffee Industry Board and put nothing in place, is what I call "donkey logic". Of course, I want to make the point quickly; this Government, their egos inflated with hubris, I know they know everything. They believe that they have a monopoly on intelligence. They are the best brain ever in Government and so on, and they expect us to close our eyes and follow them to hell. Well, not me. Not me. All I am saying, have the decency to share the information and say what shall replace the Cocoa and Coffee Industry Board.

Mr. Speaker, what will happen to the cocoa and coffee growers and their stock when this Board is closed and, some thing, some special purpose company is put in its place? What will happen, Mr. Speaker? Mr. Speaker, how will they negotiate the price for cocoa which is now US \$7 per kilo, and we have the best cocoa in the Western World? Mr. Speaker, how come the Cocoa and Coffee Industry Board is a body corporate? They propose to put a special purpose company, another body corporate. What are they doing? Do we have to change Tweedledum for Tweedledee? And in any case, tell us what Tweedledee is. Tell us, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, in the present Cocoa and Coffee Industry Board, if it is bad I ask the question: What are the factors which are hampering it from doing research and development? In fact, Mr. Speaker, as you know, when you shut down an

institution, you close it down, property goes missing. Institutional memory and talent, that is lost, and you have to rebuild from scratch. Mr. Speaker, the Board was established by an Act in 1961. The Act was amended in 1988. If the board is bad, can the Board not be revised and be transformed through amendments? Can it not be done? But you come here, abracadabra, you close the Cocoa and Coffee Board. Close it down and put what in place? Nothing! Ex nihilo nihil fit, out of nothing, nothing comes.

7.05 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I want to suggest that what the Government is doing is to snuff out the last life, the last breath of the cocoa and coffee industry, an industry that is admired worldwide for its product.

This SPC, this special purpose company that is being proposed to replace the Cocoa and Coffee Industry Board, Minister, can you tell us: Has it been formed as yet? Is there an organizational chart, Minister? Minister, are there persons in place to pick up the ball and run with it? [*Interruption and laughter*] Mr. Speaker, are interviews being conducted now for this board? I know you may have your friends and family, but tell us, let us know, Mr. Minister, how this new team will be selected. Who are the persons to run this SPC? Will we have a Phillip Rahaman? I do not know if it is Phillip Rahaman; it could be Resmi Ramnarine. I do not know, but tell us. [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, I am saying that this may be the answer; it may very well be, but you owe it to us, out of respect, to tell us what will replace the board, how it shall be constructed, how the persons shall be selected and why, and so on. None, none, none.

You talk about the Electronic Transactions Act. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Roberts: “I find all yuh making ah good team there.”

Mr. J. Warner: Yes, Bim and Bam. Mr. Speaker, the Electronic Transactions Act, very good, I like that, but I want to know what checks and balances shall be in place to ensure that the systems are not compromised. You know why I said that? We had the food card, the TT food card, and that programme was abused. That programme was used by Government as a slush fund. During election, Government Ministers and their campaign staff were handing out food cards like “chilibibi”. [*Desk thumping*] Many of those cards expired on the very day of election.

So I am saying therefore, the food cards are like credit cards. Therefore I am saying: What checks and balances do you have? In fact, during the Chaguanas

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West by-election, the Prime Minister expressed concern about the allegations which I was making about these cards that were being given out, and the then Minister of the People and Social Development—then, he was across on the other side—the Member for Caroni Central, said that an investigation shall be launched into the report. He said so on September 01, 2013:

“Minister orders food card probe”

To date, not a single finding has come forward, and now the Minister has been fired from the Ministry, I guess the issue is dead. I am saying, therefore, when you come with these electronic cards, all I am asking is that there are checks and balances so there are no compromises on these cards.

Mr. Speaker, I want to end by saying to the Minister: You could change a comma to a full stop. You could change \$100,000 to \$200,000. You could delete a paragraph and insert a line, but at the end of the day the Finance Bill has told us, and particularly me, nothing.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to join this debate on the Finance Bill, 2014 and to share some thoughts on the amendments being proposed by the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy, Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai.

I wanted to take the opportunity to respond first to several issues raised by colleagues in the debate, before dealing specifically with matters related to the amendments to the Petroleum Act and other matters dealing with the Customs Act, Chap. 78:01.

A lot has been said, and before my friend, the Member for Chaguanas West, leaves us, as I am sure he has to, I would like to respond to a couple of matters raised by the Member, and to indicate to my friend from Chaguanas West before he leaves, that I took careful note of his statements. It suggests to us on this side the amount of work that we have to do, because those issues raised, whether it is a bridge that needs to be built, a road that needs paving, a drain that needs construction, those are outstanding matters that we have to address. It cannot be left for any other administration to address that.

I want to assure my friend, the Member for Chaguanas West, that if he harbours any thought that a PNM administration will build a bridge in Chaguanas West or fix a box drain in Longdenville or build a school in Charlieville,

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[*Laughter*] I want to tell him the spelling is J-A-N-A-A-M, not in this “janaam”, not in this birth. So when we hear those complaints, I want to say that it reminds us of how much work we have to do, but that does not take away from the work we have done. That contribution reminds us that there is a lot more work to be done, whether it is in Toco, in Sangre Grande, indeed, in Oropouche, in Siparia, San Fernando, Arima, Diego Martin, we have a lot of work to be done.

Mr. Speaker, it is very simple, it is easy for Ministers of Government to stand now, after four years, and rattle off very easily a list of achievements of their Ministry and achievements of the Government. There is today no shortage of data if we want to speak to our achievements.

As Minister of Housing and Urban Development, I am extremely proud that in areas such as Union Hall, San Fernando, in Egypt, Chaguanas, in Princes Town, Fairfield we have started under this administration housing that has been completed under this administration. [*Desk thumping*] That housing in Egypt and in Union Hall in particular are reputed to be the best houses, the most beautiful, the highest quality ever built by the public sector in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to remind the House as well that when in 2010 we came into office and a decision was taken—I believe it was on an Easter weekend as well, and we are coming up to Easter—to clear state lands, and we embarked upon clearing state lands, there was an enormous amount of protests from several sectors over the clearing of state lands. Today, when you go to those state lands, you will see housing estates built for the very people who were protesting. Sometimes in government you have to take tough decisions. You have to face the criticism. You have to face the fire, if you want to deliver. Development is not an easy exercise; it is a painful exercise.

So the contribution by the Member for Chaguanas West really reminds us that we have achieved, but there is so much to be done, and so much more to be done that the People’s Partnership deserves a second term in office to continue that work. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, my friend, the Member for Chaguanas West, has also assumed a very interesting role in the politics and in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. Anytime he speaks, he is, of course, extremely passionate on the issue of corruption and good governance. He speaks enormously to this issue. It is a very critical issue that we must take note of. It is important that we deliver the

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tangibles, the drain, the road, the bridge, the school, the community centre, the house, but it is equally important we deliver the intangibles, the good governance.

My friend, the Member for Chaguanas West, has become in this Parliament really a voice crying out for good, clean government. I would like to actually get and photocopy his contribution from the *Hansard* so we could send it to the Australian newspapers, the *British Times*, the *Hindustan Times*, because I myself am offended every time I read those papers, to see my friend described as a disgraced member of FIFA. I see in a newspaper from Australia:

“Whistleblower claims Australia Paid Disgraced Jack Warner Half a Million Dollars for World Cup Influence”

I myself feel terrible about that because they do not know in this Parliament he really is an anticorruption fighter, champion. [Laughter] Maybe if they knew that, they would not be publishing these type of things in the global newspapers. [Laughter]

But this is something we must share; that passion for good governance and that passion for transparency. We must share it with the newspapers throughout the world, and the *Hansard* should be sent to these writers so that they could correct their ways. [Laughter] Not that they would stop writing, but they will not be describing a Member of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago as disgraced. [Laughter] They will not do that and therefore they will not insult this country, and they will not insult you, Member for Diego Martin North/East, because I know you are not a man who likes insults. So I want to thank the Member for pointing out those matters as well.

Mr. Warner: Can I leave now?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: I am sure he welcomes the observation. [Laughter] I do not know why there is so much chuckling around.

Mr. Speaker, the Member raised several issues of governance; I want to address it. The Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, has been extremely swift in dealing with several matters involving governance. [Interruption] I want to ask honestly to my friends opposite in the PNM, if in the history of Trinidad and Tobago we have had any administration where a political leader and Prime Minister had the courage to confront allegations, to confront issues of governance in the way that the Member for Siparia has done? What she has done as well is really to put a new standard for government that any other government will have to follow, including— [Interruption]

Hon. Member: Serious?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Any other government will have to follow, because the people out there are now accustomed to a certain political practice.

My friend, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, as well, got into a lot of hot water earlier today when he was speaking and making such unfortunate remarks—and the Member for St. Joseph followed, as we anticipated he would have—in reference to the Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development, Sen. The Hon. Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie.

The Members were suggesting that the Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development under the People’s Partnership sits in a darkroom somewhere, in a closeted 10 by 10 room, and in this windowless, dark room he looks at the CSO data and decides to change them, and give them back to the public officers and say, “Look, put dis, it look better for de Government.” Mr. Speaker, that is what they verily believe, because they practised that when they were in government. They practised that. You see, that is how they think. It is the same CSO; the same staff; the same institution, Mr. Speaker; the same staff, the same institution that we inherited.

So under the PNM, their former Prime Minister, Patrick Manning, came to this House when we were elsewhere and took the CSO figures and boasted and praised himself that the unemployment had fallen—at that time unemployment fell to 5 per cent. Mr. Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin North/East was sitting next to him and pounded the table. They had to call the parliamentary carpenter when he was done. The figures were good. [*Laughter*] They called the carpenter when the Member for Diego Martin North/East was done. [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Carpenter?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Carpenter is a singer.

Mr. Roberts: “Allyuh too bouge.”

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: So it was good then, but today when we announced 3.7 from a labour force bulletin, they have difficulty with that. The Member for St. Joseph wanted to know “where dis figure from”. When I got up to explain, he quarreled. They try this smartness.

My friend from St. Joseph is developing to be a clever politician, I tell you. Last week you know we had a protest outside, and because when he went to the UNC supporters nobody recognized him, they thought he was a UNC MP and they embraced him. [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

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7.20 p.m.

Yeah, he is smart, and it is after one of the supporters tell me, but this man was not wearing a balisier tie, so they are smart. They thought he was a member for some rural part of Trinidad and they embraced him, and then he brought two people from St. Joseph, so when he went by the PNM side they embraced him again. That is a smart man. He is a smart fella. [*Continuous laughter*] Very clever, he would never wear the balisier tie. Never! [*Interruption*]

So, Mr. Speaker, today he comes with the same “smartmanism”, wants to challenge the CSO figure. The CSO data, Mr. Speaker, is official data. And another administration coming in, it is the same professional people, public officers, they will conduct their own with similar methodology and come to the House. You know, Mr. Speaker, for 10 years when I was in Opposition I was speaking on labour issues, and if you were to raise issues of employment, raise the substantive labour policy issues, whether it is the quality of employment, the sectoral composition of employment, the occupational character of employment growth, you can look at the CSO data and make an argument about the composition of employment, the various sectors. If you believe that traditional manufacturing is going down too fast, you get the labour data from the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, to look at retrenchment over a period of time so you can build substantive arguments on employment. But their argument is, “dey cooking up de figures, Dr. Tewarie sitting down with a pot and he is cooking the figures—the chef”. [*Laughter*]

This is their argument. It is not an intellectual argument over ILO labour standards and classification of employment, and so on; it is argument that they are cooking the figures. [*Interruption*] They do not know because there is no labour expert on that side there. [*Interruption*] There are few experts on the whole but they will not speak to the qualitative issues. The same matter came up today and I just wanted to take this opportunity, Mr. Speaker—you know anytime they hear SIS they get jittery. I think anytime they hear SIS, they need an SOS. [*Laughter*] Anytime you hear SIS, you need an SOS.

You see, Mr. Speaker, that does get them crazy, they get like red ants, like “bachac” when they hear SIS. [*Laughter*] “Whe he doin’ there? Wha happenin’ here?” Now, Mr. Speaker, these are citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, but look at the venom, as if they get back in office they will jail everybody in sight. That is the venom they have against citizens, against businessmen, hard-working business people in this country who get up early in the morning, two o’clock, three o’clock, work hard, earn, sacrifice; public holidays they work, Saturday they

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work. There are business people in this country who do not know the distinction between Sunday and Monday, they work—[*Interruption*—and the approach of the Opposition is to criminalize citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

This man is not before any court, not before any tribunal, not accused of any criminal offence, but they criminalize him, so now if he gets a contract to pick up 10 dogs on the highway, “bobol”. This is it. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, the Member for St. Joseph—[*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: “They go jail all yuh.”

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Because they tried it before.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member. May I appeal to Members again, I know the Member for Port of Spain South is yet to rise to speak, but I believe the hon. Member will speak later.

Miss Mc Donald: I will.

Mr. Speaker: So, I would like you to take copious notes, but allow the hon. Member to speak. You know, sometimes we might feel a certain how; when the Member for Diego Martin North/East is speaking the Members on the Government side feel a certain how; when the Government side is speaking the Members on that side feel a certain how. All I am saying is that we live in a democratic state and democracy demands that we exercise civility, I keep saying, and we exercise respect. We can engage in some light banter, but allow the Member for Oropouche East to speak in silence. Allow him to speak. You have my full protection, hon. Member. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, with such reinforcement I march forward. [*Laughter*] Mr. Speaker, I was telling you about their paranoia with SIS, and they will continue with the propaganda until day end. Every week they will come and say the same thing, and hope that people eventually believe you at the 99th time.

So, they come again, Chan Chadeesingh is chairman of SIS or was chairman, and read from an ad, I think it is some ad from Auto Vision, a newsletter of the company, and they read. And, Mr. Speaker, I have something in my hand, the annual returns of SIS, 2009, 2010, 2011. I have it right through here and there is no mention of a director by the name of Chan Chadeesingh. [*Interruption*] But, this is the official record. I do not want to quote the names of the people here, but there is none. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, this is a country where a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago had to go and pay \$80,000 to advertise in every newspaper to protect himself from the

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Leader of the Opposition. He put ads in every newspaper to say he is not the chairman of SIS. Mr. Speaker, imagine innocent citizens must pay money to defend themselves against an opposition leader. What happens if he becomes Prime Minister? What happens if such a person becomes Prime Minister? Imagine in Opposition you have to pay money to defend your name against the Opposition Leader. This is the first time in history. Never before in the history of this country has someone had to go to the papers and put an ad to defend their name against an opposition leader. What happens? As my friend from D'Adabie/O'Meara is fond of saying, what happens when this blue light and siren take over? *[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, what will innocent citizens have to do?

Mr. Speaker, he is not here today, I regret that, because I wanted to say it in his face.

Mr. Roberts: He is playing golf.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: I understand from someone that he is playing golf in Dubai and I wish him well with whatever round of holes or whatever they are doing there. *[Laughter]* I do not know much about that, Mr. Speaker. I wish him well, if it is true that he is in Dubai playing golf. What do they call it?

Hon. Member: A round of holes, yes.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, he left all of them here and is playing golf in Dubai, so we are told. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker, but on that issue, I want to make the point that they should stop telling untruths. It is not honourable to do so. And the gentleman from St. Joseph gave us a Machiavellian confession when he said that this fella was his friend. I want to tell you with friends like you who need—*[Laughter]* The fella says that is his friend, but I do not want to know how you does treat your enemy. He comes in the Parliament, did not bother to ask his friend, “my friend of 21 years—*[Interruption]*”

Dr. Gopeesingh: Forty years.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: “My friend of 40 years, tell me, were you ever the chairman of SIS?” He did not ask his friend. He came in the Parliament, made this announcement, “gran charge” and say that is his friend. *[Interruption]* No, that is another story I will get to another time. *[Interruption]* I would talk about that another time, but, Mr. Speaker, now is not the time for that. *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. Speaker: Please, Members!

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, may I also indicate to colleagues opposite that they are making a big issue and they really pick on nothingness

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sometimes, about the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs and his qualifications. The Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs is a graduate from the University of the West Indies. *[Interruption]* He has an MSc degree, he has an MBA degree, and we will get the *Hansard* and clarify everything, but I want to tell you that he has a BSc, he has an MSc and an MBA, and more than qualified to be a Cabinet Minister and Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs. *[Interruption]* He has an MSc in petroleum engineering. *[Interruption]* I—no that is BS you are talking. *[Laughter]* He has a BSc, but I want to tell you, you do not have to be—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Imbert: Standing Order 36(4)!

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, I want to get back to the BSc.

Mr. Imbert: A point of order, you have to sit down.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: What point of order?

Mr. Imbert: Sit down! Standing Order 36(4). *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. Speaker: I am not too sure, to be quite frank, what BS in the context of the discussion, and I do not want to add any interpretation. But, I would say that if the Member feels offended by the expression of that term, I would ask the hon. Member to be guided accordingly.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, I am guided by your sagely advice and I would stick to the issue of the BSc.

So, Mr. Speaker, the point I made is that the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs is well qualified and a brilliant, technically strong politician to be—*[Interruption]* they all run—and quite qualified. So, Mr. Speaker, I would say nothing further on that except to warn my friends opposite, and to indicate to them, to give them a caution, that they need to be careful of this line that they are on where every single week they come with monotonous frequency and just throw mud, and when they do that they undermine the institutions of the State. You undermine the institutions of the State when you throw mud on the institutions. Today you were suggesting that public officers at the CSO are in a conspiracy—*[Interruption]*

Miss Mc Donald: He never said that.

Mr. Roberts: He did. He said that.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:—to distort and mislead the population of Trinidad and Tobago. *[Interruption]* This is what you are suggesting.

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Miss Mc Donald: Mr. Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 36(5). My colleague from Diego Martin North/East never made—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Roberts: He did!

Miss Mc Donald:—such a statement.

Hon. Member: Check the *Hansard*.

Miss Mc Donald: He never said that—he said the Minister.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, well repeat, let me hear.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, what I am saying is that the effect of what the Member said is to suggest.

Miss Mc Donald: No!

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: But that is my interpretation. So, you could tell me now that I am breaking the Standing Order by interpreting?

Miss Mc Donald: No!

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, the effect of what the Member said was to suggest that public officers were in a conspiracy with the Minister of Planning to distort and deceive the population of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Interruption*] That is the interpretation, Mr. Speaker.

So, you cannot do that. We never did that in Opposition. We questioned the composition of employment; we questioned the nature of sectoral distribution of labour, but to come in Parliament and attack a public servant or a group of public servants is very sad, and it tells you again the mind, the operating mind if they get into office what will they do? It will be vicious; it will be desperate; it will be victimization; it will be brutality; it will be criminality; it will be murder if they get back there. They will persecute and prosecute everybody in sight—and businessmen—[*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: Mr. Speaker, I rise again. I rise on Standing Order 36(5).

Mr. Roberts: No! No!

Miss Mc Donald: You cannot direct me. You, Member for D'Adabie/O'Meara.

Mr. Speaker: Please! Please! Could you clarify Standing Order 36(5)?

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Miss Mc Donald: Mr. Speaker, it is based on what—perhaps, Mr. Speaker, you are a bit—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Why do you not clarify the point?

Miss Mc Donald: He is saying that if the PNM, if we; he was saying you all. So, if the PNM gets back in power it is going to be, in other words, mayhem, we will victimize, and Mr. Speaker, that is the furthest thing from the truth and he cannot stand there and abuse us like this. You cannot do that!

Mr. Roberts: You all abused me last week outside.

Mr. Speaker: Please! Please! This is a debate, I do not think the hon. Member is accusing all the Members of the Opposition of being, or would like to, or be part of an abusive campaign. He is making a statement. Now, you will have an opportunity to rise and respond and say, no, what you are saying is wrong; your organization will not do such a thing. If he is, however, accusing the entire PNM Bench of being involved in any activity that could be bordering on corruption, treason, I will ask him to withdraw his remarks. But in those circumstances I am saying, in the cut and thrust of the debate, you can respond at the appropriate time, clear the air. Continue, hon. Member. [*Desk thumping*]

7.35 p.m.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to move on to the Petroleum Act now, Chap 62:01, and I want to move on to the amendments to this Act. It is the objective of the Government to deal with unlawful conduct by persons or organizations involved in illicit activities that undermine law and order, that attempt to seek economic gain by undermining State institutions, by peddling, by theft, and to this extent we have an amendment to section 6(2) of the Petroleum Act that increases the fine for persons involved in the so-called diesel racket.

Mr. Speaker, this is a racket and an activity that has been taking place for several years in Trinidad and Tobago, and it is noteworthy that the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, Sen. Ramnarine, has really, over the last couple years, led the way and almost personified this fight against persons involved in this unlawful activity. He has done so from the perspective of Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, but also as someone who is very passionate about the sector, and today he has inspired this amendment by the Government to increase the fines for such an offence as engaging in petroleum operations without a licence and other related matters. The fines are moving from \$1,500 to \$50,000.

Mr. Roberts: Yes, man. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: That is the nature of that.

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

By doing so, we believe that if persons are caught—involved in this level of illicit activities, it would be an example to others who are also involved, or thinking about being involved in such activities. Mr. Speaker—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you. It cannot be that we continue in office and turn a blind eye to this level of unlawful conduct by persons who may also be passing themselves off as legitimate business persons. It matters not for this Government whether persons are at the lower level of the criminal chain or at the higher level. It matters not. It matters to us that you are involved in breaking the law, and if you are involved in breaking the law, this Government is intent on taking action. It has long been the opinion of many people that a lot of the offences in this country, offences derived from either common law or offences on the books for decades—sort of post-colonial offences—they carry fees and fines that are very trivial, and because of that, they can almost encourage you to break the law because you believe that the fine is so small that you can get away. I think this is an important lesson here emerging, that if you commit those types of offences, you will be treated in a punitive manner by the authorities and institutions that are so set up to deal with them.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Member for Tabaquite spoke earlier in the debate and the Member for Chaguanas West attempted to counter that by speaking about the work that has been done by this Government and how much more to do. The Member for Caroni East, incidentally, had to stand up to defend his own track record. But the Member for Caroni East can do that—and we are sure he can do that—but I must say that it is in the area of education, that is one of several areas that we have seen enormous progress, in terms of the construction of the Early Childhood Education Centres, primary schools, secondary schools.

May I remind you that it was the commitment of this Government to provide a laptop for children. When we got into office we started that programme and so far I believe about 74,000 children, I am told, would have benefited from that exercise. [*Desk thumping*] The effect of that—I will give you just one example. But the effect of that, for example, in the constituency that I represent, the constituency of Oropouche East, has been that the children will use the laptop, but

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not only the children but in some cases their parents, and would you believe, Madam Deputy Speaker, the grandparents too?

I have had a family where it was related to me that a grandmother was using the computer of the child—learnt to use it; got the skill when the child got the computer and was actually checking to see if the tablets that they give are the best grade and what were the purposes of the tablet and what downside the tablet would have and so on, by googling the name of the medication provided to her from the health centre.

Madam Deputy Speaker, when I heard that story in particular, I was moved because I felt that it spoke to the vision of the Prime Minister to create a society that is 100 per cent computer literate and prepared for development of the future. That speaks to vision, that you can have grandparents using the computer; you can have children sharing with their brothers and sisters, organizing their homework and so on. It is something, I dare say, had it been introduced, you know, 20 years ago or 10 years ago, as the case may be, we could have been in a different place now in terms of the education level and in terms of our capacity to, not only produce hardware, but, indeed, to produce software for another generation of workers.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, the computers have been a major success. Not only that, you would recall that among the very first things done by this administration, Members of Government, Members of Cabinet, took a 5 per cent pay cut. We have now contributed thousands and thousands of dollars to the Children's Life Fund. [*Desk thumping*] We have saved 83 lives. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Deputy Speaker, we have saved 83 lives and that is 83 lives, 83 families, 83 communities, and that was a commitment from the Member for Siparia, who made that commitment on the election platform, and it is not something to be taken lightly.

You see, the former administration—some colleagues opposite may not know because you were not there and, quite frankly, you cannot be blamed. Under the former administration they had a maximum amount of how much?

Mr. Roberts: Sixty thousand.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Sixty thousand for a child to save their life—\$60,000. And if that child had to get an operation for \$200,000/\$300,000, to save their life, they could not. Their parents had to go organize barbeque, curryque; go to the Commissioner of Police who had to stamp behind a paper to say they could collect money for the child; get all the papers from doctors to come and beg for

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money for a child, and children died. In that period children died. We know them, and that was very sad. The Member for Siparia determined that if it is the will of God, as expressed by the will of the people that she would become Prime Minister, she would stop that, and upon entering office immediately established the Children's Life Fund to save the lives of children. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, my friends opposite, they did not contribute to this life fund. One wonders, if there is a change of administration, will they then cancel the Childrens' Life Fund? Will they close it down? Will they go back to \$60,000? You see, the former Minister of Health, his name is "Ramnarine" Jerry Narace, Minister of Health—went to Cabinet with a note in the year 2009, more or less. Colleagues opposite were not in Cabinet—several of you. Former Minister Narace actually went with a note to Cabinet to increase that money for children. You know, the Cabinet of the Member for San Fernando East rejected that note?

Mr. Roberts: Oh my God!

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: They rejected it! The Cabinet of which the Member for Diego Martin North/East was a Member, of which the Member for Diego Martin West was a vocal Member—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Roberts: Diego Martin Central too.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Point Fortin—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Roberts: Central and all.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Former Minister of Health, Jerry Narace, took a note to Cabinet to increase the amount of money for children, they rejected it. But my question to Members opposite is that, if it is that they are returned to office by any means, would they close down the Children's Life Fund and take the children of this country and punish them again in the event that they need lifesaving surgery? Would we go back to those days?

You see, Madam Deputy Speaker, they talk a lot about governance and the reputation and the performance of this administration. When we came in, we met a treasury that was under attack by the Clico debacle, by HCU. This is their legacy. We met that. It took the work of the Member for Siparia, the Member for Tunapuna at that time, to hold on to the economy and reverse that process. Twenty billion dollars later—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Twenty point eight.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: How much?

Hon. Member: Twenty point eight.

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Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Twenty point eight billion dollars later we have brought stability to that situation. Persons have gotten back some money, if not all. Members of the HCU have also received moneys; not all. So the Member for Chaguanas West comes and he cries now: “What about this and what about that?” Now, you would never believe this fella was for three years in the Cabinet, “yuh know”.

Hon. Member: Former Minister of Works.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Minister of Works, and really Minister at large. He was all over the place.

Mr. Roberts: Minister who “ha elevator for himself”.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Yeah. You would never believe that he was there, and today the Member for Chaguanas West talked about everything is bad; the country collapsing. For Chaguanas West, his world has collapsed, not Trinidad and Tobago because he is in a difficult situation in his constituency. Anywhere he goes, I think he is confronted with placard-bearing constituents, not with pleasant placards. He is confronted by protest activity and so on, so his world is a bit difficult. But it is not the country.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in this country today, if you drive along the highway, you see the oncology centre being built, promised about 20 years ago. You go lower down you see what you call Minister Fazal Karim’s headquarters going up at Endeavour. When you go lower down you see the aquatic centre—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Roberts: Yes, man! [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: World class aquatic centre being constructed in Couva.

Mr. Roberts: And velodrome.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: When you look over the road you see the children’s hospital out of the ground being constructed; drive a little more, you see the San Fernando teaching hospital; drive a bit more, you see the highway from Golconda to Debe. Look on the left, you see the University South Campus.

I mean, what else do people want? Blood? What else? This is one administration in four years, and this is in addition to the bridges. There is a bridge in La Horquetta, I am told, how many years it broke down? Forty years, somewhere there.

Hon. Member: Seventy.

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Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: There is a bridge in Oropouche East, 45 years the bridge broke down there. We opened it, I think, a year ago. Bridges, roads, that people never thought in their lifetime will be paved, have been paved.

Water! There are people who, since the British came here, they never got water. They got water.

Mr. Roberts: Increased from 15 per cent to 53 per cent, 24/7.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes. There was a time people used to come here and march up and down the street with a pot and a pan in a duster, “an ting”, marching for water. They say “dey cyar bathe. It ha no water”. Today that is, by and large, a thing of the past. Water is no longer a political issue as it was years ago.

T&TEC—electricity. There are persons who complained for years and years. They got it. Roads, recreation grounds; you drive around this country, you would not believe so many grounds are lit up now.

Hon. Member: One hundred and thirty.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: One hundred and thirty?

Mr. Roberts: Yeah.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: One hundred and thirty recreation grounds lit under this administration. [*Desk thumping*] One hundred and thirty recreation grounds, you never thought. New roads are being constructed; the connector road at St. Helena. “Long time you wind around some place; yuh ha tuh slow dong becor 10 people line up for doubles on de right; five people bad park on de left.” Today, you just reach St. Helena there, duck through a connector road and you are in the airport.

7.50 p.m.

The Couva Interchange, you line up long time, wind up in traffic on the road there to go to Couva. Today, the people of Trinidad and Tobago have seen this. Sure, there is a lot more work to be done, because in every community—we have communities in Chaguanas West, as well—they need roads, they need bridges. In D’Abadie/O’Meara—in my own constituency—there are areas we have to address; in our colleagues’ constituencies there is work to be done.

Madam Deputy Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, for this House to continue to sit beyond 8.00 p.m. there must be a procedural motion. I now call upon the Leader of Government Business.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Madam Deputy Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 10(11), I beg to move that the House continue to sit until completion of all stages of the Finance Bill, 2014.

Question put and agreed to.

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Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am saying that so much progress has taken place, whether it is in education, infrastructure, housing, wherever, but there is a lot more work to be done. We have not completed the job—we have not completed the work—there is a lot more to be done. There are flooding issues in Diego Martin and that region, we have to deal with that. They are working on it but we need to bring that to a stop, to have a resolution there so it will not flood and people will not be—you know, their property will not be destroyed; they, themselves, will not be in danger. That is work we have to do. We have to fix many, many more roads in this country. We have to provide the rural areas in the east and in the south; in the south-east, in the north-east of this country. We still have poverty, unemployment—*[Interruption]* We still have a lot of work to be done in that regard. So for Members to stand up and tell us all what we have to do, yes, we agree, but you cannot change this country from what we inherited. You cannot change that in four years and completely deal with every single problem in four years. We need much more time because the country itself was not destroyed in four years. It took a long time for this country to reach the depths it did.

We are talking about crime, Madam Deputy Speaker, we know. We have had a crime rate in this country—a murder rate of over 500. We forget that. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Roberts: Five fifty-eight in 2008.

Hon. Dr. M. Moonilal: In 2008, 558. We went down to an unacceptable 485 from 558. In one year we went down more, but murder is the most serious crime and a lot more has to be done to deal with that. But, in other areas, whether it is burglary, vehicle larceny, other areas of serious crime—we have had an almost 35 per cent drop in serious crimes except murder. Murder is the most serious crime, we admit, but we are also working on that front. Today, you go on the highways

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and the byways you see much more patrols; you see it much more—[*Desk thumping*] the police patrols. We constructed, on Duncan Street, the police post. We opened a police station in Arima. We are now going to open a police station in Piarco. Then we opened a police station in Maloney. Then we are going to La Brea to open a police station in La Brea.

Hon. Member: And they say we eh working.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: And they say we are doing nothing in their area.

The Member for La Brea, there was a time he used to come here and ask questions; every week, when we fixing this pothole; when we putting back a cover on the manhole; when we cutting the grass on the left side of the lower part of the street, as if they did nothing in 10 years. Well, they did nothing but he asked his question. [*Interruption*] The engineer is here. [*Laughter*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Government work continues. Point Fortin, we do not hate the people of Point Fortin, we want to build the hospital for the people of Point Fortin. We have made a commitment to do that and we will do it, as we are going to build the children's hospital in Couva. [*Interruption*] I will come to that now.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Oropouche East has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Hon. E. McLeod*]

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much colleagues on both sides of the aisle.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I was talking about Point Fortin because I want to assure the Member for Point Fortin that, maybe not in your political "janaam", but I want to tell you that the Point Fortin Hospital—we have done our homework, our ground work—we are now on to Cabinet for approval; we are going to build that Point Fortin Hospital and it will be built. Just as we say we are building a children's hospital, it will be built—[*Desk thumping*] Arima, as well, will be built. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, in our world, these things are technical installations, they take time. If you want to do something properly, sometimes, it takes time; you have to be very careful; your conceptual plan, your RFP; your contract

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management systems; how we award things. So, the Point Fortin Hospital has taken a little longer than we would wish, but we are getting there and we will construct that Point Fortin Hospital. But, they have promised those things for how much years? How many years?

I am proud to announce that in Mayaro we have awarded the contract—contractor is on site—to start the Mayaro Fire Station. [*Desk thumping*] Dr. Eric Williams, their founding leader, went to Mayaro in 1962. Member for Point Fortin, he drove an Austin Princess. He drove that, he went to Mayaro.

Mr. Roberts: What was the licence number?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: PM1. He went to Mayaro and promised, in 1962, to the people of Mayaro, a fire station. So we are implementing, not only our promise, we are implementing your promise. [*Desk thumping*] [*Laughter*] We gave out the contract, contractor on site; they are on the ground. Mayaro fire station to be constructed. Again, I want to tell you, building a fire station is not building a warehouse; it is not a shed. They are highly technical and scientific projects. You will not believe how much international institutes and standards you have to follow; how much technical expertise you need to get in designing and constructing fire stations and so on.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: That is why you have not built any?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Well, we were building the police stations which are also technical constructions, but the fire stations are not easy; it is not putting up bricks and mortar and calling it a fire station, you know. Those things have all types of engineering challenges and codes that you have to meet and so on, and not everybody could build that. You cannot just give anybody to build that.

Mr. Roberts: They built one and the fire truck could not go in. [*Laughter*] You forget?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: I understand that.

My friend, the Member for Diego Martin North/East—well, he walked out the Parliament already because he wanted to leave early in any event. He built something in Grenada, one breeze blow and threw it down and lectures every week on engineering and defining himself as an engineer. In fact, he should not define himself as an engineer. That is a LEGO engineer; that is LEGOLAND type of things he built, you know, that you touch one part, all break down. He boasts every week, attacking our Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs. The Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, what did he have to say on March 21, 2014 while

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answering some questions here? The Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs comes faithfully to this House to answer all his questions. He said:

“...we live in the age of science and reason...my first degree is analytical chemistry.”

He said:

“...my second degree is a master’s in petroleum engineering.”

He did not say he was an engineer.

Mr. Roberts: What he said?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: He said:

“...my second degree is a master’s in petroleum engineering.”

But, again, they want to delegitimize—he say he is an engineer, he is not an engineer. You understand? He never said that.

So, again, they came to create this thing. This man is the chairman of SIS, he is not the chairman; this one is an engineer, he is not an engineer; creating this, you know, this thing that every time you hear something you cannot believe it. They want to create doubt and mischief that the CSO figures, you cannot believe that. Sen. Tewarie is sitting in a four by four room with a pot and he is throwing in the data and cooking it. *[Interruption]* Yes, that is what they try to do so you delegitimize everything. *[Interruption]* Not a tawa, it has to be a pot on the tawa.

Madam Deputy Speaker, but you know what they cannot say and what they will not say is that they promised the Mayaro fire station, we do it. They promised police stations, we build them. They promised to fix infrastructure, we built it. That is what they cannot say. *[Crosstalk]*

Please, Madam Deputy Speaker?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Members for D’Abadie/O’Meara and Port of Spain South, please allow the Member to speak in silence.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonial: Madam Deputy Speaker, I will forgive them because you know they have a big challenge on their hands with their internal business and so on.

Miss Mc Donald: Get out of our business. *[Laughter]*

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: You see how they get already. Madam Deputy Speaker, they are hot like a tawa, hot like a tawa.

Mr. Roberts: Take care “yuh” get slap, you know.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Once you raise that issue, they hot like a tawa.

Mr. Roberts: At Balisier House they slap easy, you know.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Deputy Speaker, we are not into any blows today. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, please, please. Continue, Member.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: I would not say anything about their internal election. [*Interruption*] No, I would not say—no, their leader is playing golf in Dubai, that is what he is doing. While we are in Trinidad here conducting the people’s business, he is playing golf somewhere.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to assure my friends opposite that when they have their questions, their queries, their requests for work and so on, Ministers of Government—all Ministers of Government have been asked to respond to Members of Parliament, not only in the Government but as well as Members in the Opposition, that their queries, their concerns would be raised; whether it is a school, they can write Minister Gopeesingh. If they have concerns about community centres, they can write Minister Peters; whether it is water issues and so on, they can write the relevant—[*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: What about roads, who I have to write?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: For roads and infrastructure, the Member for Tabaquite has an open-door policy; you can go and see him at any time and discuss your infrastructural needs in your constituency and he will seek to assist Members of the Opposition with their concerns.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to alert the national community that this year would be another year of high delivery in that we will be dealing with the hospitals in Point Fortin and Arima. We will continue the construction of police stations, fire stations. We will continue the construction of housing; that programme will take us to Trestrail in the East-West Corridor—housing in the East-West Corridor. It would also take us to—housing starts in the Couva—in both eastern and western sides in Couva and will continue the expansion of housing in the southern areas to meet the demands. It is a demand that is very difficult to meet. As we all know, we have over 150,000 applicants for housing and there is a limit as to how many you can construct and how many can be distributed. [*Interruption*]

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I want to assure the Member for Point Fortin that we are now in a position to distribute housing units in Point Fortin. She has submitted her list and I want to assure you on that list, they are processing, and you are almost certain to have persons you have recommended for housing be allocated housing in the Point Fortin area. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Roberts: Her name on the list?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: No, her name is not on the list. How could you say that? [*Laughter*] I have not seen her name, so I would—Not that I would not approve that, but I have not seen her application, but Point Fortin, certainly, we have completed a certain amount of the housing stock there. It took some time, as you know, we inherited a terrible mess in that sector. We have pictures that I would share, maybe, at another time, of some of the work done in the Debe/Wellington area and Las Alturas in Morvant. [*Interruption*] Yes, we had mobile houses, they used to be moving because poor infrastructure meant the houses were moving. In Las Alturas, I think we still need to blow up a building there because—\$18 million wasted because they did not do the geotechnical work and now you cannot put anybody in a housing apartment complex because of the risk of the earthquake.

Mr. Roberts: Who built those houses?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: They were built by the People's National Movement administration.

Hon. Member: Who was the Minister?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: The Minister of Housing was the distinguished Opposition Leader, the Member for Diego Martin West, when that was constructed. In fact, I would tell you; you now raise it, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

In Debe/Wellington, as the Member of Parliament, I went to turn the sod for the construction of that housing site when I was in Opposition. The Minister of Housing was the Member for Diego Martin West.

Dr. Gopeesingh: His leader asked him about it when they were quarrelling.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: I will bring more data another time. That Wellington housing estate in Debe, they went in the cane field and put houses and did not do the infrastructure and today—do you know today, when you offer someone a housing unit in Debe they tell you thanks one o'clock and two o'clock they come

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and say, “Could I be relocated?” That is a fact. Many people here know that and you watch the houses and say, “But, look a good house; two-bedroom, three-bedrooms”. They say, “No, no, no, the electrical sparking, the house will catch fire, the land moving, the PVC outside shifting.” That is the housing stock we got and the Member for Diego Martin West was the one who turned the sod for construction. He was in charge and had oversight responsibility for that unit; for those houses. [*Interruption*] I think he studied earth or geology or something like that yes.

Mr. Roberts: And hydrology with waste water plants.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: He studied that and then came back talking about wastewater plant when he led a delegation of businessmen to go and seek their interest in that. That is what we are dealing with. We had to correct that. It has cost over \$100 million to repair the sloppy work and the bad work in the housing sector left by the former administration and it is not finished yet, it is not finish yet.

8.05 p.m.

I want to say to my colleagues opposite, even my colleagues in the Government, sometimes you see a housing site and you see all of “dis thing” and you see them empty and you say, “Why you are not distributing? Look house empty. Distribute, distribute. Give people. Bring ah box ah key and give people house. Look house empty.” Even my colleagues, they are very passionate about housing—many people—and I tell them, “I say, listen, the houses are there. You are seeing them there, three-storey apartment, but when they were constructing that they did not design with a sewer treatment plant.” So now, none of these units you can put people in. They have no toilet facility. They cannot flush a toilet, they cannot use the place.

We had that experience in Carlsen Field; we had that experience in south. So they put housing quickly and then you discover that they do not have infrastructure. In Retrench, we had to build a wall for about \$10 million to ensure that about four apartment buildings did not fall down. We had to put sewer treatment plants in several sites because they were not designed with that. That thing took a year. To go through a procedure to do that, including proper procurement, it takes a year to put that plant.

In several areas we have had problems. I do not know who was in charge of their engineering. It was probably the Member for Diego Martin North/East. Madam Deputy Speaker, we have something called a Pan Trinbago headquarters

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along the highway. They came to me and they said, “Well, why does UDeCott not finish this and give a headquarters to the people for pan?” We did a professional assessment of that to see how much money it would take to complete it. It would take \$47 million to complete that. They put a building with two and half storeys. They built a building essentially for two storeys and then decided they want a next floor, but they did not move the roof. They just slipped in a floor in the middle there. So when you go on the second floor you are bending down, and when you go on the third floor you cannot stand. That is it.

Miss Mc Donald: Who built that?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: The PNM under UDeCott—[*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: All right, we will answer that.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:—and the Member for Diego Martin West.

Miss Mc Donald: We will answer that.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: He had responsibility.

Madam Deputy Speaker, what will I tell you? There were no approvals for that site. So there were no approvals from WASA for that site. It cannot be connected to a sewer treatment plant nearby. The land borders UWI land. So they came into land, the border is UWI land. It is not state land that way. They have no connection for water, they had no drainage, but they had no road. You will land these pans with a helicopter? You had to get a road. They had no permission for a road to go to a building.

They cut a gravel road for truck to go, and when you go up—I toured that building. When you go on the second floor you have a step to the third floor where you cannot stand. It is something like an annex type of place. What can you do there? I do not know, Madam Deputy Speaker. Then they went to Pointe-a-Pierre. Colleague, Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, how much million dollars for that shell, the gas to liquid building?

Hon. Member: The headquarters is \$170 million.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: There is a shell at Pointe-a-Pierre. When you look at the guard booth at Pointe-a-Pierre, Petrotrin—Member for St. Joseph, you must see it sometime. You know, you always frequent south. You are always by your friends in south, but I “fraid” to be your friend now, eh. But when you are going

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down south, when you are going to your colleagues at Debe you must look on the right at Petrotrin. There is a building there, a structure—a hundred and how much?

Hon. Member: One hundred and seventy.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: One hundred and seventy million dollars for that shell.

Hon. Member: The crab shell.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: The crab shell they call it there. What use we could do with that, we do not know.

Member for St. Joseph, when you are on the way to Debe, you will see the Brian Lara stadium, and that Brian Lara stadium, Member for St. Joseph, started with \$375 million or \$275 million, ended up a billion. When we went to tour there, it host—I think 7,000 people could sit, but not one person could be dry if it rains. You go into the areas and so on—I do not even want to talk about that thing. I do not want to talk. That hurt me too much.

So, you have the stadium, you have the Petrotrin, you have the Pan Trinbago, and those things have remained as, you know, an epitaph of your bad governance. It is like a tombstone you have there. When you pass you will see like a PNM tombstone.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Member, would you give way, please?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: One second, I am in full flight here. So, Madam Deputy Speaker, when you look at these structures, you ask yourself and you ask the people of Trinidad and Tobago—you are looking, you are hearing—do you want to return to the Brian Lara type construction, to the gas to liquid type building, to the Pan Trinbago headquarters type building? Do you want to return to that? That is what you want to return to? Do you not want the children's hospital? What would you do—if you have to deal with a next administration—with the children's hospital? You will close it down; let bush grow all over the children's hospital? Would you continue that as you did with Biche?

My friend, the Member for St. Joseph, I am sure he has family and friends in Biche because he is at large.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Yes. [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: I am sure. For 10 long years—the people of Biche—the PNM closed down the school. They said they cannot open that school, it has gas—gas leaking. If you open that children would die, gas leaking. The Member

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for Diego Martin North/East said that it is for “douen” and “lagahoo”. The Member for Caroni East went and opened that school in what year?

Dr. Gopeesingh: 2011.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: 2011. To this day, 2014, no child has fallen down with gas inhalation. [*Desk thumping*] Nobody is suffering from gas, nobody is suffering from stroke, nobody is suffering from appendix. They had our children getting up one o'clock in the morning, travelling far and wide. In Barrackpore—they had the children of Barrackpore going to Debe, waking up three o'clock in the morning, these little children to go to Debe to a school. We opened the Monkey Town Primary School recently in the constituency.

Are you saying that people are so blind that they will go back to a People's National Movement to experience that level of brutality, and discrimination, and pain, and suffering? Is it that is what we are saying? But this is a serious argument if you are making that, that you want to go back to that. You want to go back to the Clico fiasco? A Member of their own Cabinet—you all remember? It was an old year's morning. She went early an old year's morning in a duster with curlers in her hair, when she should be home ironing clothes to go out old year's night for a dance; she should be home ironing clothes to go out to a dance; “cutexing” her toes and so on to go out, she went down by the bank and bailed out her money and did not tell her own colleagues that she was bailing out her money. [*Desk thumping*] That was the Minister of Finance, eh. And then, “she tell she mother go down by the bank and bail out your money too”. [*Desk thumping*]

Miss Mc Donald: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise. Listen, I am on my feet. Madam Deputy Speaker, 36(5). That person is not even here to defend herself.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, I know you are talking about money and somebody going to take out money and all of that, I want to ask you to stay in the context of the Bill although I know it is money you are talking about as regard. So I want to ask you to stay in the context of the Bill and tighten it, please. You may continue.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you so much for your guidance. The point we are making, of course, is because of that legacy involving Clico, HCU and so on, that we had in the first part of this administration to spend so much time, effort, energy, trying to deal with that problem, and if we did not deal with that problem, the economy may not have been in the shape it is in today. We could have been worse off if we did not deal with the Clico/HCU problem.

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Minister Dookeran and Minister Howai, the Member for Siparia and the Attorney General worked overtime on that problem. But that was not the only problem we were facing; we were facing several other problems across all sectors.

In the area of labour, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre would tell you—how many agreements we had to sign?

Mr. McLeod: Seventy-five.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Seventy-five agreements we had to sign in the public sector. Agreements that were left for us, negotiating from 2008 I believe. From 2008 they had to wait for this administration to sign 74 collective agreements for workers, and they began negotiations already for the current period. This was the inheritance. So you talk about an inheritance. It was a—listen, that inheritance when you hear about that, you will want to run and hide.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is a curse to inherit that type of administration, and that type of economy, and that type of disorder. If it was not crime with 500 murders, it was public sector workers on the pavement; if it was not that, it was Clico and HCU; if it was not that, it was infrastructure; if it was not that, it was water. Oh, dear God, I forget to tell you when we came in there the contractors came. Madam Deputy Speaker, before we find out which part our offices were as Ministers, the contractors boarded us for a billion dollars at UDeCott. They said we owe them that. Then when I turned around, they said they wanted a next billion dollars for the HDC. So, they were owing contractors. Five point six billion dollars—we had to meet and treat with contractors on that issue. We had to do all types of studies and analysis because we could not take up taxpayers' money and just give everybody everything that they claimed we are owing, and we have been able to deal with that.

Now, I mean, when you hear these horror stories you wonder what could happen to this country if the Member for Diego Martin West leads a PNM administration and becomes Prime Minister. Could you imagine what will happen if you go back to that PNM? Five point something billion dollars owing to contractors, and UDeCott—Could I tell you UDeCott got themselves involved under Calder Hart in all kinds of things. You would not believe what UDeCott was doing—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Roberts: Cookies.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:—apart from cookies and virgin colada at the Hyatt? Apart from that, that is minor, you know UDeCott somehow found themselves

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investing money in Clico. UDeCott was never an investment organization. It is a special purpose company for construction and project management. Do you know they took money from UDeCott and put it into Clico and then lost all?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Members for D'Abadie/O'Meara and Point Fortin, please, please, allow the Member to speak.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Could you imagine a special purpose company, they took the money from UDeCott and put it in Clico? That is what they were doing. Anywhere they could touch and they see money, it gone.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to tell this population be careful, watch it. It did not go unnoticed to me that for the last few months several members of the Opposition made it their business in the national community, led by the Opposition Leader—he was the chief ring leader here—demanding and arguing for more money and more pay and more salary. If they return to office, what would you do? The first thing you will do is attack the Treasury and give yourself an increase in pay. That is the first you might do.

The Opposition Leader spends all his time in the press talking about more salary. “He gone to the President.” The fella writes the President a letter and say, “Mr. President, we want more money. We broke. We can't do the people's business. We want to do more, but we doh have enough money.” But they have not even started to govern the country. Which category of workers will say what I have is good enough and I do not want more? Always! This is wage negotiation, everybody always wants more.

Indeed, there is an increase in salary, but there is a limit as to how you could give yourself increases in salary. The Opposition Leader in this country gone and write the President and tell him, “Boss man, we want more money.” If you get executive authority where you could really influence your wage, what will you do? The first thing you will do, you might give yourself 100 per cent increase in wage. The same thing I am saying now, I said it in the debate. When we were in the debate I said the same thing. Had they accepted the Salaries Review Commission Report in 2008, you would have had a bigger increase today. But the former Prime Minister, the Member for San Fernando East, did not accept those reports and because of that we are where we are. The Members for Diego Martin North/East and Diego Martin West, they know that. They know it. They were in the Cabinet when the SRC report was rejected.

Let me make the point very clear. The SRC does not determine terms and conditions. The Cabinet and the Parliament determine. They recommend. When

they made a recommendation in 2009, the then Cabinet rejected it totally, and if they had accepted that, today that wage increase would have more, what they want. But you cannot start from zero and push yourself to 100. You have to incrementally work on increasing your terms and conditions.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Would you give way, please?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Please, please, please.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Hon. Minister, are you the same Minister who sat with me in a CPA meeting and agreed that parliamentarians remuneration should be increased?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: No! Listen, you are playing “monkey tongue” with something, man. What I am saying is that I agree MPs and Ministers should get more, but I do not agree that you will get 100 per cent increase or 1,000 per cent increase. Sure, but if the national community gets 5 per cent or 9 per cent—public sector workers—you cannot expect 75 per cent. I want to tell you, I am on record. There is a record in this House when we met the SRC. We met the SRC, I made the point.

8.20 p.m.

I was speaking on behalf of the Government and I said, listen, MPs and Ministers deserve increases but we must also be mindful of the increases we are giving in the public sector. We cannot be Ministers of Government, MPs, and tell public officers out there, the most you can get is 9 per cent, 5 per cent, and then you give yourself 45 per cent increase, you cannot do that. The demonstration effect has to come from you. If they get 50 per cent then you might claim, but you cannot do that, and I told the SRC that, but I agree, you work hard, you deserve.

But the point I am really making is that one has to be cautious because you do not want a situation where a government comes in office, and the first thing they do is go to Cabinet, use their authority and increase their salaries. Before you build a road, before you build a box drain, you take a salary increase. Salary negotiation is not what you deserve, people always deserve more; it is what you have the capacity to pay at the given time.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am sure with these so few words, I have been able to share some of the thinking of the Government on these matters and correct certainly the propaganda they started today, targeting the very humble Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs—that attack on him and his qualifications. I hope I have corrected for the record their continuing untruth about chairmanship and

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chairman of the SIS. I do not know what else to say. *[Interruption]* No, he brought some new vision newspaper or something like that. I hope that we have corrected that. I hope we have spoken sufficiently on the achievements of the Government, and I ask my colleagues opposite and so on to assist us in continuing this work by supporting the Bill brought by the Minister of Finance and the Economy.

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

Mrs. Paula Gopee-Scoon (*Point Fortin*): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker and I am ever so pleased to join in this debate. Member for Oropouche East—well, perhaps, I should just attempt to get rid of the comments by the Member for Caroni East because it was the same speech over and over and over. He never changes. In fact, sometimes, he interchanges with the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara, but we hear the same thing over and over.

Now, Member for Oropouche East, you tried to make the point that the PNM never did anything for particular areas in Trinidad and Tobago and that is not so. Let me make it clear on the record that we built schools, health centres—as a matter of fact, before we went into elections in 2010, we opened the finest health centre in Siparia. We built community centres in Siparia too; in Mayaro, we did four; we did schools in Penal Rock Road. *[Desk thumping]* Just the other day, I was in Toco and I have seen all the facilities that were built—community centres and schools—by the People’s National Movement. *[Desk thumping]* We put the Point Lisas Estate in Couva as well. And you come here trying to insinuate that we do things only in our constituencies and not for all of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That is untrue. In fact, all of you have become what you are today because of the People’s National Movement. *[Desk thumping]* You were talking a little about development that you all are doing, I will address that later on. I will speak to the matter of development.

Then the Minister went on to say that he and the other Members of the Government are so proud of the decisions taken by the hon. Prime Minister in the firing of persons for whatever reasons or so. But, you know, the hon. Prime Minister has taken a decision to fire 18 persons from positions in this Government and upsetting Ministries in the process; upsetting policy implementation in the process; upsetting the public servants as well, and you want to tell me that is something to be proud of. That is nothing but a reflection of the poor judgment of the Prime Minister and this Cabinet in the first instance in choosing this pickup side. Poor judgment on the part of the Prime Minister.

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The question is: How many to go? How many more to go? Imagine, two in one week—one fired because he was “fatigued”; another one resigned because “he fraid fatigue”. Who is next? I met a Minister from this Government over the weekend and he said—and he is proud—“We have another one to go” and I could only guess who that is. So, they are making it look as though this is a planned exercise to clean up the ship before the election comes, but it is nothing more than poor judgment, in the first place, by the hon. Prime Minister, and for those of the others who were working with her in selecting members for this team.

Then, you went on to talk about unfair distribution of labour under the People’s National Movement. I want to assure you that when we resume office in 2015—and that, we will—the public can be treated—all members of the public—unless, of course, you have done some kind of wrongdoing—will be treated fairly [*Desk thumping*] and with equity and with justice as we do in everything that we do. No person shall be ill-treated or victimized or blackmailed or anything of the sort. Everyone will benefit from the PNM, as has always been the case. All businesses flourished under us; all of you; all of us in here are where we are today because of the People’s National Movement. In fact, what we have seen is a reversal under you.

To top it off, in the course of your discussion, you are accusing us of unfairness and inequity but, in the course of your debate, he has talked about the University south campus. Where is it? In Debe. The highway from Golconda—well, it has to go somewhere so it ends up in Point Fortin. Where has it started? In Golconda. Then you talked about the children’s hospital. Where is it? In Couva. Then you talked about the law school. Where is it? Debe. I do not know, I think it is probably UTT headquarters. Where is that? I believe it is now in Chaguanas. The aquatic centre. Where is that? It is in Couva. You are just moving three Ministries—I think one of them is the Ministry of Community Development. Where are they going? Food production and science and tertiary education as well—where are they going? To Chaguanas.

You are building your first fire station—the first one in four years—and you said the reason you are now building the first one is because of scientific and technical data needed and so on. The first fire station but where is it going? Not in La Brea, not in Point Fortin, it is going to Mayaro. Couva interchange; Couva again, and you are talking about fairness and equity and justice, Minister. You ought to be ashamed about that.

Then, you went on to talk about the business of salaries and tried to make it seem that we came here to beg for money, and to ask for some exorbitant salaries

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that we are undeserving of and that kind of thing. But, Member for Oropouche East, you were a Member of the House Committee. In fact, you were the Chairman of the House Committee. You all agreed with us on all those increases. [*Desk thumping*] That was a very, very equitable committee. You have the same number of Members from the Opposition and the same number of Members from the Government as well. You all agreed with us.

It is only in the last minute, you all went to the Cabinet and because of the mood of the country, and because you know there is an impending election, because you know that things are not looking good for you, then you all came here and say, “No, no, we are going with the SRC”. But that was not the intention, Member for Oropouche East. Let us face it.

Dr. Browne: He signed the report.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: You signed the report. That is right. Thank you, Member. He signed the report. I find it very dishonourable that you would come here for the sake of a few votes—“you still not winning” [*Laughter*—to suggest that we are dishonourable on this side, and we are just looking for additional funding, and we are going to rape the Treasury and that kind of nonsense, that cannot be so. With those few votes, you still will not win. I can assure you of that.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am very pleased to discuss the Bill which does quite a few things. One of them is to raise taxes and then, of course, the Minister—and it has been spoken to at length over and over about the incentives in the energy sector—I will come back to the question of raising the taxes. Then, as I said, with regard to the incentives in the energy sector, we know of that, but, of course, we lament because the persons who are benefiting from those incentives are really friends and family because, I can tell you, there have been a lot of distribution of leases in Petrotrin, and they are going to persons who are connected with the Government. I have no problem with the incentives, I am pleased to know about the incentives, but I am concerned about who are the real beneficiaries of those incentives.

Then, of course, the Minister also went on to talk about the facilitation of the electronic transfer of funds within the Government system, which I find quite laudable as well, but, again I will address this later on as well. I think the Minister really wanted to impress upon us the fact that he is coming closer to achieving a balanced budget, and this is why, perhaps, some of these taxes have been put in here and so on. But, really, what I want him to acknowledge is that although he might be a man of professional integrity, he is in fact presiding over the economic

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affairs of an administration that is committed to the worst form of financial abuses and corruption that this country has ever, ever known.

He tried to give an excuse that lateness is not the real issue with the presentation of these unpopular measures which should have been instituted a lot earlier. Eight months into the financial year, here we are now. They have come back to an unsuspecting population to introduce these increases that were supposed to take place from January this year. But, even though they may have been mentioned in the budget, it is my duty to bring them to the attention of the public because at budget time, you would find that attention is not really focused on some of these things, but the population needs to know that they are going to feel the brunt of some of these large increases. I am not here to discuss whether they are worthwhile or not worthwhile—the increases and so on—but the point is I have to bring it to their attention that there are some increases and they are going to be passed on to them.

I mean, like the section 34 fiasco, we know we do not take things at face value with the Government and therefore it is my duty to bring to the public's attention that there has been some significant increases in fees and, in particular, in several licences as well. These include the Minerals Act, the Litter Act, the Petroleum Act, the Exchequer and Audit Act, the Customs Act. Well, the Exchequer and Audit Act, I do not think it involves a fee but in some of these cases, you have had increases amounting to several hundred per cent. I am trying to bring the debate back to the Bill.

So, for example, clause 3 of the Bill is amending the Registration of Clubs Act, Chap. 21:01, in section 23, by imposing the penalty of 15 per cent on and in addition to the tax payable and then that clause also requires the secretary of a club to deposit something like \$500,000 to the Treasury and that, in fact, is a new imposition.

Then, clause 5 of the Bill seeks to impose an increase of 100 per cent in the fines under the Litter Act. Again, I am not debating whether these fines are valid or not but the point is that they are there, and I am bringing them to the public's attention once again. But 100 per cent increase in the fines under the Litter Act, under the Minerals Act as well, under clause 16, the gaming tax on alcohol establishments. Those are increased as well and the list goes on. Of course, we saw that there have been similar increases in the Liquor Licences Act as well. Madam Deputy Speaker, do we have a quorum? Yes? No. Do we have?

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Madam Deputy Speaker: Members, I want to suspend for five minutes until we get a quorum, please. This House is now suspended for five minutes.

8:34 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

8.39 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I think everyone needed a little bit of a break, so I was quite happy to relieve myself. Maybe it is that the Government does not want to admit to some of the things that I have been speaking of. They do not like to hear me at all.

Mr. Indarsingh: What is the relevance?

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: It is very relevant. We are talking about—in fact, I have come back to the Bill. Let me go back to where I was when I was talking about all of the increases in the Liquor Licences Act. In fact, we have not even concluded that piece of legislation and we are speaking to increases. We are speaking to a licensing committee, which has not even been established. Then, of course, section 35(9) provides for another increase, from \$1,000 to \$5,000 for selling spirits of a lower strength than 40 per cent alcohol per volume.

Then, of course, there is another penalty for failure to comply with the provisions of an occasional licence, and so on. All of those things may be necessary as well, but I am not debating that.

But, again, one of the things I have found is that there has been no policy, and this happened both in the budget and also today. We got very little policy to inform these increases. I really would have no problem at all—especially given the spate of accidents, and so on, in this country—if the Minister of Health came to us and spoke to us and give a little background, or the Minister of Finance and the Economy himself, that there is a policy objective in these increases in the liquor licences and so on, because you really would like it to be a deterrent on alcohol drinking, and so on. But, really, it was absent both in the budget and hardly ever today as well.

I mean, simply if the Minister truly wanted to, of course, achieve a balanced budget, which I believe he is working towards, he could simply, I think, easily cut out the billion-dollar contract, which was awarded to SIS, the Government's favourite contractor. That is one way, as well, of cutting the Government's expenses. And, again, rather than raising fines under the Litter Act, the Government could balance its budget, perhaps, by facilitating a proper tendering

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process in the award of contracts for the collection of garbage, rather than simply awarding them to family and political affiliates as well.

I think some of it could be avoided, whatever the reasons he has come here today, we are going to approve it. We had approved it in the budget, so this is the implementation. We will do it but, again, I feel it is my duty that the public should be aware, because the members of the population are the ones who are really going to feel the brunt of it, and I know that the Government, as well, needs money. We could expect some more of this as the year goes on because the Government needs money to go on its election spree as well. So, you cannot trust them. I know that they would be looking for sources of revenue all over and the public can expect more of this.

But I just want them to be aware—some of them who love the little watering holes, and so on, all of this is going to be passed on to them. All of those persons who enjoy their watering holes—Member for Oropouche East, I was not talking about you. You got very keen when I spoke about watering holes. But they are the ones who are going to be affected by these increases.

But even the dramatic increase in the Litter Act, I am really wondering: Is this absolutely necessary? I took a drive to Grande Riviere over this weekend, Member for Toco/Sangre Grande, nice place, lovely people, but such a filthy environment. Really, I have never seen bush almost moving across the road. Where do the people walk? They have to walk in the middle of the road because you have overgrown bushes everywhere. It is an unkept place, Member for Toco/Sangre Grande, and I am really interested in tourism and I am interested in the welfare of the persons but I am sharply disappointed by the state of that constituency, Member for Toco/Sangre Grande. You are not seeing litter bins or anything like that anywhere in that area. I am concerned about that as well.

This money that you are trying to raise, under the Litter Act, hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy, I do not know if we are really going to get any benefits from that. Do we have enough litter wardens to really enforce this? Have we seen any action by the current litter wardens? The Minister was speaking about the 120 or so that there are. Have we really seen any change, any effect of having these wardens all over Trinidad and Tobago? I still think 120 is not enough if you are going to be serious about this thing. So, it is, as I said, there are some people who are going to feel the brunt of it.

The consumer will definitely have to pay higher prices for alcohol, certainly more exorbitant entries for fetes, higher prices for cinema tickets, I believe,

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because of these hidden taxes in between. I am particularly concerned about clause 16(1). What I get from that is that it allows for the introduction of amusement machines into alcoholic establishments. I am concerned about that, simply from the point of view that these amusement machines are primarily used by teens and young adults, and yes, this is to me—I am concerned about it because it is an avenue for owners of bars to offer a service to entice young people into their establishments. That is what I read into 16(1), and we have seen the degeneration of values and morals and behaviour of young people, in particular, so I am truly concerned about clause 16(1), and the allowance of these amusement facilities into bars.

Yes, there will be increased revenue stream for the bar owners with the amusement machines but I cannot say that I can approve of the combination of alcohol and amusement machines. I do not know what you were thinking and whether or not you were thinking of any social policy when you introduced this.

But, again, I think the population has come to know that you all usually do not think things through and you do not usually have a strategic plan, so these things have been imposed but, they are, of course, bereft of policy and that is why you miss these things along the way, but if you can correct me, I would be glad.

Again, Minister of Health, I really would have liked to get some kind of expression about the harmful effects of alcohol consumption on the health system—yes from this Government—and with regard to—they seem to be behaving in their last few months because they know that an election is near. But I really would have liked to hear something about the effects of alcohol consumption on heart disease, diabetes and non-communicable diseases as well, to dissuade the public generally from drinking and so on, but that has not come from you. Again, no foresight, no thinking, no policy, no concerns about the social side of those things.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, let me just move on to the Exchequer and Audit Act. With regard to those amendments which will permit the changes, to facilitate electronic transactions at government offices, I really do believe that we should have had a separate Bill to treat with this. I welcome it. I think the public will welcome the ease of paying with a credit card or a debit card at government institutions. I do welcome it, but it is quite a momentous change, but there is a negative side to it. And, therefore, I wish that we could have had a separate Bill with greater detail as to how this will be done.

The Minister did not address any systems or so that—supporting systems, supporting human resource systems, technical systems—are absolutely necessary if you are going to facilitate electronic transferring of funds throughout the public system. I really think this is lost within this Bill, which is more or less dealing with increase in fines and licences and so on. We have concerns. We must have concerns. We have seen what has happened in other jurisdictions.

If you look at Target, Target department stores in the United States, they have been fraught with difficulties and of, course, the danger, we all know for fraud, is enormous.

8.50 p.m.

So I am concerned about the background of this introduction, and really I feel that it has not been well treated to—we simply do not want the Government to be vulnerable to any cyberattacks or so. And it would mean all—it will mean usage by all members of society, and you have to be concerned about the effects of it. You know, state enterprise—[*Interruption*] sorry? No, let me—go ahead, sorry.

Dr. Griffith: Thanks for giving way. I do not know if it would give you some ease, to let you know that we are very assiduously working on the Electronic Transactions Act, and the ePayments Act. Those two pieces of legislation will come before Parliament, before the end of this term, that will give you the guarantees, that certain securities and confidence in the system that the citizens would want.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Thank you Member for Toco/Sangre Grande. I think the thing to do, would have been to pull this piece of legislation out of this miscellaneous Finance Bill, and introduce it. This is a formidable piece of legislation and, of course, we need to hear the supporting documentation—the supporting pieces of legislation in terms of systems and HR and that kind of thing, and risk as well; that should have been dealt with at this time. I do not think it is well placed at all, right.

Again, we have had, you know, when we are dealing with—when we are treating with the State: state enterprises, state agencies and state companies and so on, I think we need to apply the same thinking that we would use if we are dealing with normal private sector companies, and so on. I think that is missed sometimes and we assume it is the public sector, and a lot of things fall by the wayside. And, therefore, all of the risk assessment that is done usually with private institutions and private businesses and on so on, I think we sometimes miss in the public sector.

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I think the Member for San Fernando West can greatly help in terms of her Ministry, to ensure that the same kind of business approach is adopted when we are dealing with state agencies. So all of the risk assessment, all of the matters of fraud and so on, that we need to look at—as would be done in private enterprise, really should be done with the public sector agencies and so on as well; but they are not.

I mean, when you look at the case of the recent fiasco with FCB, where one employee has been able to defraud—I would use the word “defraud”—the company of millions of dollars, Madam Deputy Speaker, I have a concern about the safety of the Treasury. That will always be my concern in the interest of the shareholders of Trinidad and Tobago, the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We cannot allow any Ministry or any agency or so, to be duped by unsuspecting employees, unsuspecting, sorry, by systems and so on, that are not up to mark as well.

So Minister, I know the Minister of Finance and the Economy in terms of his integrity and his competence and so on, and that is the kind of approach that I will like to see introduced, Madam Deputy Speaker. At the same time, I wish at this time to mention, Minister of Finance and the Economy—and maybe I will speak a bit more about that—I am concerned as well about the level of directors or the competence of directors that are placed in some of these institutions. Petrotrin, FCB and I will speak again later about that, because I want to stay a bit on FCB.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there was an article on April 02, I believe in the *Trinidad Guardian*, and the headline for that was the:

“Negative outlook for First Citizens”

It said, and I am sure the Minister of Finance and the Economy would have read that article. It goes on and I am quoting:

“In its ratings rationale, Moody’s said the change to negative on FCB’s standalone ratings reflects the weakening of the bank’s profitability indicators during the past three years, due to declining net interest margins and rising operating costs.”

That concerns me “rising operating costs”:

“In addition, asset quality remains weak relative to the bank’s historical standards....”

“Still, modest economic growth in”—Trinidad and Tobago—“points to further pressure on asset quality and credit costs. FCB’s declining profitability metrics also reflect tighter competition and do not fully reflect the bank’s strong market presence or core funding advantages, the agency said.”

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So this was the international rating agency. What they were basically saying, that for the last three years, the bank performed poorly, that is in comparison to the years before that. And maybe, not maybe, surely, the Minister of Finance and the Economy can take credit for the performance of the bank under his stewardship, because I too believe in FCB, and it is a great institution. It has come a long way; they have done exceedingly well. I am very, very proud of the bank, but it is a fact and here it is being confirmed by this rating agency, that it has performed poorly in the last three years, and that, Madam Deputy Speaker, does not—Moody did not take into consideration at that time, the fiasco over the last few weeks about the underhand dealing with regard to the IPO transaction. Moody did not take that into consideration, and that was revealed by the Member for Diego Martin West.

So you see, I do have a concern, and so do my constituents as well, but I do believe that the Minister had the opportunity, but he did not use it to assure the public that the Board, which has presided over the declining fortunes of the bank, as well as—that they are going to do something about this Board, because the public is very concerned about executives taking off with taxpayers money and nobody being held to account. So that—and, of course, to assure persons that no laws were broken in the IPO fiasco. I mean, he should have said something, and I appreciate the fact that he is awaiting another report, but at the same time, something ought to have been said on the occasion of the presentation of finance legislation in this House, about FCB's declining performance over the last three years.

I know that while the deterioration is there, or has been seen, and it is because, yes, the Minister of Finance and the Economy in a previous reincarnation did preside over a quality institution, and brought it into something, and that is because he worked under—he presided under a PNM Board and I think therein lies the difference. It was a PNM Board with well selected professionals, who were able to give direction and set policy, and to grow the bank from strength to strength. I do remember because I was there when—I worked at that institution when it first started, and it did exceedingly well. So the credit is not only to the Minister, but the PNM directors that had been appointed. So, therefore, I remain concerned about the deterioration in fortunes, and I could tell you that I do have a concern for the existing Board, and whether or not they have been any credit to the FCB, over the last three years, Madam Deputy Speaker.

As I speak generally about directors, I wish to remind the Minister of Finance and the Economy and also this honourable House and the people of Trinidad and

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Tobago, that section 99 of the Companies Act of 1999, speaks to the directors and the role and duties of directors. I think that this must be taken seriously by this Government, especially you, Minister of Finance and the Economy as Corporation stole, Sole—[*Laughter*] I said corporation stole. [*Laughter*] To you, Minister of Finance and the Economy, I apologize. I am not sure that I will do so to the other persons. I mean you are a \$10 million man, but I do not think you stole any money; you did not.

I think you need to be reminded of the duties of directors to act honestly and in good faith towards the best interest of the shareholders and employees. Yes, the employees yes, but in a fair and consistent manner, but certainly to the shareholders, the people of Trinidad and Tobago, they are the owners of these assets. These directors are to act with—section 99 goes on to say: with diligence and skill and with prudence and that directors are responsible for the overall stewardship of the companies over which they preside.

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, generally there are some red flags being raised about directors and the appointment of directors to particular boards and so on, over the last three and a half years, and to some practices; some practices have been flagged, unsavory practices as well, and we are concerned about that. You will have to make some changes to those boards.

The Minister of Finance and the Economy spoke a lot about continuing the growth momentum, and performance, strong performance in all sectors. I want to say very clearly, Madam Deputy Speaker, through you, to the Minister, that this is clearly, only on the basis of strong energy prices and no more, nothing else. If you go to the—there is no question of diversification, that was not fulfilled under them—there has been no new investors in Trinidad and Tobago. All of these foreign-direct investments which they speak of, in existing businesses within Trinidad and Tobago, that have built their infrastructure here, I am talking about large energy companies and so on.

And, therefore, they know as well that in the energy industry, five years is not a long time, and they know that the PNM will be back in power, they have every confidence [*Desk thumping*] that we understand the sector and, therefore, this is the reason they have chosen to continue doing business in Trinidad and Tobago. They know that it is going to go back into the safe hands of the PNM but, really and truly, it is based on strong energy prices.

Today we have heard all about the IMF and all of these good and sound things they had to say about the economy but, of course, they were very selective in

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what they read into the public record. I will tell you, we heard from about three Members on the other side, and I am quoting from the IMF's press release No. 1/149, April 02 and it says, I quote, Madam Deputy Speaker:

“Trinidad and Tobago is experiencing more robust growth after several years of sub-par performance.”

But it goes directly in the next line, within the same paragraph:

“With the end of maintenance-related outages in the energy sector, we project the economy will grow around 2 1/2 percent in 2014 after around 1 1/2 percent growth in 2013.”

Clearly linked, Madam Deputy Speaker, that any growth that has been enjoyed by this Government, little as it is, it has been because of the energy sector. And we know it is simply because of, certainly not because Petrotrin is performing better, because we know it is performing at a loss, and that is the largest state energy company. But we know that any growth at all has been linked only, to the energy sector and only, to high energy prices. So they have been blessed. Had it been anywhere different, this country would have been under pressure, another kind of pressure, because we are already under pressure in this country, but certainly from the economy as well.

Then, of course, whilst I am on it, you know the IMF report goes on to talk about:

“The country's external position remains healthy, with external reserves at US \$10.0 billion...”

And they boasted about that; US \$10 billion. Well, when we left here in 2010, it was more than 9.—I think it was probably about US \$9.5 billion in foreign reserves, when we left there, if I am not mistaken. I am sure the Member for Port of Spain South can give the exact figures, but that is what it was. So external reserves have not grown exponentially under this Government, as they try to imply at all. So when they come here to tell us \$10 million, really, really has not grown under this Government.

We left it with close to \$10 billion in foreign reserves, about 11 months cover or something like that, I do recall. Definitely in excess of \$9 billion and then, of course, it speaks to the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund assets continue to grow. Of course, it will continue to grow, because really the HSF is based on a formula of deposits, reflecting excess revenue over the budgeted price of oil and gas; so it will grow. So it is not growing, it is growing on the basis of the legislation that

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was created for the existence of the fund, the operation of the fund, but certainly not because of the hand of the UNC Government or anything like that. So they must take no credit from that.

9.05 p.m.

Again the report goes on, and I look again at when they speak of:

“the current account surplus should continue to be in double digits...in 2014, thanks to a strong rebound in energy exports from 2013”.

Again, this is a direct link to energy exports as well, Madam Deputy Speaker.

So, when you are talking about a strong economy and so on, it is because of the foundation which was laid by us in the energy sector. If it is that we had not put together an energy sector in the first place, heaven help us all in this country. I do not know where we would be today. It is all because of the PNM and the work that we did in the development of the energy sector as well.

The report goes on to speak about the excess liquidity in the banking system. It says:

“With excess liquidity in the banking system rising to TT\$7.1 billion through March 2014...”

And it goes on. What it highlights there is that there is serious excess in the liquidity in the banking system and that is because there have been little or no local investments taking place over the last few years in Trinidad and Tobago. The private sector has not seen any growth in Trinidad and Tobago over the last three and a half years under this Government—very little investment at all—and it comes back to the whole question of confidence. They have no confidence in this Government and that is why there is that excess liquidity in the banking system. Definitely!

It goes on, the report:

“While credit to business has continued to fall...”

So they have said it, that the business persons have just not taken up credit at the retail banks. They are saying that it is lack of demand, but I can tell you that the business people have been speaking out. There is a lack of confidence in this Government.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Point Fortin has expired.

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Motion made: That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Miss M. Mc Donald*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and thank you to my colleagues for the extension of time.

What I was saying is that usual blue skies coming from this Government about the economy and the Minister of Finance and the Economy, but here it is the Central Bank on April 02, 2014, "Cautious Optimism for Economic Outlook". This is the Central Bank, only in 2014. They are singing blue skies, but the Central Bank is reporting cautious optimism for the economic outlook.

Even the Minister, he opened something, I think it was the long service awards for the ADB and he spoke about growth in the agricultural sector. They have been saying a few things here and there as usual. They are advertising a lot, but nothing much has been happening in the agricultural sector to speak of. Nothing at all!

I can tell you, within my own constituency, the Government opened a breeding station in Cedros and I have gone down there and I am quite excited. I have gone to visit and so on. We have young ones and I go there and I take pictures and I am very pleased, but at the end of the day, you have not followed up on it and the breeding station has not been commercialized so that small farmers are not benefiting from it.

So they have dropped it there just to say that they have opened a breeding station, but we are not seeing the effects of it. You need to take it further. In the first place, it is just a few animals and, therefore, you need to enlarge the enterprise and to commercialize it if it is you are going to see the true benefit. It is not just a place for housing animals. All that is exciting and a lot of school children will go and see it, but you need to commercialize it if you are going to be serious about these agricultural exercises.

Despite all that the Minister has talked about growth and so on, you notice he has stopped talking about growth poles. They do not speak about growth poles anymore. They know why, right? They know why. They are struggling with what economists call anaemic growth, of 1.5 per cent, but they can never get the kind of robust growth that we had under the PNM. [*Desk thumping*]

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Madam Deputy Speaker, double digits under the PNM, and in a bad year, 5 and 6 per cent. That is what the economy would grow by under us. So 1.5 really is anaemic growth by this Government and we had the vision to take the economy away from oil and gas and we were going there with diversification. We were going there, but I can tell you there were no achievements with regard to diversification under this Government, none whatsoever.

Last year, the President of AmCham—Hugh Howard it was then; I do not know if he still is—spoke about the challenges of the private sector. You cannot have growth unless you have private sector involvement. You cannot have growth unless you have them on board, confident in you, participating with you in policy direction and so on. He spoke last year about the challenges being faced by the business community as a result of the poor governance of the People’s Partnership Administration. It was in the *Express* on June 23, 2013 and I quote again. This is Mr. Hugh Howard, the President of AmCham then:

“Three years since its landslide victory, the coalition called the ‘People’s Partnership’ has found its favour among the population slipping.

A new exclusive survey also finds that confidence in the way that the government is handling the country’s finances is also sliding.

Crime and corruption remain major concerns for business leaders who feel not enough is being done to get to the root cause of the problem.

‘Crime and corruption perceptions are very real. I cannot say over the last three years there has been any discernible dent in crime to give businesses the confidence to go out and invest in the country’ ...”

And that was the President of AmCham and it really has not gotten any better. That was the opinion then and that situation has not improved under this Government at all up to 2014. I think the private sector has really lost confidence with the Government’s handling of the economy.

Okay, fine, I realize that they try to support them and sure enough they have been on some of these investment trips. This Government has taken the private sector, I think they went from India to Brazil to Panama; some of them would have gone to China as well. It is amazing. No, no improvement at all in terms of private sector actual achievements resulting from those trips and certainly no interest in multinational companies in coming to Trinidad and Tobago except the last one, the Japanese company coming to La Brea and my sense is that that will not take place.

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What is worrying for me is that this is not just AmCham's view, this is also the view of the local business community. Only recently, in the *Express* newspaper of March 27, there was a headline, "Chamber Head: T&T plagued with problems". This is Moonilal Lalchan, an executive from Atlantic Energy who is the current chairman. In fact, his assignment has been extended for another year and he spoke.

"T&T plagued with problems

Lack of competitiveness, real and perceived corruption, crime, the slow pace of legislative reform for procurement and campaign financing, and no real material implementation of the findings of various commissions of enquiry are but some"—of—"the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce's concerns about the state of the country.

'Our nation continues to be plagued with (these) issues...essentially affecting our business development and government tax revenue collection, and undermining the growth in our communities,' ..."

These are his words; not our words in the PNM. These are the words of an independent body of professionals and business persons, the voice of the local business community in Trinidad and Tobago, at a recent dinner meeting at the Hyatt.

He did acknowledge that there was willingness to speak and to listen by successive Governments—this Government included—but at the end of the day, that willingness has to be translated into action and implementation and that is what we have not seen under this Government.

He went on to say, and I quote:

"The successive changes in government ministers, permanent secretaries, and their portfolios, have all had a drastic impact in timely implementation."

Not my view, Madam Deputy Speaker, but the view of Chamber.

"What causes further delays is that each new leader in their respective ministries wants to review and put their own stamp on already agreed plans.' ..."

Slow down! Those are my words, Madam Deputy Speaker. This process is only slowed down with the kind of changes that we have had with Government Ministers and so on.

So the only conclusion is that they are not confident; not confident at all in this Government; not confident at all. At that time, they were unaware of these

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two changes as well with the Minister of Tourism choosing to leave because he is afraid of “fatigue” and so on. And the other Minister who is “fatigued”.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, we have had a bit of a reshuffle once again. Again, we have had Ministries affected and so on. By the time people get a little used to their portfolios, Madam Deputy Speaker, I can assure you that the kind of reshuffle we will have is a reshuffling of a Government. That is what we will have. We will have a Government reshuffle and we will, in fact, be on the other side in a matter of months. I know that the Member for Diego Martin West will be shifting places with the Member for Siparia. That is what the public can expect and at least the population and the business community will be more at ease and they can breathe a little better when we take over that side of the Government.

So the problem is, as I see it as well, that state capitalism is too much alive with this Government to the extent that the Government plays too much of a dominant role through public sector companies and, of course, its political affiliates as well. That is where all the business activity is—state capitalism at its best only through the state sector and, of course, the politically loyal business persons, so that opportunities are really not available to the non-partisan private sector at all.

The non-partisan are those who publicly align themselves with other parties other than the ruling party. You will find that the opportunities are not available to them. At the end of the day, the sector has suffered, so that the growth that we have seen, that they speak about, the one and a half and so, that is politically associated and that cannot be good. Everything has gone to SIS.

When the Member for Diego Martin West spoke—I mean I may be exaggerating a bit—when he presented his Motion last week, I think, the extent of the contracts granted to SIS was in the vicinity of more than \$1 billion. That cannot be right for our economy. That could have been shared and shifted among all of the private sector and this is the reason still why multinational companies are choosing not to come to Trinidad and Tobago. It is because of the political landscape. Trinidad and Tobago at this time is just not attractive for doing business.

Then, somewhere along the line, they spoke about SMEs going public and, yes that sounds attractive, but to my mind that is not realistic. Then, you know what, when the Minister started speaking about the conditions of being able to benefit from these IPOs, he started talking about a \$5 million capital base. I cannot remember all of the other details, but when you are talking about a \$5 million

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capital base, you are certainly not talking to small business; you are not talking to micro enterprises; you are not talking to all of the family businesses that are out there. You are not being realistic. I think that is really to benefit their people. As a matter of fact, you know that many small businesses, micro businesses and family businesses have really suffered and they have exited under this Government. That is a fact. Very few of them have done well and have stayed in business.

Then the Minister spoke about rise in GDP and, to my mind, the Government fails to understand fully the relationship between sustainable and healthy development and GDP growth. You cannot speak of GDP growth in isolation and assume that you are talking about development. They go hand in hand. Social growth and economic growth as well, so it is more than just GDP and so on. It is about improving persons' lives; improving the lives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It is about realizing social equity and justice; it is about protecting the environment. It is about all of those things. It is not about economic growth alone when you speak of development and if we are to assess this Government's performance when it comes to development, if we evaluate them at all, they would be rated very, very poorly. They would be low, low, low.

Ask yourself the question. Ask yourself. Go back and ask yourself the questions: Have people's lives really improved under us? Has there been social equity in Trinidad and Tobago under us? They should ask themselves the questions. Have there been justice, equity and fair play? There has not. What about our environment? These are the sticky questions that they should be asking themselves, if they want to talk about development at all, and it just has not happened.

9.20 p.m.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Just recently, there was an article in the *Daily Express* of Friday, March 28: "People not rising with GDP Growth", and that is a very, very real issue, Mr. Speaker. The people of Trinidad and Tobago have not risen with the GDP growth, minor as it is, they have not risen, and really, the article went on to speak—and I was very impressed:

"For leadership to be empowering, Carmona said, whether in the private or public sector"—leadership must—"be inspired and inspiring...on an altar of integrity, embracing a philosophy of humanity."

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And this is what the PNM promises the population of Trinidad and Tobago, and this is what has not happened under a UNC Government at all—not inspired and inspiring leadership at all, at all, under this Government. In fact, we have seen very little economic growth; little or no social growth in Trinidad and Tobago.

You talked about an unemployment rate of 3.7 per cent, I can tell you, in La Brea, in Point Fortin and in so many other parts of Trinidad and Tobago, unemployment is really at about 20 per cent plus. That is the true rate of unemployment in those areas, and you do not speak of that. I do not know where you get the 3.7 per cent.

And then you went on to try to impress us as well—that is another point you made, Minister of Finance and the Economy, through you, Mr. Speaker—about all these numbers of new business that have registered. I just remember that point that you have made. Registration of a business gives no comfort of business activity at all. That does not talk about a business concept; that does not talk about business implementation, ideas or anything like that; that does not speak to any positives at all. It is easy. They understand that money is being given away now and within the last year. It is an election year, and the Government will be giving away contracts, left, right and centre, so people have registered their businesses, but that is no indication of success in the private sector, again, and so on. When you come with that kind of information, I want you to talk to me by sector and by constituency, and I want to see the equity and fairness in all of your statements.

I must speak a little about the Point Fortin Hospital. Minister, you have come here with a Finance Bill, and you have not spoken about the Point Fortin Hospital. The Couva Hospital is moving at a pace; Point Fortin Hospital is not. I paid a visit to the hospital only last week Monday, Mr. Speaker, when I heard the screams of a mother under pain delivering a baby. As I drew closer, because I found it was rather loud—I thought by now we will be delivering babies in an air-conditioned room and so on, of course, for not only comfort, but also for hygienic purposes—and to my surprise, I saw the midwife running out and she was sweating profusely. I said, “Why are you looking like that? She said, “We have no air condition; no air condition for the last month.” So I said, “So all of the windows are opened?” She said, “Yes, one window is opened”—one hot fan on the mother delivering the baby and a door is opened as well, unhygienic. Is this somewhere in, I do not know, Madagascar. I do not know where this is. It cannot be in a country where there is a budget of \$61 billion. This Government wants to impress the population that they are a First-World government, absolutely not; no air conditioning for a month. So unless we brought it to the attention, nothing would

be done about it. Then nurses are begging for a little water cooler. Can you believe it? So do you not have officials who know what is going on in these institutions? No attention is being paid to Point Fortin at all, and I am sick of it.

I invited the Prime Minister to visit the hospital. On February 06 I sent that letter to her, I have gotten no acknowledgement. I told her I am inviting her—of course, I sent the invitation to her first before sending it to the press. I owe her that—and, of course, I have gotten no response. She has gone to a funeral, to China, to Panama, to St. Vincent and, of course, no response to my letter about visiting the Point Fortin Hospital, Mr. Speaker.

I mean, I looked at the doctors there, and yes we are getting the doctors in Point Fortin. We have quite a few doctors now, but they have no place where they can rest. None! So these doctors, if they are working on a night shift, they actually sit in their chairs and sleep. That is what it is. So there is no doctor's lounge. They are fatigued, but they have to rest in a chair. Unheard of, unacceptable, and we are demanding that hospital. Couva is moving on.

It is the same way, somebody came here today and said, "Oh, we are going back to Cabinet, we have done all the necessary preliminary work that we needed to do". That did not happen with Couva. Couva was not in your original manifesto. It was not there at all. Everything is put in place and Couva is moving ahead. Every time I go down to the south, I can see the change in Couva, but nothing in Point Fortin and it is not good enough at all, at all and you are talking about world class health care. Not a bit of that! And then the water taxi to Point Fortin, we are still awaiting word on that. Not good enough.

The houses again, somebody talked about affordable housing—this Government has made housing affordable. I just had a fire victim, I tried to get help for her, do you know the kind of help they insisted? Imagine, you have just lost all your possessions, your house, et cetera, they told the person, "The only way you could get this is if you pay down \$70,000". Where is somebody getting \$70,000 from? They come to you in a depressed state, you are depressed financially as well, everything you have lost, and you are coming to say, "Yes you could get a house but \$70,000". That cannot be a caring Government. They are not interested in the welfare of people.

So, I want to close, Mr. Speaker, and in closing—[*Interruption*] I have dealt with it, but that has happened. I have dealt with it and I think they are getting some assistance now but, in the first place, why did you go there, \$70,000?

So, I want to close, and let me tell you what I want to hear from this Government, if they are really interested in the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I

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think what you need to address is the question of values. No Government Minister comes here and talks about values. Morals and values have really degenerated over the last few years, whether or not you hold yourself responsible for it or whether the society is responsible for it, but the point is, this country and this population is suffering. They are suffering and there has been a degeneration of morals and values, and it is really close to home for all of us in here, I am sure. We are concerned about our society and the way it is going. And, therefore, this country needs to find and to establish an identifiable system of values. We must do that. That comes first at this time. We have gone too far downhill, but it must start with you. It must start with the Government at this stage, and it must embody all of the dreams of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That is what they are looking for under a Government now, you know.

Before they start thinking about lofty dreams for themselves, they are thinking about basics; basics for themselves and dreams for the future of their children, Mr. Speaker, and you really have to ask yourself as a Government, whether you have won the respect and admiration of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and that is what any Government would want to have; that you empower and after a few years the people of Trinidad and Tobago respect you and admire you, but that is not happening. We see no evidence of that when we come here on a Friday afternoon. There are persons from all sectors protesting out there. The people of Trinidad and Tobago are taking issue with this Government; this Government has not been successful.

So, I am saying, at this time, that is what we want from you. I think you must come to the Parliament and you must collaborate, and you must start talking about a proper system of values for Trinidad and Tobago. We have to go back to the basics, that is where it has to start, Mr. Speaker. And, as I said, all of the dreams of the people must be embodied in that value statement as well, and take into account a bit of the spiritual as well; national values for our population, something that we could stand up to, something that we could look forward to. That is what we need for us now; national values.

You know, there has been just too much of self-serving and so on and serving of self-interest under this Government, and I am not sure—they have really not taken the people's interest at heart; the nation's interest at heart. I have to say they have not done that. So, contrary to all of the numerous ads that you are putting out there, the People's Partnership—this UNC-plus Government—has not been working for the people of Trinidad and Tobago and they have come to understand that. Mr. Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Public Administration (Hon. Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to participate in this debate on the Finance Bill, 2014. Mr. Speaker, while this Bill amends several pieces of legislation, my contribution here this evening or tonight, really focuses on the section that pertains to the transfer of electronic funds.

Mr. Speaker, however, before going into this, I just want to take up on a point that the last speaker, the Member for Point Fortin, was speaking to and, you know, I am very passionate about the value system that the Member spoke to. But, you know, sometimes we have to understand that we are leaders, and if we are leaders in this nation—all of us, on both sides of this House—if we want to talk about the value system, we have to watch the way we behave in this House. [*Desk thumping*] And, therefore, Mr. Speaker, it was really alarming for me when I came into this Parliament last Friday evening, and I noted PNM supporters in these red jerseys—in PNM jerseys—and they were behaving in that manner, and I would have thought as leaders—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Hooligans; hooliganism.

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan:—on that side, on your side, wearing those balisier ties, you should have urged your supporters not to behave in that manner. People can come out, they can support, they can express their ways but, you know, Mr. Speaker, I was very alarmed by that, and I wondered what was happening to our value system here in Trinidad and Tobago. But, Mr. Speaker, we could talk on all sides and we can accuse each and every one of us, but you know it starts with each and every one of us, individually.

You know, this evening, I did hear a lot spoken about whether who is an engineer and who is not an engineer but, Mr. Speaker, you know, at the end of the day, I want to say as well—let me place on record, that I have a first degree in Pure and Applied Physics and I have a Masters in Electrical Engineering. [*Desk thumping*] I lectured in the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, temporarily, from 1987—1990 and then from 1990 onwards to 2002. Yes I have had some exposure and experience, but I think we are taking it a bit far when we start attacking professionals on their credentials. At the end of the day it, is our performance that counts and we must understand that.

Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to put this on record, because I feel it is important that, as I said, if we are to go and if we want to be leaders, we want to be models, then it must start with each individual, and I think it should start with each individual

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in this House, and I say on all sides; on all sides of the House we must watch our behaviour if we want the young people to follow in the right direction. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, coming back to the issue of the COP, we have dealt with that in the public domain already. Members, as you would have known, we have made public pronouncements on several of those issues in the past. In fact, Mr. Speaker, you would have noted that we have forwarded a copy of our code of ethics and code of behaviour to the Elections and Boundaries Commission.

Mr. Speaker, returning to the Bill, clause 10 of the Finance Bill, the electronic funds transfer clause, I want to say that the amendments that we are providing here this evening will provide or facilitate the ease of doing business with government agencies through the elimination of delays in government payment systems and minimizing the interaction between government departments, suppliers and suppliers of goods and services.

9.35 p.m.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, we are speaking about strengthening and modernizing our financial infrastructure. The Government is moving towards improving the payment system in the public sector by recognizing electronic means of transferring funds in paying for goods, services and other statutory obligations. This policy direction is in line with developments in the global economy where there is a decline in the use of paper-based payment instruments and a concomitant increase in the use of electronic payments.

Mr. Speaker, just to say what this electronic funds transfer is about and, as stated before, “‘electronic funds transfer’ means any transfer of funds through electronic means that is initiated by a Department or a client so as to instruct, authorize or order the Central Bank or a financial intermediary to debit or credit an account held with the Central Bank or financial intermediary;”. So the term EFT generally refers to the system of transferring funds between bank accounts through the use of electronic computer-based systems. EFTs usually include direct debit transactions, wire transfers, direct deposits, ATM withdrawals and online pay bill systems.

Mr. Speaker, what are the expected impacts of these proposed amendments? First of all, Government is one of, if not, the largest issuer of cheques. I am not sure if we are aware of that. Salaries and procurement of goods and services are done by issuing cheques. There are numerous issues of keep backs for payments.

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With the direct payment, salaries can be sent directly to public servants and pensioners' accounts as well. Pensioners, Mr. Speaker, you know, without having to wait for this two-day clearing period. Many of these SMEs are negatively impacted when they do not receive their payments on time.

You see, on this basis, Mr. Speaker, this country is currently out of step with the rest of the world, the developing world, in its use of electronic transactions as it remains within our jurisdiction itself, the largest single user of cheque payments. Mr. Speaker, for the purposes of this Act, one of the things I want to say today is that these proposed amendments—and I take the point raised by the Member for Point Fortin that there was a need, you know, her desire that we would have had a more extensive debate on this issue.

I just want to say, yes, it is a giant leap, these amendments, for the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and, again, in its purpose to enable to Government to conduct electronic transactions, including online purchasing and trading. But with these amendments the Government will affirm its status in the 21st Century global economy, and all of these ambitions, these proposed amendments are by no means lofty; they are realistic and attainable.

Once proclaimed, this piece of legislation, the amended Exchequer and Audit Act, will enable a number of significant benefits. At the national level it will improve T&T's international competitiveness—we heard a lot about that today—secondly, it would significantly encourage the private sector to conduct business with Government; thirdly, Government itself will be able to offer greatly improved services to its citizens and, very importantly, it will serve as an effective saving measure since electronic transactions are less costly than their paper counterparts.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that has been happening is that the cost of using cheques has been steady over the years. In fact, if you look at the US Bureau of the Fiscal Service, the US Department, what they have indicated is that the cost of using paper cheque payments has remained at the cost of \$1.03, but yet still when we are talking now about electronic transactions or electronic payments where the cost itself has gone down from \$1.03—we are talking about for cheque payments—it has gone to ten and a half cents for an electronic payment. So think about the cost savings that we will be realizing in all of this.

At the regional level we will be talking about advancing—headway already in the caricom region. You know, it was interesting that I noticed that there are a number of countries within this region, including Barbados and Jamaica, and

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others who have instituted the electronic payment systems. Mr. Speaker, it is very important for us to appreciate as well that these amendments here today are not by itself in one part. Yes, Member for Point Fortin, they complement and add the finishing strokes, this set of amendments here today, in terms of the Exchequer and Audit Act. They complement and add the finishing strokes to the previous work of the Government, such as with the Data Protection Act and the Electronic Transactions Act, moving towards this technologically economic advancement to the benefit of the citizens.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, the amendments to the Exchequer and Audit Act is probably a key part of the wider holistic body of work, and I must mention what this body of work is all about. The Minister of Science and Technology stood up here and he was mentioning just now to you, responding to you Member for Point Fortin, but if I will just mention the body of work because it is important to see it in that context. It includes, for example, the Government's cybersecurity agenda, the Electronic Transactions Act, as I mentioned—yes, the regulations are there and are coming very soon—the Central Bank Act, the Data Protection Act, as I have already mentioned, the Financial Institutions Act and the Electronic Transfer of Funds Crime Act. As you would notice, some of the definitions in this came from that Act.

Additionally, if we look at other legislative instruments to be introduced, which are all aimed at creating that safe and secure environment for online transactions, we will see it will also include further enhancements to our consumer protection legislation, amendments to the Freedom of Information Act and regulations of the Freedom of Information Act, amendments to the Telecommunications Act, and a suite of regulations which Cabinet has already passed some of these regulations and they should be coming very soon for approval to the Parliament.

Critical initiatives, Mr. Speaker, arising from or closely associated with the amendments to the Exchequer and Audit Act, include also electronically authorized and authenticated e-signatures, and I think that is important, the single unique identifier, electronic debt management and electronic payments. So, Mr. Speaker, we cannot just see these amendments here in isolation. Government, in developing these amendments—and it is very important for us to understand before we talk about these amendments—we examined the international legislation, such as the Electronic Funds Transfer Act which is the 15 U.S. Code, and the trends and benchmarks, and looked at those findings and the empirical data and adapted it to meet our own unique local needs.

So before discussing many of the ways in which citizens and the private sector alike will benefit, I think it is important first to speak to the thinking behind it. The current amendments to this Act, the Exchequer and Audit Act, may be a small but extremely significant part of Government's ongoing, as we say, the e-legislative agenda, and that will be an ongoing agenda. So, for example, with these amendments we have introduced into our legislative framework, standardized international e-trans definitions and, in addition to that, defining new roles and requirements towards leapfrogging our immersion into the emerging e-trans market. You see, this is how we speak to the information and communication technology, ICT, as it is transforming the way the world lives and conducts business, and right here in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, just before I go into what the amendments are all about, I just want to speak to the Act itself, the Exchequer and Audit Act, what does it really regulate. In fact, just for us to know, I do not know if many of us know but this is the Exchequer and Audit Act, Act 20. I do not know if you know when it was first passed or when it first became law. It became law in 1959, and since then there has been about 26 amendments, with the last one being in 2006. In fact, this Act provides:

“for the control and management of the public finances of Trinidad and Tobago; for the duties and powers of the Auditor General;”

I think that is one of the things that we know most about this particular Act, you know, the duties and powers of the Auditor General.

“for the collection, issue and payment of public moneys; for the audit of public accounts and the protection and recovery of public property; for the control of the powers of statutory bodies; and for matters connected therewith.”

Mr. Speaker, does it mean now that we need to amend this Act? Mr. Speaker, yes, it is time. Member for Point Fortin, it is time to carry out this amendment. You know I also say, time lost is opportunities lost, and in this 21st Century when we are dealing with a dynamic global economy, Trinidad and Tobago must keep pace, and time is money lost, time is opportunities lost.

So, Mr. Speaker, it is the age in which we will allow for information to be accessed at the click of a button, and if we look at the public service, as you rightly said earlier, still operating in this sort of paper-based operation of cash, I mean now is the time to get rid of these sort of systems. I think the private sector has accepted these advances in its own businesses for years and have been begging—because as you said rightly here, Member for Point Fortin, you spoke

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about the need to be able to walk into a Government office and be able to use a credit card—for that for some time now, for the public service to move with the times.

We are still asking citizens in this day and age—I mean, you know, the other day I was looking at one of the systems at the licensing office and when citizens walk in to actually transfer vehicles, they have to walk with cash, sometimes thousands of dollars in their hands. I mean, when you look at the security, the risk to citizens, it is really time that we move on from this.

So, Mr. Speaker, it is important as well, before I go into the amendments, let me just say that one of the things that we have to look at—and let me just quote from the statistics from The Digital Divide Survey, 2013, provided by the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, TATT. You would find that a:

“Proportion of households with access to a computer 70.51%”

So over 70 per cent of our households have access to computers.

“44.6%”—of our—“households with access to internet”—and—

“80.1 %”—of—“individuals using the internet”

The proposed amendments, Mr. Speaker, are such that by amending this Act what we are really doing is inserting after, section 23 of this Act, a whole new section which we call the Part IV A, the Electronic Funds Transfer. Mr. Speaker, let me just turn my attention to the actual clauses within that clause, clause (10), the sections of this clause. Mr. Speaker, there is this new section 23A which starts off by speaking to what will be the function of the Act itself, and as it says here it is to:

“be made by means of electronic funds transfer in accordance with general or specific directions issued by the Treasury.”

But, Mr. Speaker, the important part of this Act is 23B, which brings in by regulations, and it has outlined the scope of the regulations to be made by the Minister of Finance and the Economy. Mr. Speaker, the first part of it speaks to, in (a):

“...conditions relating to electronic funds transfers, including the use of bank cards, credit cards or electronic money;”

This means, in the means of exchanging value, if we look at that we will see that has evolved over the years from a physical delivery of a coin, money or cash, to

manual cheque clearing. You remember those days when we had manual cheque clearing and then that moved to data centre batch cheque processing, and now today we are talking about processing into systems which can process payment information in electronic form, and electronic transfers through single point, what we call point of sale terminals, and telephone bill payment systems. We referred to—and you will hear—the ACH, the automated clearing house and the real time gross settlement system, the RTGS.

You know, in those cases, Mr. Speaker, when we speak about cash notes and coins, for instance, the value was immediately transferred and unless it can be shown that the cash is counterfeit or such, no further action was required by any party to complete the payment transaction. All other means of payment involve a process of clearance and settlement. So if we look at the use of a cheque, it is an instrument in order to complete the exchange of value between payer and payee. So in the case of a personal or business cheque there is that written instruction from the account holder to his bank to pay upon request the specified amount to the beneficiary.

Rules over the years have developed for clearance on settlement of cheque payments, so when a bank agrees to pay money on the written instructions of the customer as stated on your cheque, the relationship between the customer and the bank becomes one of agent and principal. So the cheque being paid, which is the customer's order or the principal, to his agent, who is the bank, to pay out of the customer's money into agents hands, the amount that is on the cheque itself to the payee.

9.50 p.m.

The exact time when the cheque is cleared or the transfer of the account is actually completed, may be decisive in determining whether the bank has become the debtor of its customer, in respect of any amount of the cheque on the account. In the cheque environment, the bank usually bears the risk of fraud and would be liable if it pays a cheque which is irregularly endorsed. So if you have a signature that is fraudulent, the bank will bear that risk.

The Central Bank has indicated that the use of cheques as a means of exchange is slowed since the year 2000. In fact, I looked at the statistical report on payment systems in Trinidad and Tobago for 2000—2010, and if we look at electronic transactions themselves, credit cards in particular, payments by these means have increased considerably.

But, Mr. Speaker, if we move from there and we start talking about payment by cards, whether it is credit or debit cards, you have to have information and

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security requirements to establish the validity and also require clearance and settlement arrangements. So unlike cheques, clearance and settlement arrangements are automated, from the merchant's perspective, whether the debit card has a flat fee per transaction, whereas with a credit card the fee charge is based on the value of the transaction.

But when we talk about electronic funds transfer, there is no physical payment instrument, and payment instructions are entered in an electronic system which completes the processing of transferring funds from one financial account to another. These electronic messages substitute for the exchange of currency or a signed cheque that will be required to complete that payment transaction.

In Trinidad and Tobago, what happens here, the ACH, the automated clearing house, or the real time gross settlement system, the RTGS, are the major electronic payment transfer mechanisms. The exact time that a payment instruction is legally considered to have cleared electronically is also important in determining whether the financial institution had become the debtor of its customer. As such it is important to understand that the EFT technologies that underpin this system and issues such as privacy, confidentiality and system security must be considered in the design of the EFT system.

Mr. Speaker, it is contemplated that each EFT payment option will have its own set of procedural arrangements and will provide firstly for definitions of useful terms and concepts associated with the particular payment type; the details of the rules of the particular access system, for example the ACH or the RTGS; the general outline of the accepted procedure for payment—submission and acceptance; details of information required for the processing of the particular payment type; treatment of exemption items, example, payments returned for various reasons; schedules for processing deadlines; authorized documentation for payment requests; applicable fees; retention schedule for payment records.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is important for me to go through this part based on what the Member for Point Fortin raised, her concerns for this particular part of the Bill. The regulations themselves also make provision, as you would see, under the second part of the provision, which is (b), which is:

“processes and controls for ensuring valid and reliable authentication and access to information;”

So the EFT environment will require different checks and balances, because she spoke to checks and balances. So the EFT environment would require different

checks and balances which are appropriate to the new payment types. These would again include, (a) the detailed limits of authority for the authentication of entries; details of new procedures, example, inputter and authorizer functions and audit trails.

Mr. Speaker, we recognize that the provisions of the Electronic Transactions Act, 2011, and the Data Protection Act, 2011, relating to the electronic authentication of service providers and consumer protection need to be proclaimed in order for the EFT regulations to make sense. But as the Minister of Science and Technology was saying, it is our intention to ensure that all of these be proclaimed at the same time. Therefore, this is why if you look at clause 10(2) of this Bill, you will see that there is a provision for proclamation which is included in this particular section.

The regulations will need to make provision for electronic signatures, as said here in (c). There will be environmental and application controls to support the use of electronic signatures, and given the electronic nature of these payment instruments, it is envisioned that while initially the present arrangement will continue for the payment approval request process, there will be a gradual movement towards more electronic processes. To this end, it is envisioned that electronic signatures will be used as part of the authentication and authorization processes.

The next part of it in terms of (d), speaks to the guidelines and controls to ensure protection for clients and departments, et cetera. In the present international environment, electronic communications and contracts are governed by a protocol which requires the timely disclosure of specific information. This is no less true for electronic funds transfer, however the disclosures are unique in nature and require different standards than those of ordinary contracts.

So, for example, in the ACH environment, an advice is required to be communicated to the recipient within a specified time frame, with details of the payment to be made prior to the funds being debited electronically from the account of the payer. As such, there is a need for the accepted structure, content and timing of these disclosures to be clearly articulated within the procedures, and communicated to the public in order to foster transparency and create a level of standardization among the various government agencies.

As with the paper based environment, Mr. Speaker, it is expected that there will be some degree of standardization on the use of electronic forms, and this is

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expected for both interagency communications as well as communications with members of the public.

Another area, the last part here:

“(e) the liabilities of the State with respect to”—the various areas under that section (e)

That is, these provisions establishing the liabilities and responsibilities of the State, the collateral agreements that will be entered into with the participating financial intermediaries are also an integral part of this system. It is also going to be part of the system.

In keeping with the need to focus on issues of consumer protection and for the sake of transparency, the regulations will need to make provision for arrangements to be put in place outlining the responsibilities and liabilities of the parties involved in these transactions. These are intended to protect both the public and the government agency.

The issues which are typically addressed in other jurisdictions cover the following: unauthorized transfers, fraud or negligence of public officers and resultant losses, notification of loss, theft or unauthorized use of devices, system failure and dispute resolution. Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that there is a project plan in place. It is my understanding that a project plan has been developed by iGovTT. The Minister of Science and Technology will be able to verify this, that this high level project plan has been developed, and currently at the decision point at this point in time for the selection of the payment gateway. That payment gateway could either be an online link, Internet banking or it can be ACH.

Very important in here in the proposed section, 23B(3) introduces a fine of \$150,000 and imprisonment for one year as the stated penalty for contravening these regulations. We note that the regulations are still being fine-tuned. Up to today I think I heard that the regulations themselves are just going through the final part, and there would be finalization in the next two weeks or so. In moving towards an EFT means of exchange, there has been ongoing discussions with several stakeholders on the following: the cost to Government of using this system; what profits financial institutions are making from the use of this system—so we are going to get that up front—again in response to the issues raised by the Member for Point Fortin.

We will have these issues, we are dealing with these issues up front, while we are developing the regulations—what information is being collected through the

use of this system and whether this information can be shared and with whom, that is issues of confidentiality; how safe the system is; what types of suspicious circumstances should the financial institution look for in an EFT transaction, in exercising reasonable care and skill in carrying out its customers' business; who should bear the risk of fraud, and should the financial institutions be permitted to limit their liability for unauthorized use of the PIN or for the fraud of their employees, and what contractual arrangements will govern the EFT system. The answer to these questions will require a multidisciplinary response, and there is a multidisciplinary team established for this purpose. Mr. Speaker, I know it involves the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, the Ministry of Science and Technology, iGovTT, the Central Bank and some of the private stakeholders.

Of course, there is also the critical matter of proclaiming the Electronic Transactions Act and the Data Protection Act, and as I indicated earlier, the various Government agencies are currently in discussion to resolve these issues, as the Minister of Science and Technology mentioned, and it is the intention to have all of this coincide at the same time, so when we pass the regulations for this one and those other two Acts, we will be able to implement electronic payments.

Mr. Speaker, that takes me to the end of the issues related to the whole issue of the amendments themselves. Because the Member for Point Fortin spoke a lot on the HR issues, I just want now to turn Members' attention to this particular issue of the public service itself and the impact of this set of legislation, the introduction of e-payments for the public service.

First of all, it would allow for what we call empowerment. I heard today a lot about empowerment and so on, but one of the things that we are doing in our gold to diamond journey, the development of the new diamond structure human resource management architecture for the public service is one where we are talking about the empowerment of public officers. So with this sort of environment, what we are saying, very importantly, is that in terms of how we renew and modernize the public service, which is championed right now by the Ministry of Public Administration, the objectives of these amendments of the Exchequer and Audit Act, by way of this explanation, will actualize Government's long-term commitment to the provision of a safe and secure electronic funds transfer environment with redounding benefits.

This is again, Mr. Speaker, towards ensuring this security, the Government's methodology with these amendments is one that is technology neutral, and I want to make this point, because many times when we do pass legislation, especially legislation that involves technology, we have to bear in mind and we have to aim

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for technology to being technologically neutral, because as we know we live in a very dynamic world, and in this dynamic environment so many changes are taking place. New methodologies are evolving every day, new best practices, techniques and technologies themselves.

So under this agenda, Ministries are challenged to pursue creative new approaches to their work as a standard way by which they will operate on a day-to-day basis. They need to become more innovative, and this applies equally to all public service employees themselves who are empowered to bring new ideas for improving operations and service delivery. With these amendments, the goal will now be to support more effective planning, that also looks at opportunities for collaboration, for revenue generation, regulatory improvement, performance monitoring, improving citizen satisfaction and other factors.

One of the things that we have had in the public service for quite a long time is this vertical approach to the provision of services to the public. Today, and I spoke about this before right here in this Chamber, one of the things we want to do is to move across horizontally in the public service, and that means integrating services. Electronic payment is one of the enablers for allowing us to achieve that objective.

One of the other issues I wanted to raise is that while we apply technology, an important part of applying technology is that we just do not use technology or deploy it in our existing practices and processes, rather it is to re-evaluate all our existing practices. This is why we have reintroduced into the public service, the reengineering, process reengineering, process remapping and so on, that methodology in order to help us determine whether or not it is still valid, and mainly it is because we want to exploit the technology that is available to us.

10.05 p.m.

So that our technology itself is not wasted if it is applied only to speed up work, but really to make a revolutionary change in the way we do business in terms of how we improve our effectiveness and our efficiency and reducing the cost, not only to the Government, but also to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. And this is why this strategy is about transformation, is as much as it is about technology, because it must challenge the public service to rethink not just how it works, but also the nature of its work.

Mr. Speaker, this is why we are saying that the public service is now empowered to actually innovate and be creative, understand the technologies that

are available. I want to emphasize that no amount of technology can change the fact that Government does rely on a vast network of talented professionals across the public service, delivering services on a daily basis. Improving the way the public services are delivered is greatly dependent on process improvements; these improvements require the legislation and regulations as we are dealing with it today, which would allow public servants to use technology in performing their duties. This will have a range of benefits which we call G to C (Government to Citizens), G to G (Government to Government) and G to B (Government to Business). So, all of these transactions, Mr. Speaker, will be affected.

Mr. Speaker, when we speak on the national agenda, I just want to say, very important, I had mentioned earlier that there are many countries within our region who have surpassed us and have gone into this realm and I just wanted to mention those countries are: Barbados, The Bahamas, Belize, Jamaica, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and therefore Trinidad and Tobago will now join this group of countries. We have taken too long to actually join, Mr. Speaker, in my humble view. Therefore, this will allow us to remove barriers, raise the ceiling for foreign direct investment, level the playing field by bringing Trinidad and Tobago in line with other countries that have enabled e-transactions. There is, however, a learning curve, I would agree—apart from the facilitating flow of global goods and services—electronic transactions constitute one of the fastest growing areas in the world economy.

Mr. Speaker, if we are able to look at electronic transactions and make that part of the life here in Trinidad and Tobago and the public service, imagine the impact it will have on our citizens. Our citizens themselves, as we diversify the economy can become more service oriented. I always say that one of the things—if the public service continues to operate on a manual basis, and on paper-based transactions, then in the private sector there will be no impetus, there will be no reason for them to move into this new world of electronic transactions, and that is because the private sector is either a consumer or a provider of goods and services to the public service. So, if the public service is not keeping in step, to the private sector, there will be no economic reason or no justification for them investing in this sort of technology.

I agree, Mr. Speaker, there is a learning curve associated with building the robust and secure systems and developing the public trust and confidence necessary to support the widespread use of e-transactions. But, Mr. Speaker, there is no better time than now to start that learning curve. Mr. Speaker, benefits for the business community, the supply-chain efficiency, the private sector that would

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become part of that international supply-chain benefit allows this country to open up new markets. We no longer have to look at the loss of potential markets, foreign exchange, et cetera. Mr. Speaker, you know what is interesting? Carnival bands. I had some friends who played with Tribe and it was interesting to see that carnival bands themselves—I do not know if you are aware—started using Pay Pal two years ago.

Just returning a bit to the benefits for Government and to the public service of Trinidad and Tobago, as you know we have launched our gold to diamond journey and one of the issues with gold to diamond is that it is our view that as we celebrated the golden anniversary, 50 years for the public service of Trinidad and Tobago, which was established in 1962 and in 2022 we will be celebrating our diamond jubilee and therefore we have marked a 10-year journey which we call, gold to diamond journey. And the vision for 2022 is that we would be able to have what we call the one stop shop for Government services. We say the “no wrong door” approach to Government, meaning that you are able to go into any Government office and get any Government service.

So, you can go to any regional corporation office, you should go to any city corporation, you can go to any Government building and in that Government building, probably the ground floor of that office we must be able to renew our passport, renew our driver’s licence, check our teaching certificates, apply for a job, get a home improvement grant, obtain a food card, and therefore, Mr. Speaker, this e-payment system will allow us to be able to integrate, because, as you know, we do have coming up in June of this year, we had launched what we called the Diamond Certification Programme last year June and this year June we will be awarding diamond certification to a number of pilot agencies/services that have been participating.

These pilot services include, from the health sector: emergency department, medical records, et cetera. To the education, two schools are participating, a police station is participating, the TTBizLink is one of the candidates in it and so on. So, it runs across all the ministries, we have selected some, those who wanted to apply. But, one of the issues here is that a criterion that must be used—whereas of the criteria which include customer involvement, customer service and so on, technology and innovation, they will also be scored on that. One important criterion is what we call partnership, and that is the possibility of being able to go into, let us say the licensing office and be able to pay your parking ticket or go to a library instead of having to go to the magistrates’ court.

Mr. Speaker, that would not have been possible if we did not today pass these set of amendments and start the ball moving in terms of realizing and operationalizing the electronic payment system. Therefore, today, this is why I know those agencies that are participating in this pilot will welcome this initiative. So, it will change the face of the public by impacting on how jobs are designed and improve the customer experience. In fact, the Member for Point Fortin spoke about the HR issues, the human resource to support this particular project, and I want to say, Mr. Speaker, we have been preparing for this for some time now and in fact we have redesigned the jobs within the public service.

This is why we call it from the gold triangle shape to a diamond shape, because we have removed a number of the clerical support positions, because today's technology is telling us that because of this technology, we no longer need to have cashiers, we can now have that multi-skilled individual and, therefore the technology would be that vehicle that would allow this particular realization of the support officer, and therefore we could get rid of the cashier cages and we have replaced it and in fact I am pleased to announce that it has gone to the CPO's office. We have had discussions and we have now classified a whole new series which we call the management support office series.

I have spoken to it here in this House, but the management support office series is now that multi-skilled individual who can do a certain amount of project management, can do a certain amount of scheduling, can take decisions, and because we are no longer involved, in terms of manipulating and getting involved in this physical counting of money and standing there to deliver a cheque, we are now able to free up the public officer's time to provide better quality service to citizens in Trinidad and Tobago. So, this is what will happen to allow for an enablement of these new services that we would like to offer. Therefore, they would be engaged in the more meaningful task of probably helping citizens fill out forms, and it will fit in to a new work environment.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for San Fernando West and Minister of Public Administration has expired.

Motion made: That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Hon. R. Samuel*]

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleagues on both sides of the House, for giving me this extra time to finish my

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contribution. I thought it would have been a very brief intervention as I was just focusing on this part of the Bill.

Mr. Speaker, I was mentioning that because of this change, the e-payment system, we are looking at the way we change the jobs in the public service as we empower public officers, and I mentioned that what will be happening is that there will no longer be clerical staff and cashiers, and today we are pleased to state that the Ministry itself has arranged for this new set of positions called the management support office series. In fact, this is an integrated, multi-skilled individual who is able to carry out a number of functions and no longer restricted to cashing or performing.

And if you think about that, Mr. Speaker, it means, therefore, that a customer going up to a counter can deal with one individual instead of having to move from queue to queue or go into a cashier's cage. In fact, one of the issues there is that it would be able to, as well, allow for opening up, because we have introduced what we call a new outfitting policy for all Government offices and Government services and that allows for more friendly interaction with customers and citizens, and therefore there should be no longer any of these cages and counters, but more that sort of interaction between the customer, the citizen and the public officer who is providing that service.

So, Mr. Speaker, that will assist us in a long way. For some time now we have been looking at this and we have developed these new job specifications. It has been classified and it is ready and waiting for the operationalization of these particular pieces of legislation that will allow for electronic payments to take place.

Mr. Speaker, it also provides a tremendous opportunity to revolutionize public services. For example, Mr. Speaker, mobile applications, facilitating electronic payments, that is something that is becoming very, very—and if you look at the number of young people we have, as well, in Trinidad and Tobago who are very techie, they want to be able to use their smart devices and they want to be able to pay from their phone. And as I mentioned before, there is a significant reduction in the cost of services. I used just now an example, in the US they are saying that to clear a cheque it is over \$1, but to clear an electronic transaction is just about 10 and a half cents.

Again, too, Mr. Speaker, it will allow for improved timeliness of public service delivery and therefore reduces citizens' and business' frustration especially of businesses having to stand in in these long queues to pay bills. I mean, imagine, I do not know how many of you have ever had to go and pay CXC fees. I remember once my daughter was doing CXC in January and you had to go to a district revenue office to pay this fee, I hear sometimes you have to go and pay \$2.50 for a stamp, so you actually have to go to a district revenue office for this, so you have to go and look for the post office first.

So, Mr. Speaker, a lot of these can now be done online, and interestingly if we take for example—I am just giving another example here—TTBizLink, you know TTBizLink has been set up, it has won an award and it is now the single window for the investor to the business environment. Mr. Speaker, it won that award because of the integration of services, so that you can go to this one stop and businesses or investors can access these services.

10.20 p.m.

But you know, Mr. Speaker, what is interesting is that they can perform a name search in a matter of hours instead of the standard three days it would have probably taken them when you go to the Registrar General's office. However, do you know, Mr. Speaker, you still have to go into the office to pay all of these fees? So you have really defeated the purpose of when we reduce from the three days to the three hours, when we now still have to go and find an office to actually pay the fees.

Can you imagine then now, if these fees can be paid online? What is to say that the entire process itself, which is what we intend to do, can now become one? So you do your name search, you review all the draft articles of incorporation and all of that becomes one part of an electronic process, and without the applicant having to even visit the office itself, all you may have to do now—because you would have made your online payment—is probably to visit the office to collect the registration documents. Or if not, because you do not have to go to pay, TTPost or a courier service can actually bring those documents out for you. So there is no need now to get to that Government office. Mr. Speaker, think about the space savings that we are talking about in Government offices; think about the public officers, less long queues to deal with; think about the citizens not having to stand up in the long queues.

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There is also another area as well, there is a future potential to engage citizens and, what we call the techies, the young people of Trinidad and Tobago who want to get involved in these technology-type solutions—to use mobile phones for bill payments, and these techies can develop these applications themselves—these mobile apps.

So, in fact, Mr. Speaker, you know, in essence, enabling these electronic transactions by Government has the potential to be this game changer that will drive a transformation in the way Government services are provided to citizens. I just want to again say, in three areas, the service improvement area—which is where we would be able to access services—will be dramatically improved, becoming hassle-free, cheaper and most cost-effective, but it will also provide an opportunity for service innovation and therefore—because we always say that the public service of Trinidad and Tobago, if you look at the platform, because of its diversity, there is that potential for innovation. You know, whereas in a country like ours we tend to use our diversity for our weaknesses, many other countries that enjoy this diversity in ethnicity, in religion, in culture, in professionalism, in terms of the number of professional disciplines, in terms of gender and age, it creates the platform for innovation once technology is available, to give you that click moment.

We have started sessions with CARIRI where we have created these platforms within the public service so that we can get to that information—you know, that innovation phase where we can get that click moment. And, of course, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned to you, the “no wrong door” approach, which is the multichannel service delivery where you can actually access that service either from on your phone, your iPad or your home computer or even turn up at any Government office.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, service improvement, easier, no queues, faster, no bank drafts, cheques or letters, cheaper, as I mentioned. Government will save money through greater efficiencies. Citizens will also save money by access; potentially cheaper services, and it will mean that they will not have to travel from home or they can stay closer to home.

Mr. Speaker, one other area is the whole e-taxation system, and right now we are in anticipation of the passing of this legislation. Through the IDB loan which runs—there is an IDB portfolio for the modernization of the public service. One of them is the Board of Inland Revenue, and they are one of our pilot projects. We are preparing with the online filing and payment of income tax and VAT. In fact, the specifications, the requirements, et cetera, have been signed off by the Board

of Inland Revenue, the IRD, and we have a project in place ready to move with the e-online filing systems and because of the e-payment it will allow us to bring this to fruition.

E-procurement, Mr. Speaker, imagine for e-procurement, again, payment of examination fees and other fees—Ministry of Education—can be done from home; electronic submission and payment now for your Government birth certificates, death certificates, marriage certificates. It should be noted that the ability to access and pay for Government services via the Internet will be of particular benefit to many citizens who need access to Government services from overseas. We never really think about the many citizens who need to access Government services from abroad and, therefore, they would be able to do so.

Mr. Speaker, examples, again, of services which citizens can currently apply for online, but must be paid for over the counter, include: animal import licence, e-work permits, which is the Ministry of National Security. I mentioned the company registration; the e-certificate, ExporTT, e-goods declaration which launches within a month from today by the Bureau of Standards. But all of these, yes, can be done online, but we must pay over the counter.

Mr. Speaker, scholarships and advanced training division, which is one of the pilots as well, I do not know if anyone understands how the payments are made for our students who are abroad. In fact, when moneys are actually paid, it is interesting to note—I never realized this process was so complex, to just be able to pay tuition fees for a student at a university abroad. Mr. Speaker, something has to go from the Ministry of Public Administration; it has to go to the Comptroller; then Treasury has to issue a direction that goes to the Central Bank; the Central Bank has to remit the funds to the diplomatic mission abroad. If not, we have to find some way from there to the university. If there is no diplomatic mission, we have to find a diplomatic mission of Trinidad and Tobago closest to the university and have that money wired to them. Then, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry or so will have to now go and clear the Treasury suspense account at the Central Bank.

So if you look at the many steps in that process, Mr. Speaker, what happens sometimes is that we end up with major delays in the payment of tuition fees for students who are on scholarships. It is sometimes horrible when you hear the stories and it takes our staff working overtime, hours into the night and running to the Comptroller because of all the steps in this process. Just imagine how this process itself will be improved. Imagine if we have to make emergency payments to scholars as well. Look at the quandary of the Ministry when we have to make

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an emergency payment. Therefore, it will also reduce—and I am sure scholars would love to hear this. It will reduce the time involved in conducting transactions with banking agencies, like Unit Trust, where they get their payments to pay for their board, their rent and so on, and their upkeep.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of innovation, e-transaction legislation will provide opportunities for innovation in the provision of services to citizens. And again, too, this supports the national objectives of building innovative capacity and strengthening synergies between Government and the private sector, again, all of this towards improving Trinidad and Tobago's ranking on international surveys, such as the WEF's Global Competitiveness Index.

Mr. Speaker, an important area, as well, is that this new industry—this will facilitate the development of a whole new industry for our tech savvy citizens to become entrepreneurial, by developing apps for services, particularly through mobile services.

In addition to that, we will also be looking at mobile apps for Government—not necessarily developed by Government itself, but developed by citizens outside there. And not to mention as well, very important, some services could be paid for via a mobile phone account, as is done elsewhere in the world. I think I heard somebody mention that here today, or earlier, where you will actually be able to pay for a service from your mobile phone account. [*Desk thumping and interruption*] That is right. In Asia and so on, they are doing this, especially when you are talking about services for smaller fees, not large fees.

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned before, there are two other projects that this will help us with. One is called the shared services concept, which allows Government agencies to work together to pool State resources. So we have started the shared services project which will allow ministries to share accounting services, share payroll, et cetera. Can you imagine what it will do for our payroll function? Because it will mean direct payment into accounts instead of Ministries themselves having to develop this payroll and then have these cheques issued for individual accounts, and making sure that the total sums match when they send them to the banks.

Mr. Speaker, it is also important for us to appreciate that coming out of this, there is another project which we had started, which is called the integrated service delivery project. In fact, it was interesting that I was looking at an article today in the US which talked about social security and the issue of how e-payments have aided and improved the efficiency of delivery of these social

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payments. So, for example, what they call the supplemental security income benefits, et cetera, are actually paid electronically, and that is according to the rule from the US Department of the Treasury.

So, Mr. Speaker, we have started a project where we are trying to integrate all of the social services so that you can go to one office and obtain all the social services, whether they are from Community Development, from the Ministry of the People and Social Development, from the National Insurance Board, and the Minister of Finance and the Economy mentioned that in his budget presentation in 2013 and I spoke to it.

But one of the issues is by being able to allow for these electronic payments, we would be able to achieve this particular project where we are able to pool scarce resources and achieve economies of scale. But most important, Mr. Speaker, with an integrated social service delivery project, imagine what it does for the citizens themselves. Citizens no longer have to go to many different offices. In addition to that, we had a situation the other day where it is dangerous for people to go out and give out these old age pension cheques in some of these areas. Can you imagine these payments being made directly into the accounts of some of these pensioners; the timeliness, the ease of doing business in doing that; efficiency and cost to the Government and cost to the pensioner?

Mr. Speaker, as I close, I want to say that this has the potential—these amendments that are passed here today, it is an important piece of legislation. I hope I have responded to the issues raised by the Member for Point Fortin, and to state that these amendments are part of a wider body of legislation and it has the potential to transform Government's ability to deliver services to citizens. In particular, it would improve what we call citizen to Government; business to government experiences via hassle-free services; create opportunities for innovative business and financial services; drive Government's vision of providing the "no wrong door" approach to service provision through adopting multi-channel service delivery solutions; enable opportunities for more citizen-centric service delivery.

Mr. Speaker, the time is now to make changes if Trinidad and Tobago wants to keep with it and ensure that we become part of the 21st Century global economy. The time is now for us to transform our public service into the 22nd Century public service in the 21st Century.

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

10.35 p.m.

Mrs. Patricia Mc Intosh (*Port-of-Spain North/St. Ann's West*): Mr. Speaker, I stand to make my contribution to the Finance Bill, 2014 under review in this honourable House this evening.

Mr. Speaker, with the exception of the last speaker who addressed the Bill—if only one part, the Electronic Transactions Act, 2011, but I must say very efficiently so—the other speakers before her on the other side, most of them never even addressed the Bill. It seemed to me that they were on a campaign trail desperately fighting for survival, leaving me in no doubt that general election will take place next year. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I have to go back to the Member for San Fernando West, however. She came out swinging, as she usually does, upbraiding the Members on this side of the honourable House for not upholding the value system and for not cautioning our supporters in their conduct. But, Mr. Speaker, I wondered if she was joking—if, as the people would say, she is for real—because I want to caution her that people who live in glass houses should not throw stones and she must be careful about how she waxes sanctimonious.

Indeed, the hon. Member has no moral authority, nor do any Member on that side of this honourable House, have any moral authority to pontificate to the Members on this side of the honourable House about a value system. They have only to look across—she just has to look across—at three faces of former ministers who are sitting there before her—[*Desk thumping*]
[*Crosstalk*]
[*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: I have always said—[*Crosstalk*] May I have the attention of the hon. Members?

Hon. Member for Port-of-Spain North/St. Ann's West, do not make any personal charge against any Member of this honourable House or do not raise the conduct of any Member of this honourable House. Do not use this debate for that. File a substantive motion, and do not impugn the character or reflect on the persons who you have made reference to. Do not go there at all. Move on, please.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Oh, thank you, Mr. Speaker; facts, however, are facts.

Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Take your seat, take your seat. You withdraw that statement, apologize to the Chair and to the House.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Mr. Speaker, I am afraid that those facts are in the public domain. They were in the newspapers—[*Interruption*]

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Mr. Speaker: All right. Take your seat. Take your seat. Next speaker, please.
[*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Land and Marine Resources (Hon. Jairam Seemungal): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to contribute to this debate on this Finance Bill, 2014—a very historic day in the life of this Parliament—where there are two major amendments in this Bill which will be recorded in history. [*Crosstalk*] The contribution by the Member for Port-of-Spain/St. Ann’s West would also be recorded in history.

This Bill, Mr. Speaker, introduces two very fundamental—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, please. Member for Port-of-Spain North/St. Ann’s West, I have ruled on your behaviour. If you continue to utter words that are designed to question my ruling, I will ask you to leave for the rest of the evening.

Continue, hon. Member, please.

Hon. J. Seemungal: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, this Bill is a very historical Bill as it seeks to introduce two very important pieces of legislation, one of which my colleague, the Member for San Fernando West alluded to, which is the introduction of electronic payment. The second historic piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, is that this Bill also seeks to repeal a 53-year-old piece of legislation, which is the Cocoa and Coffee Industry Act, with respect to clause 9 of the Bill. I will speak a little on the Cocoa and Coffee Industry Act a little later on in my contribution.

Mr. Speaker, when one listened to Members on the other side, you get the sense that they are very new to this House; they are very new to the Parliament and that their party only formed recently. This Parliament continues to bring historic amendments. This Government continues to bring historic amendments in keeping with the times that we are in; in keeping with the technology that we are in and in keeping with the growth and development of the economy of this country.

I want to start by congratulating my colleague, the Minister of Finance and the Economy, Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai, on this very innovative and this very forward-thinking piece of legislation by way of the amendment to this Finance Bill.

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Before I speak of clause 9 and other clauses of the Bill, I want to speak, first, of the non-performance of the former administration, especially, when it comes to constituencies that were under their control over the last seven years of the administration.

Mr. Speaker, the constituency of La Horquetta/Talparo, one which I am very proud to be representing and one which, for the very first time in the history of this country, has changed hands from PNM control and rule into another government, the People's Partnership Government. When one looks at what neglect and what lack of representation and what total disregard to their own constituents, one feels very ashamed as to what they have left with their own constituency. When they come now and speak of every single thing that is occurring in south and central, but they were there and they were there to also develop, not only Port-of-Spain and environs but the entire country.

Mr. Speaker, in the constituency of La Horquetta/Talparo, when I went into that constituency, there were several major infrastructural development that never occurred. Close to 70 per cent of that constituency never had water supply by way of the WASA-produced water, by way of pipelines. There are areas such as Mundo Nuevo that have never seen water for over 200 years of its history. That is a constituency that was started by the migration of persons out of the sugar industry who went into that area to start a cocoa industry. That constituency—that area—in particular, has never had pipe-borne water.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, there were pipelines on the ground that were over 30 years old and they never had pipe-borne water. I share Mamoral with my colleague from Tabaquite and there is an area inside there called Miani Village—some people refer to it as Miami Village because it is so far away from civilization. [*Interruption*] In that area they have never had pipe-borne water. You had to take donkey cart and bull cart to get inside there because taxi would not carry you; people had to pay \$60 in transport—close to \$70 in some instances—and if you have to carry goods home you had to hire a vehicle that was fit for the road and they take close to \$100. So you are spending \$50 in the grocery but you have to pay \$100 to carry it home.

I am proud to say that the hon. Member for Tabaquite, the Minister of Works and Infrastructure, for the very first time in the history of that area, they have paved asphalt road. [*Desk thumping*] There are now brand new pipelines laid in that particular area. There is a brand new activity centre in that area.

Hon. Member: The community centre was burnt down years ago.

Hon. J. Seemungal: Close to 20 years ago that community centre was burnt down and nothing under the previous administration. The sad thing about it is that constituency was theirs. It was their constituency and when Members like the Member for La Brea comes every single week in this Parliament and keep referring to infrastructure in his constituency, I am sympathetic but that is the legacy which the PNM left.

Mr. Speaker, in the Todds Road area the constituents, residents living along that Todds Road, had to use barrels—*[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, the Member with her telephone and it is distracting.

Mr. Speaker, in the Todds Road area there were members of that constituency—residents along Todds Road use barrels to carry water; barrels where their children would drink water from and for children to go to school they have to boil water. In that area now, for the very first time, the entire Todds Road has water, in most instance, seven days a week. *[Desk thumping]* We have pipelines now going straight up into Mundo Nuevo—directly into Mundo Nuevo—where every single person along that Mundo Nuevo line got rid of their barrels and for the first time they have pipe-borne water, in most instances, seven days a week.

Mr. Speaker, when you had to travel from Talparo to Chaguanas it would take you close to an hour because of the condition of the road. That road, like it had never been repaired, in the history of the last administration's stint in government. Today, today, Mr. Speaker, that road is being paved by the Member for Tabaquite. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Speaker, this is the type of work that this Government is doing, especially for the rural communities. Rural communities had been neglected under the previous administration. Rural communities felt alienated from the public purse. They felt that the previous administration never gave them anything nor do they deserve anything, but under this Kamla Persad-Bissessar administration, they now feel part of the governance of this country. They now feel part of the public acceptance; they now feel part—*[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin Central would have his time, but at least give me my time to speak, “nah”.

Dr. Browne: You are the Speaker, or what? I am listening to you. I am the only one listening to you.

Hon. J. Seemungal: You will have your time to speak.

Dr. Browne: I am the only one listening to you.

Hon. J. Seemungal: Mr. Speaker, this is how this People's Partnership administration, led by our Prime Minister, has us, Members of Parliament, going into every single area of the constituencies—looking for constituents, looking to see what development is required in the constituency—to improve the lives of our constituents.

Mr. Speaker, when I looked around the constituency, the recreation facilities were in such a deplorable condition; not one recreation ground was capable of even holding a football small goal, much less for holding large competitions. I want to congratulate the Minister of Sport, every single recreation ground has been upgraded. [*Desk thumping*] There are lights in my constituency in five of the recreation grounds. This is a constituency—I want to remind us again, that this constituency was under the PNM control for seven years prior to me coming into office, and this is a constituency called La Horquetta/Talparo.

10.50 p.m.

They never thought they would have lost La Horquetta/Talparo, but it is neglect like this that caused them to lose constituencies such as this. None of the recreational grounds had any lights in them. Not one! Today, Mr. Speaker, we have lights on the phase two recreation ground in La Horquetta, phase five recreation ground in La Horquetta, the Las Lomas recreation ground, the Brazil recreation ground, the Caparo recreation ground. We also have in the Talparo recreation ground, and very soon we will be coming to the Wallerfield recreation ground and the Todds Road recreation ground. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, it is like they do not like people. [*Laughter*] The Minister of Sport, Mr. Speaker, launched one of the most successful programmes for young people. It is the LIFE-sport Programme. [*Desk thumping*] That programme touches thousands of young people's lives. The programme allows young people to come out, and in a disciplined way of competition, in a disciplined way of learning the sport, have proper coaches, have meals to eat, come out in the morning. There are persons who do not even have breakfast, and they would come out and they would get their breakfast, they will have lunch and they may have dinner in the afternoon and they would practise their sport.

Mr. Speaker, when I came into the constituency, I started a sports club called the La Horquetta Sporting Academy. In 2010—I want to put on record in this House, that I and a gentleman by the name of Mr. Fallon Thomas were responsible for registering and starting this La Horquetta Sporting Academy. The

reason I want to put it on record is that there was a PNM meeting in La Horquetta recently and they were laying claim to this sports club. This sports club was started by me and on that sports club I got in contact with the Minister of Sport, and this is one of the first LIFE-sport programmes that he launched right there in my constituency, in the heart of La Horquetta, in the heart of a constituency which was theirs. Mr. Speaker, let me read into the record the achievement of this sports club. When you want to learn about football, you do not go and look for Joe Public and anybody else. You come into La Horquetta and we will teach you about football.

Mr. Speaker, in 2011 the La Horquetta Sporting Academy came second in the Eastern Football Association First Division. They won the Emerald Plaza League Cup and they won the President's Cup in the Eastern Football Association. In 2012—and that is when we now started, eh. That was when the boys now got together. The first time they are hearing about LIFE-sport, they are so excited; the first time they are going out in the field and playing together; but it is the discipline. It is the discipline that had been instituted in our young people. It is the discipline that we have inculcated in them. Not like what we had seen on the last Friday outside of the Parliament by PNM supporters. Not like the display we saw just now by the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West taking out her cell phone and speaking in Parliament.

Dr. Browne: Standing Order 36(5), imputing improper motives.

Hon. J. Seemungal: What?

Mr. Speaker: Please! No, please! Do not make any reference to the Member or any Member on this side, especially the Member in question. Do not make reference. Okay? Continue, please.

Hon. J. Seemungal: I am guided, Mr. Speaker. Let me get back to the La Horquetta Sporting Academy. In 2012, they placed first in the Eastern Football Association President's Cup. Again, they came second in the Emerald Plaza League Cup and they won the Eastern Football Association FA Cup.

In 2013, this same sports club which I formed and they went into La Horquetta tried to lay claim on it during a little election campaign thing going on; I am not too sure, they tried to claim the sports club as their own. Listen, in 2013 and 2014, game now finished. In 2013, they won the EFA Premier League Champion. They are the first team in the history of this league to gain 50 points in any season; the first team in the history of this league to gain 50 points in a season. They are the Eastern Football Association FA Cup champion at this point in time. They are the Eastern Football Association President's Cup champion at

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this point in time and, Mr. Speaker, they are the Emerald Plaza League runners up, but they played in the champions of champions league, and out of the five games they won four and they have been promoted to the Super League.

Mr. Speaker, this did not come by chance. This came because of the intervention of this Government, the intervention of the Minister of Sport, the intervention of the LIFE-sport Programme. And for those of you who know La Horquetta, it is an area that was branded as one of those hot spots. It is an area prior to 2010, people were afraid to go inside La Horquetta. Before 2010, you could not even walk the streets. It is every other day you are hearing about a killing and a shooting, and this one and that. Mr. Speaker, people are standing on the streets today. Three years later people are standing on the streets and they are conversing. They feel at ease to come out from their houses inside La Horquetta.

Mr. Speaker, it is not just about the sports. It is about the community spirit that has started building among the young people, and it is that type of attitude by the PNM administration and their own by neglecting them, but also taking them for granted. That is how they treat their own. They take them for granted. They say that they are ours for life. They do not have to do anything with them, Mr. Speaker, and the success of the LIFE-sport Programme can go on and on, all over the country. The Minister of Sport is also going to construct a state-of-the-art small pavilion, a stadia-type pavilion up at the Brazil area, and he has indicated that will start very shortly. This is the type of facilities, this is the type of caring Government, this is what representation is about, this is how Members of Parliament should represent.

Mr. Speaker, I will tell you that you cannot find me sitting in the constituency office for too long. Do you know why? I moved my constituency office into the areas that people cannot even reach and they do not even get taxi to come to the constituency office. So it is not that they have to come to see me in Brazil office sitting there, I go to them. Last week we went to Las Lomas No. 1. Next week we are in Mamoral, the following week we are in Mundo Nuevo, the week after that we are in Four Roads Tamana, then we are going down to Wallerfield/La Horquetta, all over every single Tuesday. That is the representation that the hon. Prime Minister has instilled in us. We are here to represent the people, represent the people and represent the people, and representation means finding where they are. Do not let them come and look for you. Find them where they are. So when one looks to see what they are doing, it is very important that we understand where we come from to know where we are going.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill introduces—and my colleague spoke a great deal about it—the electronic payment. When I was a Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Legal Affairs, that was something that came up very early in discussion. Because in the Ministry of Legal Affairs you would appreciate that every single transaction under that Ministry requires some type of payment. It appalled me to see persons in 2010 when we took office and when we entered the Ministry, come into that Ministry to transact business from four o'clock in the morning.

Mr. Speaker, in the building in Trinidad House they call it, persons lined up around the entire building for close to 200 feet or metres—200 metres—and these are persons who would be standing there on most occasions at four o'clock in the morning, Port of Spain, with cash money in their pockets. What is worse about these cash payment-type transactions is that you require a cashier to sit behind a cash register, but also you require two security guards with ammunition, two security guards with guns to be around the cashier and to be around inside of those cashier booths with public servants operating right around.

Mr. Speaker, just imagine someone comes and makes an attempt to hold up someone inside that cashing area, what would happen? What would the security guard do when he draws his gun and starts shooting all over the place? Even if he makes an attempt there will be persons standing all around, there will be employees sitting at desks, there will be other persons who are transacting business, what would he do?

Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the Minister of Finance and the Economy. This piece of legislation has been long overdue, and this is the first time I am in the Parliament where I am not hearing the other side laying claim to it because it is something they did not think up. They have been in Government for too long and they did not think that this type of transaction is such an important—the banks have been using cards for as long as I know. As a matter of fact, when I joined the bank close to—how old am I now?—about plenty years ago [*Laughter*] the first thing I got was a bank card. But when you have to go now to make a \$20 payment, in most Ministries you have to go and get a draft from the bank.

Now, Mr. Speaker, your transaction is \$20, but the bank is charging you \$50 for the draft. So there now, comes a \$70 transaction where you could have taken that other \$50 and buy some sweetie or something, two doubles or visit somewhere and spend that on something substantial, or even give it to charity. But, Mr. Speaker, this payment by transaction will facilitate, especially in the Ministry of Legal Affairs, many of its transactions.

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In the Ministry of Legal Affairs since this Government came into office, we decided that there are many services that were people-centred services. There are services that people would come for from all over the country into Port of Spain to transact, and one such is to obtain their electronic birth certificate. To get their birth certificate they actually have to come into Port of Spain to obtain their birth certificate.

Mr. Speaker, under this administration, the Kamla Persad-Bissessar led administration, today, we have a registrar house not only in Port of Spain. We have a full registrar house in San Fernando, a full registrar house in Arima and a full registrar house in Tobago.

11.05 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the same thing you can do in Port of Spain in the Registrar General's office, you can do that in San Fernando, Arima and Tobago. No longer do people have to take a plane to come to Trinidad to obtain a birth certificate or a deed for their property. No longer do people have to leave Grand Riviere and Toco—and the Member for Point Fortin said she went up Grand Riviere, see how beautiful it is and you see how far it is—to come down to Port of Spain to obtain transactions in the Registrar General's Department, we can do it right here in Arima.

Mr. Speaker, thus far, in the Registrar General's Department, they were able to issue some 52,000 electronic birth certificates in just the last couple of years alone and so far, 24,846 death certificates. Again, there were some fundamental changes with respect to how business is done at the Registrar General's Department. By way of registration of companies, for every single transaction you have to do in the Companies Registry, even where you had penalties to be paid, had to be done by cash. Now, by way of electronic means, you can transact any part of these in these five stations.

When we came into office, it took you two years when you register your child to actually get your birth certificate in your hand. The child sometimes nearly ready to go to primary school and “yuh ent get dey birth certificate yet”. Today, you can register your child and fifteen minutes after, you can get your birth certificate. [*Desk Thumping*] You can sit and wait for your birth certificate and you will get it. That is how this administration sees people and that is how we care for people, and this only happens under this People's Partnership Government.

Mr. Speaker, let me turn my attention a little to clause 9 of the Bill. Clause 9 seeks to repeal the Cocoa and Coffee Industry Act. The Cocoa and Coffee Industry Act, Chap. 64:20, and it is really No. 20 of 1961. It is a 53-year-old Act. The Minister of Finance and the Economy actually alluded to some of the fines and penalties of this Act. But, Mr. Speaker, let me give you a little history as to how this Act came into effect.

Many years ago, before independence and under the colonel rule, there was an attempt, then, to control one of the most profitable agricultural products that came out of this country. The sugar industry was one but the cocoa was one of the fastest growing industries in this country at that point in time. The production of cocoa, then, at that time, amounted to some 200,000 tonnes of cocoa when the industry just started. That grew close to 300,000 tonnes and over the years, it started declining. Today, it is just under 90,000 tonnes of cocoa that are being exported from Trinidad.

But, what was more important is that Trinidad and Tobago holds the only two gene banks in the entire world, and one gene bank has some 22,000 species of cocoa. There are areas in Latin America and South America, you cannot even find the cocoa gene and the trees that we have in this country. We were able to preserve and keep those genes and over the years, developed the brand of cocoa that we know in Trinidad. Trinitario is the name of one of those brands that is well known all over the world. Chocolatiers all over the world refer to Trinidad as trinitario; some of them do not even know the words “Trinidad and Tobago”, but they say trinitario because they know about that flavour of cocoa, because it is still the best flavouring cocoa in the entire world.

Mr. Speaker, the *Newsday* of 2012 reported and I want to read into the record:

“At the Olympics of the food world, The Great Taste Awards, which...took place in London, Tobago Chocolates won gold...”

That was in 2012. It would be interesting to note that over 2,500 producers from 20 different countries in the world produced cocoa at that particular competition. There were some 350 persons who participated in the tasting of this cocoa from these 2,500 producers, and Trinidad and Tobago won gold at that competition. In 2011, they did the same, and, in 2013, they also repeated—and this one was in France where Trinidad and Tobago’s cocoa, again, was voted number one in terms of flavour in the entire world. So it means that we have something that everybody wants, but the problem is what is happening to the industry.

Mr. Speaker, there is a saying that if you allow the same thing to go and go on and it does not get any different result, you have to come up with some type of

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change, and it is in view of this, and in the context that also some of the penalties and fines under the Act itself created an onerous approach to the cocoa industry. Because in the Act, for instance, in section 25, you cannot sell cocoa on a Sunday, Christmas Day, Good Friday, Corpus Christi; you cannot sell it to anybody else after the hour of six. So it created a lot of heavy and onerous burden. In section 24 of the Act, it provides that it is a criminal offence also to be selling cocoa if you are not registered with the board and only the board can fix the price of cocoa. So even if the price of cocoa goes up in the world, the board in Trinidad, again, fixes the price of cocoa.

Many people want to expand their cocoa industry, they want to expand their cocoa estate, not only for the growing of cocoa but actually to manufacture the by-product of the cocoa to make chocolate. There is a cocoa estate in Tobago that actually does that and they have it as an eco-tourism estate as well, where persons can come onto the estate and be guided by tours, and they can take part in the dancing of cocoa and see how it actually bears on the trees, and then, after that, they are allowed to purchase some of the by-product—cocoa. In some instances, this same cocoa is sold for some TT \$1,200 per pound. Tourists are willing to pay \$1,200 for the product of chocolate in this country and yet we are selling—the board—a fixed price of \$20 a pound. So, it is not open, at this point in time, for the free and open market but it is a fixed rate system and the Act has been designed with the cocoa and coffee board to control what happens in the industry.

At one point in time, the Act was really set up to protect the local farmers. They could have felt, when the Act was created, that the farmers were being exploited by the persons then. During those days, all the cargo ships used to come to Trinidad and dock, and they used to go around and buy every single thing but they were being exploited. So, the thinking at that time was actually to set up this control over the cocoa industry, but, Mr. Speaker, time has changed. And in moving with the time, now, the Minister of Food Production, in his wisdom, had felt that he is required to try something different and so, he has formed this company which is the Cocoa and Coffee Limited Liability Company, and putting in a different structure as to how to manage and treat with the cocoa industry.

Because you will appreciate that the cocoa industry is one that many young people do not want to get into unless it can be profitable and many young people like to experiment in school and lessons and doing a degree and doing something along the processing line of the food industry. Because of that thinking of how the young people would like to move forward, it is felt that the limited liability company will also help them in that venture.

I know today, for instance, the University of the West Indies got a grant from the United Nations to actually set up a small factory, a small processing plant, for the purpose of making chocolate, because it is felt that since our chocolate is the best flavour in the entire world, why we do not produce a chocolate and market it as a Trinidad and Tobago chocolate and maybe sell that same chocolate to every single showcase in every single airport all over the world and mark trinitario or something along that line. So the thinking is that this new company would then drive that industry forward. So, this piece of legislation will be a landmark piece of legislation in its own right.

The Bill also helps in the new Ministry of Land and Marine Resources in—coming back to the electronic transactions—how we transact business there as well. It is very important to note that the Ministry of Land and Marine Resources is responsible for over 200,000 clientele, as we call them. If I am to read in a few of the statistics that we have to date: we have over 60,000 persons who have applied for certificates of comfort. In 2000, we had 23,000 persons applying for certificates of comfort and between 2000—2014, we had another 37,000 persons applying, bringing a total of 60,000 persons who would have been squatting on lands and who have applied for certificates of comfort.

In the commissioner's office alone, we are doing an audit right now, and we have some 24,000 farmers and some 4,800 leases have expired and we are in the process of treating with those leases. We have also, under the Land for the Landless Programme, to date, some 48,000 persons have made applications, and that programme, we are going to issue leases to the first set of recipients later in this month.

Mr. Speaker, I am saying all of this because every single one of these clients that we have here requires to do some form of money transaction. It is not a little money, it is a lot of money, in many instances, that they actually have to walk around with. Some people like to save and walk around with cash. Some people like to pay with cash. There are many older persons who do not want to hear anything about card and all these kinds of things, they walk around with cash. Now, they can actually go to the bank and have it wire transferred across to the Ministry.

So, I want to support the Minister of Finance and the Economy in supporting this Bill. I know it is late now. Any Member of this House who does not support this Bill would be missing out on an opportunity to be part of history in the very first time that we are having payment by electronic transaction.

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With these few words, I want to congratulate the Minister of Finance and the Economy and I want to thank you for allowing me the opportunity. [*Desk thumping*]

11.20 p.m.

Mr. Fitzgerald Jeffrey (*La Brea*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I sat here and I listened. I sat here and I listened and, Mr. Speaker, for most of the contributions on the other side, they strayed away from the business at hand. But I guess for good reason. With a general election next year, the politicking has started. But, Mr. Speaker, let us set the record straight on some inaccuracies and some misleading statements being made on the other side.

Mr. Speaker, let me start with the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, who is giving the impression that the electronic birth certificate that you could receive in one day, has started with this Government. Nothing could be further from the truth. Mr. Speaker, that is the first thing I want to correct.

The second statement has to do with the Member for Tabaquite. I thought that this smelter debate was settled once and for all. But, Mr. Speaker, he could not help but make comments about “crying down” the then PNM proposed smelter on health grounds. Mr. Speaker, permit me for the last time to set the record straight on this smelter.

The smelter that was supposed to be built in Trinidad was one of the most technologically-advanced smelters that we were going to get in the globe, 125,000 tonnes. Just by comparison, I want to take Bahrain, which is 765 square kilometres, and put it alongside Trinidad and Tobago, which is 5,124 square kilometres, which means that Bahrain would have been about one-sixth the size of Trinidad and Tobago. Bahrain has a smelter of 880,000 tonnes.

Mr. Roberts: Bahrain is a good model.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Trinidad—[*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, I need your protection, please.

Mr. Speaker: You have my full protection.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Bahrain has a smelter producing 880,000 tonnes. The smelter in Trinidad was only going to produce 125,000 tonnes. Therefore, if the aluminum smelter was such a bad thing, the whole of Bahrain “should not have nobody. Everybody shouldda die.”

Mr. Speaker, let us compare Bahrain against Trinidad and Tobago. The death rate in Bahrain is 2.65 per thousand in 2013. In Trinidad and Tobago, the death

rate is 8.42. Mr. Speaker, the birth rate in Bahrain is 14.16 per thousand. In Trinidad and Tobago, it is 14.07. The infant mortality rate in Bahrain is 9.93. In Trinidad and Tobago, it is 25.74. Life expectancy in Bahrain, male, 76.28; Trinidad and Tobago, 69.09; female, Trinidad and Tobago, 74.91, Bahrain 80.63. Mr. Speaker, what this simply means is that this talk about health concerns is a big hoax and what has happened, political expediency took the better of good patriotism in our country. But, Mr. Speaker, time is longer than twine.

The Member for Tabaquite talked about prosperity for all, helping the poor, preventing them from falling through the cracks. Well, Mr. Speaker, my constituents, people from the coastal zone of La Brea, Rancho Quemado, Erin, I guess Port of Spain South, Point Fortin, Laventille, “is not no crack; we fall through the flooring, under this Government”. [*Desk thumping*].

While non-PNM areas, like La Horquetta/Talparo, are receiving large slices of bread, the PNM-held constituencies are receiving fine crumbs that fall from the master’s table.

Dr. Gopeesingh: You come back with that misinformation.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, I need your protection.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, you have my protection.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, based on the experience I have had with my constituency, and I guess my colleagues, we have a dream. We have a dream, and if we could just take a little bit of modification from that famous speech in 1963: we have a dream that from the taxes and duties paid by our fore parents and by ourselves in the Treasury of Trinidad and Tobago one day, not very long from now, my constituents and their children yet unborn will be treated, not on the basis of their geography but by the extent of their character. [*Desk thumping*] You see, Mr. Speaker, we have seen only too well the experience that the people of La Brea had recently. But I will come back to that in a short while.

Mr. Speaker, what is the purpose of this Bill? Is it meant to be downright punitive and vindictive? Is it merely to increase revenue for a Government buried in waste? And if it is to increase revenue, it begs the question: to do what? Mr. Speaker, these are very pertinent revenue questions. Almost four years have gone and over \$275 billion have slipped through the hands of this Government. What have the people gotten from this Government, particularly from the PNM areas?

Mr. Speaker, we looked at the Bills before us and while we compliment the Minister for the amendment to the Municipal Corporations Act, whereby the

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municipal police officers would receive their duty allowance; they are grossly underpaid yet very committed, industrious and loyal. They deserve their duty allowance.

Mr. Speaker, I think I also want to support the Litter Act because we know that our environment is far from satisfactory. But we need to understand that in the Municipal Corporations (Amdt.) Act we missed the opportunity to make another amendment, because if we are talking in terms of creating a healthy environment, we have a situation in our country with abandoned lots in our country, overgrown with vegetation, haven for rats and snakes, and really and truly pollution.

Mr. Roberts: Wild Balisier.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Legislation—*[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, I need your protection, please. I need your protection.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, may I ask you all to allow the Member for La Brea to speak in silence. Continue, hon. Member, please.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, in the urban areas, if lots are not maintained, the corporation would clean them and charge you, and if you do not pay they have a way of collecting. In regional corporations, for example the Siparia Regional Corporation, they have no authority to go and clean the abandoned lots and, therefore, it makes the residential areas look very untidy. I think, the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy, it would be worth the while to put some kind of thing in place to force owners of properties to maintain their properties, so that it could improve the ambiance of our country.

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to the whole question of the amendment to the Minerals Act that talks about any holder of a licence to do the extraction of minerals and:

pollutes any watercourse in the exercise of his mining operations commits an offence...”and there is a fine imposed.

Mr. Speaker, I agree with that measure. But, when I looked at the amendments to the Petroleum Act, I am worried, because not too long ago, just December, January, February, March, we had a very serious pollution problem in the south-western peninsula and we come to this House here to deal with the Bill and we could talk about pollution of watercourses and omit to deal with oil pollution. Mr. Speaker, something has to be wrong. Somebody’s interest is being protected.

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When we look at the situation, Mr. Speaker, I happened to be—I have been in that area for the past four months and one time I got emotional, because to see the amount of oil on the beaches and even the coastal waters, in the mangrove and see thousands of crabs and oysters, birds not only pelicans, but also our National Bird, the Scarlet Ibis, squirrels and iguanas all covered in oil—fish in the sea. And to add insult to injury, the deadly COREXIT 9500 was used. Mr. Speaker, we recognize, because I was there, on December 18 and 19, when the aircraft flew over the area dispersing the deadly COREXIT 9500.

11.35 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the HSE manager, Mr. Dayal, admitted that for the two days of the oil spill, they used COREXIT 9500. At a Petrotrin news conference on January 13, the President of Petrotrin, Mr. Khalid Hassanali, stated that they used the COREXIT 9500 in La Brea. These are two people who were intimately involved with what transpired at Petrotrin. [*Interruption*] But, Mr. Speaker—you could make joke with a serious issue, you know.

Mr. Speaker, what happened was the following: they mixed—they sprayed the COREXIT on the oil, and it broke it up into little nodules which sank on the sea floor but, Mr. Speaker, that mixture is 52 times more toxic than the natural oil; what has happened was the ill effects of these pollutants. I hasten to add, that the same rash, diarrhoea, fever, scratching of the eyes, burning of the nostrils, loss of balance, vomiting, are the very said illnesses of the people in Alaska, when they had the 1989 Exxon Valdez spill, when they used the COREXIT 9500 there; same illnesses.

What is even more, 20 years later, the people in Alaska started to suffer from serious lung disease, heart, kidney, Mr. Speaker, and not only that; cancer. Mr. Speaker, 20 years from now, who will take care of those people in La Brea? Moreover, the people in Alaska who were involved with the clean-up, very few have survived to age 50; evidence has that. Those people who were involved in that clean-up did not wear protective gears, the goggles, and the respirators and so on. The very said thing happened to the people in La Brea, they were not informed that the COREXIT9500 was being used. And I am saying, it is a sad story that we could sit here and pass legislation talking about pollution, and leave out the petroleum industry; something has to be wrong. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I go a step further. The oil tanks and oil pipelines are in a serious state of disrepair in our petroleum industry. So yes, we are giving incentive to produce more oil, but also it would lead to more leakages. I think the Minister of

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Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development at one stage admitted, that he cannot guarantee that there would not be any more oil spills, and he was correct, because with the bad state of the pipelines, we could expect serious problems and thing. And, therefore, it is extremely important that within the legislation, that we try to address this situation with the pollution as far as oil is concerned, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, do not tell me that the EMA will deal with the issue, because I happened to speak with the officials from the EMA, and I asked them: “Well, listen, what about the penalties for polluting the environment?” The goodly gentleman told me they have no authority to fine for pollution. However, they could fine him for the failure to submit for approval, the failure to report the accident, the failure to comply with health and air monitoring requirements, the failure to submit and complete a written report on the incident, but nothing to deal with the pollution. Mr. Speaker, on behalf of those poor people, who have nobody to intercede on their behalf, I stand for them. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I also want to make a plug for those former petroleum workers, former Trinidad Tesoro, now Petrotrin pensioners. Over 5,000 of them have been affected by the non-payment of arrears based on the outstanding retail-price index for the period 2008—2013. Mr. Speaker, I am saying, if we are thinking in terms of giving the—allowing the petroleum companies and them, to have more revenue, I am saying within that, we must remember those people who have toiled in the oil industry, and that they must be justly rewarded for the sacrifices that they have made. And, therefore, I call on the hon. Minister, to look into the plight of those former Trinidad Tesoro pensioners, who are being disadvantaged at this point in time.

Mr. Speaker, I want to turn now to the Cocoa and Coffee Industry Act. I want to warn those opposite, that careful we throw out the baby with the bath water. Yes, we have some bad sections and some outdated or archaic sections in the Act, about public holidays and so on, but the Board performed a vital function, in terms of ensuring that the quality of the cocoa was kept to its premium standard. Not only that, they were also involved in training the farmers, guiding them in keeping—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Seemungal: Not the Board.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: “Ah listened to you, you know.”

Mr. Seemungal: All right. Sorry, man. [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Nice—to train the Board—to train the farmers so that the quality of the cocoa will be kept to a standard. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, in working alongside or hearing the late Professor John Spence, he echoed the bright future of the cocoa and coffee industry in Trinidad and Tobago. He lauded the work of the Cocoa and Coffee Board, therefore, one cannot understand why, why we would want to throw away the baby with the bath water, and put in place something that “we doh know nothing about” up to this point in time?

Mr. Speaker, all kinds of things are being said about Liquor Licences Act, et cetera, et cetera, but you know something, Mr. Speaker, while the Minister was talking about 3.7 per cent unemployment, I remember only too well, that in 2008 under the People’s National Movement, the unemployment rate was 3.9 per cent; 3.9 per cent. [*Interruption*] And, Mr. Speaker, you know what they said, it was make-work-programme; so it was 3.9. I am saying if it is 3.7, what is the difference in your computation? How you arrived at 3.7? And how does that compare with the methodology used when we had gotten our 3.8 per cent?

Mr. Speaker, we have to be careful, sometimes when we use this place here for our own selfish ends, because our then Prime Minister, had predicted long before, that he was going to reduce the unemployment rate below 5 per cent, and they cried scorn on the whole thing

Mr. Speaker, under the State Lands Act, I see they talked about asphalt, the removal of asphalt. Mr. Speaker, yes, we must protect our asphalt from illegal handlers. But when we could allow—sign a MOU with—let me get the name of the company, man—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Roberts: “Take yuh time. Take yuh time.”

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Yeah, yeah, “I taking meh time doh worry”—Beijing Oriental Yuhong Waterproofing Company. I understand it is a secret MOU, but it had a leak. I understand that the plan is to mine 250,000 tonnes of the crude, the asphalt, take it to Point Lisas and process it for export to China. But, Mr. Speaker, in La Brea at the Lake Asphalt company, there is a refining plant, and if you are going to take the asphalt and carry it to Point Lisas, you are putting over 200 persons on the breadline, and La Brea already has an intolerable 40 per cent unemployment situation. What are you doing to us?

Mr. Speaker, we also see that the revenue office in La Brea was closed, and workers sent to other areas. Mr. Speaker, the people who are working in the revenue office “eh working for no big money” and, therefore, when they have to use some of that money for transportation—I have already heard from a number

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of them—they will have to resign, because it does not make sense to continue; that is more unemployment. Mr. Speaker, the NALIS library in La Brea has also been closed. People out of work. The NALIS library has also been closed. I want people to understand what is happening.

And more than that, Mr. Speaker, the people who were involved, who are living along the coastline in La Brea, they depend on the marine environment for their livelihood; “who catching oysters, and crabs, who involve in the fishing industry”. For four months now, these people are out of jobs, they are not working anywhere, and this Government that believes in prosperity for all, that cares about the poor, and “yuh want to prevent dem from falling through de crack”, they have not turned an eyelid, for the people affected by the oil spill in La Brea. All we got was mamaguy.

11.50 p.m.

We were told—of course, the COREXIT as well—that the Government had some teams sitting down examining alternative accommodation for those affected by the oil spill. Four months have passed since the EMA had advised the immediate evacuation of the residents in the area. Four months have gone and not one person has been evacuated, including the bedridden Alpheus Lee, who had to stay in that area for four months, two and a half months of which he was inhaling the very high hydrocarbon, which is carcinogenic, as well as the COREXIT9500 that was sprayed. I understand it stays a long time in the atmosphere.

I am saying that one has to recognize that, listen, if we are serious, if we are just thinking of raising revenue, that is one thing, but if we are talking about environment and we are talking about pollution, then there has to be an amendment to the petroleum legislation to deal with this issue. Mr. Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy (Hon. Rudranath Indarsingh): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. After having listened to the Member for La Brea, whilst I would want to commend his sense of commitment and passion to the issues of health and safety and employment of workers and so on, all I can conclude is that he has gone down the road of being sensationalist and seems to be in keeping with the PNM propaganda that has been their sense of focus since this particular debate began.

He made a number of statements as they relate to the Petrotrin oil spill and he indicated that he was advocating the cause of the people down in that particular area of Trinidad and that he was the only one who was looking after their interest

and so on. I can clearly recollect that when the incident occurred, the Prime Minister led a team of Government Ministers, which included the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, the Minister of Water Resources and the Environment and also all the senior officials of Petrotrin, led by its chairman and president, to analyze the entire scenario and come up with the appropriate remedial action and so on in relation to the people down in that part of Trinidad.

Also, I can recollect that my colleague, the Member for Arima, the Minister of Diversity and Social Integration, making a journey down there to analyze the impact of the damage done to the mangrove and so on, which fell under his jurisdiction, from a national trust and heritage point of view. So to say that the Member for La Brea is the only one who had a sense of feel and a sense of compassion and empathizing with the people of La Brea and the environs is totally misleading, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, I never said that. I never said I was the only one.

Hon. R. Indarsingh: From that point of view, I would say that it is in keeping with PNM propaganda. Then he went down the road of focusing on the retirees at Trinidad Tesoro and I am sure that I do not want to get into the business of collective bargaining, with which I am quite familiar in relation to my experience here tonight.

I would not want to draw the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development and the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre into this issue at this hour, but I can certainly say that the Oilfield Workers' Trade Union is quite competent in looking after the business and affairs of the retirees of all workers in the petroleum industry in Trinidad and Tobago. I am sure that in their negotiations and so on, the issue of indexation and the pensions of retirees would have been competently addressed during his negotiating tenure at the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union.

The Member for La Brea, again, attempted to create what I would call a sense of, again, propaganda. That is the only word I can conclude here tonight in relation to the workers at Lake Asphalt and what has been happening there, not in 2014, but what started in relation to the People's Partnership Government and its whole position on Lake Asphalt.

In fact, the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs made it very clear, in a statement in the other place I think, whereby there were no plans at all to privatize Lake Asphalt. He attempted in his statement, really, to clarify the Ministry's position and, by extension, the Government's position with regard to the

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Contractor and General Workers Trade Union, which has the bargaining responsibility for this particular state entity, and also to allay the fears and concerns of the workers.

In fact, I want to quote from an article which was written by Miss Carla Bridgelal of the *Trinidad Express* dated March 24, 2014, under the headline, "Lake Asphalt won't go private".

"The Government has no plans to privatise Lake Asphalt, Energy Minister Kevin Ramnarine said yesterday."

I want to quote:

"I want to categorically state that there is no plan to privatise Lake Asphalt. These rumours are unfounded and are designed to create fear,' Ramnarine told the Express."

And in addition to this, he said he did note that Lake Asphalt had signed a Memorandum of Understanding with a Chinese company named Beijing Oriental Yuhong to explore the construction of a waterproofing membrane plant and the feasibility of that project was still under study and the arrangement did not include any privatization.

So the issue at hand is that the Government is pursuing a policy of expansion as it relates to Lake Asphalt that is designed to place Lake Asphalt on a sounder financial footing and once you have an expansionist thrust, of course, it would lead to the creation of additional jobs.

Again, it is the PNM's propaganda playing out in relation to what this Government has been doing. In fact, the propaganda went on tonight when the Member for La Brea indicated that he wanted to know what the people have received from this Government after four years and he attempted to go down the road of waste, mismanagement, corruption and so on.

Well, I want to speak from a Couva South point of view and I will immediately move in the area of delivery just for you to listen in the context of what we would call the development of the National Road Transportation Network in Trinidad and Tobago.

I am sure, Mr. Speaker, that the Member for La Brea, when he leaves the Chamber at the end of sittings here, as he makes his way from Wrightson Road down to La Brea, he has what I would call first-hand experience of what this People's Partnership Government has delivered as it relates to the transformation of the road network in Trinidad and Tobago.

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As he moves from the Parliament and he goes down Wrightson Road on to the Beetham Highway, he then comes across the Aranguez Overpass. From the Aranguez Overpass, he moves to the Grand Bazaar Interchange and when he goes beyond the Grand Bazaar—and he will see it, Member for Diego Martin Central; he does not have to drive on the Aranguez Overpass, from a geographical point of view, if you need further edification tonight.

Beyond the Grand Bazaar Interchange, you see the Couva Interchange, at a cost of \$72 million, for the benefit of the people of Balmain, Calcutta Nos. 1, 2 and 3, Basta Hall, Phoenix Park and Windsor Park. If you go to my neighboring colleague, the Member for Caroni Central, it has provided a tremendous sense of relief and benefit to his constituents also in terms of the traffic congestion, which the PNM allowed to prevail in spite of having experienced a boom, a revenue windfall when oil price stood at US \$147 per barrel and the price of natural gas stood at US \$5 per MMBtu.

You did not see it fit to address the issue of traffic congestion for the constituents of Caroni Central and Couva South; all the stakeholders and citizens of this country who would have visited the Point Lisas Industrial Estate in terms of who worked there, who would have gone to conduct and transact business on the Point Lisas Industrial Estate and the Port of Port of Spain. That is what we have been able to deliver to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, Member for La Brea, within the first year and a half of the People's Partnership administration.

Just to amplify and elaborate the point, I want to tell you that the Minister of Education has been able to deliver the Balmain Presbyterian School in record time, within budget. This is what this Government has been able to do because you said you wanted to know, after four years, what the Government has been able to deliver to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I am taking it from a constituency context and I will also elaborate it from the context of the national development of Trinidad and Tobago. So from that point of view, it is the Balmain Presbyterian Primary School that you did not see it fit to build during your 10-year tenure, and at no point in time you focused on the young children of this particular area. You did not see it fit to construct any early childhood education centre.

Today, Phoenix Park Early Childhood Education Centre has been constructed; it is functioning; its doors have received the children of Phoenix Park and environs and we are moving towards—and I am sure the Minister of Education did indicate to me, he is looking, with the passage of time to ensure that the ones

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at Lisas Gardens and also Milton are opened for the benefit of the young children, in keeping with the Partnership's philosophy and commitment to the young people of Trinidad and Tobago and the Prime Minister's commitment of universal early childhood education to beyond tertiary level education throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

So, from that point of view, we are seeing what is happening in terms of delivery.

12.05 a.m.

I just want to move from education into the areas of infrastructural development, and whether it is from the point of view of road rehabilitation or what I would call road and drainage rehabilitation, we have to look at what has happened.

I could recollect that when I campaigned or sought the votes of the constituents of Couva South, there was a road from—to be precise and to use some landmarks for the benefit of those on the other side who may not be able to connect and understand where Calcutta No. 1 and Calcutta No. 2 and so on are. [*Crosstalk*] Well, the only Calcutta they know about is how to infuse a sense of divide in the affairs of the election in Tobago and so on.

But if you know, Member for La Brea, from the Freeport Junction—there is a Police Station—and down to a place call Kurban Junction. The constituents told me at no point in time did they want lights and water and so on, they simply wanted—in terms of being their Member of Parliament—to have that particular road paved because in their 40 years, they could recollect that the PNM did not see it fit to pave that particular road and in 40 years—in one of our very first acts from a Government point of view, via the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, that particular roadway was paved, and it has been complemented with other roads in the context of the Milton or what we would call the Mount Pleasant Road from Springvale to Milton Junction. Then you have the Phoenix Park Road; then you have the road from—the Mc Bean Local Road from the Southern Main Road end into Kurban Junction and so on.

So you can see, there is a level of delivery from what we would call road rehabilitation and, in addition to this, drainage complementing the road rehabilitation ensuring that there is value for money so that the roads can stand up to the test of time in relation to the flow of vehicular traffic. And I could go on to speak at length about a number of minor roads which have been repaired through the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation.

I could also speak about the role of the Unemployment Relief Programme, which has played a very supportive role in the construction of box drains and paving of roads and so on in this whole overall thrust of delivery for the benefit of the people of Couva South, and by extension surrounding constituencies, and in keeping with our vision and commitment to deliver to the 41 constituencies of Trinidad and Tobago. And, in addition to that, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Sport, in collaboration with the Ministry of Local Government has been able to upgrade recreational facilities.

There has been, what we would call, a creation of the enabling environment, to address the whole question or the whole issue of non-communicable diseases. Mr. Speaker, you would be very aware that this particular issue has been placed on the front burner at a global level and also at a regional level by the hon. Prime Minister in her quest to see a healthier population existing in Trinidad and Tobago. When I say “an enabling environment”, I am speaking in the context of pavilions, walking tracks, jogging tracks; also, the Ministry of Public Utilities has played a very critical role in the lighting of grounds which has resulted in activities from a sporting point of view, and also addressing the whole issue of lifestyle issues and so on. Citizens are being allowed to go for their walk and engage in cricket matches and football and whatever, at a time that was never enjoyed previously, because of the failure of those on the other side to light grounds in a way that we have been lighting, and which has brought benefits to the people of Milton, Calcutta, Dow Village and Basta Hall and so on, in relation to looking after the benefits of all the constituents of Couva South. So, from that point of view too, there has been a level of delivery, Member for La Brea, and this is what the people have been able to get over the last four years.

And, today also, I could say that there are a number of bridges which have been constructed and which have been overhauled. In fact, all the old bridges and so on—whether it was at Esperanza or Carolina or Mount Pleasant and so on—have been repaired either by the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure or by extension, on the other side, the Ministry of Local Government.

I want you to listen very carefully to what the people voted for in relation to May 2010, because there is a bridge that is currently under reconstruction by the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure—you continuously ask: what the people got? The last time the Balmain/Calcutta Bridge collapsed, Mr. Speaker, the PNM took 25 years to rebuild that bridge, and I want to repeat that for the benefit of the Member for La Brea. The PNM took 25 years to repair the Calcutta/Balmain Bridge.

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Mr. Speaker, in our tenure as a Government, the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure officials from the bridges division of the Ministry deemed the Calcutta Bridge to be unsafe for the flow of vehicular traffic and so on, and in less than nine months, reconstruction of that bridge was able to restart and I could say that a projected time frame of February 2014 was the projected completion date. There are some challenges which have been incurred as they relate to the soil and so on, but the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure is working assiduously towards the completion by the end of May [*Desk thumping*], so that there could be a reconnection of the Balmain/Freeport communities and, again, the flow of vehicular traffic. And, again, that shows the difference in relation to how the PNM approached the issue of rural development.

I want to, again, reinforce the difference in relation to governance, government and how people's issues are dealt with from a rural point of view, Mr. Speaker, because when the PNM took 25 years to rebuild that bridge, they had no alternative flow or no alternative road for the flow of vehicular traffic. The then Minister of Works and Infrastructure, Minister Emmanuel George, under my jurisdiction as the Member of Parliament for Couva South, held two consultation meetings or what we would call town meetings in Balmain, Freeport and Calcutta.

Dr. Browne: Member for Couva South, will you give way? Thank you Member for giving way. I am just seeking clarification on that 25-year period that you keep referring to. When did it begin and when did it end?

Hon. R. Indarsingh: Well, Mr. Speaker, I will have to go deep into my history books tonight to recollect the exact date and so on, if the Member for Diego Martin Central wants the specifics, but I want to tell him that I have not existed in Couva South for the last four years.

I have been the President General of the All Trinidad Sugar and General Workers' Trade Union [*Desk thumping*] for 20-plus years. I have bonded with the people of Couva South and environs for that period of my working life and, certainly, I will not come to this august Chamber to try and mislead in terms of the sins of the PNM [*Desk thumping*] and how they dealt with the people of this particular community. [*Desk thumping*]

And just to reiterate, in terms of delivery and the whole question of people-centred delivery and consultation, I was on my legs indicating that the then Minister of Works and Infrastructure held two town meetings and so on, and after consulting with the people of Freeport and Balmain, today I can report to this House that there is a new road within the network of roads in Couva South that

was developed solely for the purpose of providing a sense of ease and a sense of comfort for the people as they went about their daily lives and so on. Today that road is known as the Camden Base Road. It was developed, it was paved and it has been electrified by T&TEC to further provide a sense of comfort in keeping with that sense of people-centred development and understanding the needs of the people within that particular constituency.

So, Mr. Speaker, that is what I want to tell the Member for La Brea in terms of delivery, and before I move off on that particular issue of delivery and what the people have been able to receive, I want to tell him too, that if he goes down—or anytime he has time—Member for La Brea—Member for Diego Martin Central, you seem to be in and around central Trinidad and so on, so you seem to want verification, so you could feel free to go down in Dow Village [*Desk thumping*] and you could go down in California and so on.

Today, the Member of Parliament for Tabaquite, through the Unemployment Relief Programme, has been able to finish the construction of an empowerment centre in California, and the last time that was there, Mr. Speaker, in terms of its existence—Member for Port of Spain South—the foundation was constructed by the PNM and it was left there for 25 years, and it is this administration which has seen it fit to build on the foundation and to have an empowerment centre for the benefit of the young people and for the benefit of all those who would want to pursue what is called technical and vocational training through YTEPP, the National Energy Skills Centre and so on. That is what delivery is about, and that is what the people have received as a result of the revenue stream of the Government for the last four years.

12.20 a.m.

The Dow Village Ramleela and Cultural Committee pleaded with me when I became the Member of Parliament for Couva South. They said to me, “Mr. Member of Parliament, this is the only ground where Ramleela has a permanent home in Trinidad and Tobago”, as my colleague from La Horquetta/Talparo has reminded me, existing for more than 110 years. That ground was never refurbished. It took the People’s Partnership Government and the Ministry of Local Government through RDC to display its commitment to the continued cultural development of Trinidad and Tobago and Ramleela, to have that ground [*Desk thumping*] upgraded for the first time in 23 years. So, Mr. Speaker, again, that is what the people have been able to get in relation to four years of delivery.

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I just want to read into the record, a message that I received within recent time, Mr. Speaker. [*Interruption*] I will continue, Member for Port of Spain South, in spite of your focus and your intent in attempting to distract me, but I will continue to remind you, and remind those on the other side, of what you fail to understand as it relates to people-centred delivery. You ruled this country for a number of years but you focused on what we would call “urban-centred development”. You had no sense of focus on what we would call “rural development” in Trinidad and Tobago, and the supply of water is a commitment that this Government has made and we are following through, whether it is the 54-inch main, the South Trunk Main—recently, Mr. Singh had launched the—I am trying to get the diameter right from Kelly to Exchange in Couva—the 48 inch for the provision of a water supply.

Today, I could stand before you and safely report to this Chamber that whether it is in Maingot Trace, Nathaniel Trace, Windsor Park, Basta Hall and so on, water is coming into the taps of the residents of these homes. [*Desk thumping*] Recently, one Ms. Karen Debisarran-Boodhai, informed me via facebook on Monday 28 March, 2014, at 2.51 p.m.

I would like to inform you that the residents of Jerry Road, Windsor Park, are very happy at this point in time. We are about to get a supply of water for the first time in 30 years. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to repeat that, Mr. Speaker.

We are about to get a supply of water for the first time in 30 years. Work has started today and, I, being a resident of this village, would like to take this time to say thanks to you, the Prime Minister, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar and the People’s Partnership Government for addressing this particular issue.

The humility in someone who has been able to experience what the People’s Partnership Government is about in addressing the issue of bringing a sense of dignity to their life after 30 years. [*Desk thumping*]

So that is the state of play, Mr. Speaker, and, more so, the Member for La Brea in relation to the delivery. I could stand here and speak ad-lib. In fact, I could stay here until tomorrow—[*Interruption*]—as it relates to the issue of delivery and what this Government has been able to achieve.

So I want to turn because you all have attempted to focus on the figures and the economic data of this Government in terms of what has been presented today,

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Mr. Speaker. You attempted to discredit the rate of economic growth. You attempted to discredit the Minister of Finance and the Economy when he piloted this piece of legislation; this piece of legislation which was designed to build upon his budget presentation of 2014.

Mr. Speaker, the economic position of Trinidad and Tobago that we enjoy today did not come about by “vaps”. It did not fall from the sky. It did not happen by accident. [*Desk thumping*] It happened because there was a sense of focus, a sense of vision, a sense of planning from the Prime Minister when she was political leader, when the Member for Siparia assembled a team of whom she felt was capable to lead Trinidad and Tobago for the next five years, and that was seen in the overall vision, I dare to say, which was clearly spelt out in the most progressive of manifestos to be ever produced [*Desk thumping*] by any political party and Government in Trinidad and Tobago under the theme of “Prosperity for all”.

Under this particular theme of “Prosperity for all”, it has been clearly played out and clearly laid out over the last four years in the budget presentation of the last four presentations which were made by Ministers of Finance. So that is why I would say to you, it did not happen by accident. It did not happen by “vaps”. It started with “Facing the Issues, Turning the Economy Around”, followed by “From Steady Foundation to Economic Transformation”, and then “Stimulating Growth, Generating Prosperity”, and in 2014 the focus or the overall theme from a fiscal and monetary point of view was “Sustaining Growth, Securing Prosperity”.

That is why today, Mr. Speaker, the IMF can say to the people of Trinidad and Tobago—and I want to be very clear before I am accused of misleading and forging, and cooking the statistics, [*Laughter*] cooking the statistics as those on the other side would want to conclude, and those on the other side would have sought to attack the credibility of public servants and attack the credibility of legitimate institutions, the Central Statistical Office, and to attack the credibility of a global institution, such as the International Monetary Fund.

I want to read into the record from the *Business Guardian*, and I quote from an article written by Mr. Aleem Khan, and I go on into the article:

Trinidad and Tobago—“is experiencing more robust growth after several years of sub-par performance, the IMF said. With the end of maintenance-related outages in the energy sector, the IMF projects that the economy will grow around 2.5 per cent this year after...1.5 per cent growth in 2013.”

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So when they want to come to the conclusion and, in keeping with their propaganda, try to convince the population of Trinidad and Tobago that we are influencing, we are manoeuvring, we are manipulating, we are cooking the books and so on, we have legitimate institutions that are telling you that the economy of Trinidad and Tobago grew in 2013, and it will grow in 2014 based on the sound policies which are being pursued by the People's Partnership Government.

Mr. Speaker, in that regard, it is important too to further indicate that Trinidad and Tobago is on a sound financial footing, from the point of view of an article that was written by Mr. Raphael John-Lall, and it is in the *Business Guardian* again, dated April 02, 2014, and it says that:

“T&T is well positioned to be the international financial centre of the region,”—according to—“Varun Maharaj, chairman of the T&T International Financial Centre (IFC)...‘Unlike many of the competing destinations, T&T, with a Standard and Poor’s rating of A, is a vibrant and stable economy with world class infrastructure and the availability of trained, English speaking financial services and accounting personnel,’...”

So I think that this conclusion from the PNM, that the statistics are indeed misleading and so on, is in keeping with the theme of them being what I would call, prophets of doom and gloom. That is all I have been able to hear from them over the last four years in their contributions to anything that is progressive, and anything that benefits the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

It has been one of consistency, one of doom and gloom, one that has not been able to offer any kind of credible solution or, what I would call, any kind of credible alternative of development for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. So that is the sole conclusion I could come to in relation to the position of the PNM as it relates to this particular piece of legislation. I simply want to say, Mr. Speaker, that the Finance Bill, 2014, must be seen in the context of being paramount to the continued growth and development of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago.

As I said previously, it is building on the budgetary presentation of the Minister of Finance and the Economy from a monetary and fiscal point of view, and if I could say, that it will also focus on addressing or, what I would term to be, redressing our dependence and so on, on the energy sector. Also, from the point of view of the agricultural sector, the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo has touched on a very important issue of the Cocoa and Coffee Industry Act, and I could recollect that the Member for Chaguanas West wanting to know what would replace the Cocoa and Coffee Board.

I want to say that there is now, on the horizon, the introduction of what is called the Trinidad and Tobago Cocoa Company Limited, which will focus on steering the rebuilding of this renowned industry in Trinidad and Tobago in keeping with what we would call best practices and modern practices, and techniques of cultivation growing towards, what we would term, high quality cocoa and quantity of production for the benefit of, not only the people of Trinidad and Tobago, but for the benefit of generating additional foreign exchange, and also further developing the brand of Trinidad and Tobago from a global point of view.

12.35 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, we all are focussed also on the importance of what changes would come to the gaming industry or the gambling industry in Trinidad and Tobago. This is an industry that will continue to exist with us throughout the length and breadth of this country. We have a fundamental responsibility to understand the level of income that is circulating within this industry, and it is calculated to be in the vicinity of \$2 billion. There are about 120-odd plus private members' clubs existing in Trinidad and Tobago, and they provide directly and indirectly for approximately 42,000 citizens of this country. So at the end of the day, we have a fundamental responsibility to ensure that this industry is properly regulated and is properly taxed also, to ensure that there are returns to the Treasury of Trinidad and Tobago. From this point of view, the Minister of Finance and the Economy has put the wheels in motion. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member of Parliament for Couva South and the Minister of State in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy has expired.

Motion made: That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Hon. R. Samuel*]

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to all my colleagues who have supported the extension of my speaking time. I will not detain the House much longer, Member for Port of Spain South, but it is important that I also speak on the Bill itself in relation to the benefits for the economy of this country.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, before my initial speaking time came to an end, the Government has not turned a blind eye and, in fact, we have put the wheels in motion as it relates to the establishment of the regulatory framework and bringing all those who should be within the net. A special committee has been established

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under the chairmanship of Mr. Philip Marshall, and this committee is working assiduously to ensure that the work is completed and to build upon the appropriate legislation that is needed to ensure that we deal with the issue of taxation and compliance and the role of the Board of Inland Revenue in relation to the machines, devices and tables which exist within the gaming industry of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to this particular focus on the gaming industry, there is a sense of focus as it relates to the environment, littering and increasing the fines and trying to instill what I would call, not from a fine point of view, but trying to send a very clear message to the population of Trinidad and Tobago that we must be more responsible. We must own up in terms of how we deal with the environment, how we dispose of our garbage and our waste, and that message is being sent in a very subtle way as it relates to the increase of the fine for littering.

That sense of focus on the environment and wanting to ensure that people are held accountable and are brought before the judicial system in relation to the environment, as a sense of focus too, a sense of relationship from the point of view of the quarrying operation and also the fines as they relate to the whole diesel industry and so on. So from the point of view of quarrying and the point of view of the diesel industry, we want to ensure that people, when they transgress the laws of the land, they feel the penalty and they feel the brunt of the law in keeping with their act of wrongdoing. It must not only be seen from a revenue-generation point of view, but making people accountable for their actions. It has been clearly outlined as it relates to the measures as a result of what would take place or what will come into effect when this particular piece of legislation is passed in both Houses and then assented to.

Mr. Speaker, the importance of the electronic payment has been clearly articulated by the Member for San Fernando West and Minister of Public Administration, and it must be seen in this groundbreaking way that would facilitate persons who, from time to time, may go to the Licensing Office, the Customs, all state offices and so forth, they can now conduct their transactions through what we would call the electronic form of payment. This is something, I am sure, that while those on the other side would have agreed with it today, when they spoke about during their tenure the development of the economy, and the development of e-commerce and where they wanted to take Trinidad and Tobago, they did not see the wisdom of implementing this particular method of payment, which would present, what I would call, a tremendous amount of ease and

comfort for people as they go about pursuing their daily transactions, for the benefit of themselves, their families and their respective businesses that they may be affiliated to.

So, Mr. Speaker, from the point of view of the Finance Bill, it must be seen in the context of the continued growth and development of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago, ensuring that our economic position strengthens itself. Once we can strengthen the revenue stream of Trinidad and Tobago, we will continue to ensure that the people of this country get a greater sense of delivery from what they have grown accustomed to over the last four years. Certainly, it will be an additional 15 months of a greater sense of delivery, and as we build and strengthen the finances of Trinidad and Tobago, it can only propel the People's Partnership Government to continue its level of development for all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, beyond the year 2015 and a second term of government for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Amery Browne (*Diego Martin Central*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Right from the get-go, I want to respond to the Member for Couva South who I have great respect for, as I do for all Members of this House. He has done a lot for the trade union movement, et cetera, et cetera. In fact, we collaborated prior to his real political tenure, while I was at the National AIDS Coordinating Committee.

He started off with some very, I would say, uncharitable comments, directed at the Member for La Brea, who is really, in the best traditions of Parliament, seeking to represent his constituents with force and good effect too. I did not think those initial comments were in order at all.

Mr. Speaker, I do not want to demean the contribution of the Member for Couva South on this Finance Bill, but what I would say is that when he had concluded, and I listened carefully, it remains unclear as to exactly what his portfolio is within the Ministry of Finance and the Economy. That is all I would say about that particular contribution. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak in silence, because I sat and listened for 15 hours thus far continuously.

This Finance Bill, 2014 is an attempt to bring into law and into effect a series of provisions that were introduced to this country in the last national budget. It is also an opportunity for the Government to boast a little about the economy and to try to tell citizens that all is well in the financial sector, all is well with

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employment, all is well with the police service, all is well with our financial institutions, all is well with our petrochemical sector. That is their right, and the Minister of Finance and the Economy started in exactly that fashion.

He painted a very rosy picture of the economy, and the Member for Tabaquite took it to another level. He claimed that they were “over-governing”. [*Laughter*] It is the first time I have heard that phrase in the House. The Member for Tabaquite said they were “over-governing”, and it went to over-governing well, and all they were hearing from citizens—and I hope I am getting his words correctly—is a crescendo of—[*Laughter*] Mr. Speaker, I am going to have to read this carefully, it was so absurd—a crescendo of congratulations for their stewardship. All they were hearing from the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago is a crescendo of congratulations for their stewardship.

I have to call that insanity. The crescendo they might be hearing is the political obituary that many citizens, including [*Desk thumping*] their guru, Mr. Basdeo Panday, has been reading for this particular administration. Mr. Panday almost used the words—he did not quite use the words—that this Government’s days are numbered; a familiar echo. [*Desk thumping*]

So I do not know what crescendo, Member for Tabaquite. I do not know if he was talking about last week Friday when there were massive protests here in Port of Spain, or the Friday before that or the Wednesday before that, or the Friday before that. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Douglas: PNM hooligans!

Dr. A. Browne: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West is interrupting me, and he is doing so by talking about hooligan behaviour. Look at the irony right here in this House. Ridiculous! And then they want to stand here and talk about example.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West, please; allow the Member to speak in silence. If you would like to speak, I guess you will talk to the Leader of Government Business, but in the meantime allow the Member to speak in silence. Continue, please.

Dr. A. Browne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker; I appreciate it.

I think there were two public officials who got lost outside of the Parliament and found their way, instead of through the protected section—we have good staff in the Parliament—in the middle of the crowd. The Member who is continuing to disturb me right now, was one of those Members, so maybe he is still a little disoriented from that particular experience. Bizarre behaviour, and it is not the first time—it is not the first time.

Mr. Speaker, I want to touch, while we are on this topic, on some of the things the Member for San Fernando West said, because she made some comments about standards of behaviour in and out of the Parliament, but she made no reference to some Members of her own party, who are among the worst behaved public officials. [*Interruption*] Not the Member for Arima, and he is removing himself—the worst behaved public officials in Trinidad and Tobago. She focused exclusively on persons wearing red jerseys last Friday outside the Parliament. She ignored the reality—and I am going to be very frank—that there were members in yellow jerseys outside of this Parliament, in large numbers as well, who were booing and jeering Members as they arrived. The same apparently applied on the other side. It is just that no members of the PNM found themselves strolling through any crowd trying to provoke anybody, because that would have been in poor judgment. The Member for Couva South did not do that either, because he has better judgment and better sense than that, Mr. Speaker.

12.50 a.m.

So, the Member for San Fernando West made some good points, but she fell into the trap of being very exclusive and talked about the red jerseys and all this sort of thing, but we need to be a bit more honest. She also forgot, when talking about standards of behaviour to mention the professional character assassins that have been hired in this country to defame persons, to put out photographs and videos, et cetera, and if you stand against certain protected persons, that is the kind of response you are going to get; professionals hired to conduct those kinds of campaigns, but the Member for San Fernando West is telling us about standards of behaviour, et cetera.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am going to go further than her, she had a very narrow interpretation of what she means by standards of behaviour and I would call on all supporters of all political parties to raise their standard of conduct whether outside of this Parliament or anywhere else. There must be one Trinidad and Tobago. There is no country for them, country for us. It does not work like that. This is one nation and I want to extend—we all belong here, Member for Arima, and we all have a role to play in Trinidad and Tobago, and I want to extend that admonition, even to those who might be campaigning right now, and it is campaigning going on, on that side, I listened to some of the speeches. But all those who might be campaigning right now we should raise the standards, we should allow others to raise their standard to meet us, we should not lower our standards to meet anybody else and who that cap fits should wear it.

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I would move on from that point, Mr. Speaker, because there are a few observations that I want to make with regard to the contribution of the Member for Chaguanas West.

Hon. Member: You are not campaigning.

Dr. A. Browne: Not at all, I do not need to. The Member for Chaguanas West, Mr. Speaker, he entered the debate fairly early this—[*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, what is going on here? Come on, it is too late for that, it is almost one o'clock.

Mr. Speaker: Members, I am appealing to Members, allow the hon. Member to speak in silence. Members have already spoken, allow the Member to speak in silence! Continue, hon. Member.

Dr. A. Browne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is room on the naughty corner, you know. [*Laughter*]

The Member for Chaguanas West's observations, because, apparently he and the Member for Tabaquite have some discourse going on, so he chided the Member for Tabaquite for punishing his constituents—I am interpreting his words—and neglecting the constituents of Chaguanas West because of who their MP is. This is what the Member for Chaguanas West presented to this honourable House today. But, Mr. Speaker, my mind takes me right back to the year 2010, I believe it was August 2010, when this same Member for Chaguanas West was riding high in the Government and was boasting in the national media about not inviting PNM MPs to events within their own constituencies, within constituencies that they were democratically elected to represent.

Mr. Speaker, I was one of those MPs, I had to read a newspaper article of a Government Minister celebrating the fact that he deliberately is not inviting the Member of Parliament for the area, that is with regard to the opening of the Powder Magazine elevators and lifts—[*Interruption*]—which only worked for one day. He moved on. He was accompanied by the Member for Caroni Central. I am talking about their official capacity. They have moved on from that. The lift worked for one day and never worked after that, but there was pride and emphasis, we are not inviting the MP and we heard similar observations from Members, Member for Mayaro and others. But now the Member for Chaguanas West in his new epiphany, his rebirth, is talking about neglect and punishing constituencies because of who the Member of Parliament is. And I just want to say, who feels it knows it, apparently. So, now he is on the other side of the table and he is feeling it, when in my humble opinion he was part and parcel of the same mentality he is complaining of today.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Couva South also demonstrated a bit of a disconnect because when I asked him about the 25-year bridge, he got very vague and he started to talk about his credentials and so on. That does not concern me, but he also spoke about the fact—I cannot say the fact, he made reference to the issue that in 40 years the PNM did not pave a particular road in his constituency. He is talking about one road, eh. Forty years the PNM did not pave—Mr. Speaker, what 40 years is he talking about? And Members on the other side fall prey to this time and time again, and we really have to put a stop to this. What 40-year period is he talking about in which the PNM failed to pave his constituency? Because, Mr. Speaker, within the last 40 years there have been several administrations in this country, so if he was going to give us an honest presentation or honestly represent on the issues related to the neglect of that one road, he would have to talk about former Prime Minister Basdeo Panday and the UNC administration that governed this country during that period. He would have to talk about former Prime Minister Arthur Napoleon Raymond Robinson and the NAR administration that governed this country during that period, but somehow when it is convenient, they extract all of that and talk about the PNM did not pave that one road for 40 years. Very, very convenient and I see that as a disconnect.

Moving right on to just one or two observations on the erstwhile Member for Oropouche East, who has promised to be totally silent during his contribution.

Dr. Moonilal: Shoo.

Dr. A. Browne: And he is saying shoo, you know, a little unparliamentary.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Oropouche East—well, the Member for Point Fortin dealt with him on another aspect so I am not going to dwell on that—he moved a stirring case, I thought he was before the Privy Council at one point. He moved a stirring case in defence of SIS and a gentleman, let me see if I get his name correctly, someone by the name of Mr. Chan Chadeesingh. He took his time in Parliament today, stood up and moved a stirring, a rousing case in defence of Mr. Chan Chadeesingh and the SIS. He used words to the effect and he said that Mr. Chadeesingh is no criminal so why should he be denigrated as a criminal in the Lower House of Parliament. I have here what I believe is a quote and I wrote when he was speaking, “Imagine good citizens”—good citizens, eh. Member for St. Joseph, I hope you took note as well. Imagine good citizens have to pay money to defend themselves against the wild attacks of the Opposition Leader. The Member for St. Joseph. Good citizens have to pay—is it good money?

Mr. Deyalsingh: Eighty thousand dollars.

Dr. A. Browne: Have to pay money, yes, to defend themselves against the wild attacks of the Opposition Leader, he is no criminal. And, Mr. Speaker, I agree with the principle, but if the Member for Oropouche East were to level with this House, he would extend the same principle and the same defence to other good citizens whose names have been brought into this same Chamber by his colleagues—[*Interruption*—and literally denigrated.

Mr. Speaker, I got in trouble here on this Bench trying to defend against the same Member for Chaguanas West, tearing into citizens of this country with no evidence or background whatsoever, wild allegations. Mr. Bell was one of them and there were others, I would not—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: Vernon De Lima.

Dr. A. Browne: Vernon De Lima, yes; Ken Julien, their names have been trampled and torn up in this Parliament already—Brig. Peter Joseph who took a shot during the coup.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Literally.

Dr. A. Browne: Literally, Brig. Peter Joseph. What about Prof. Brian Copeland? There is a long list. I do not have to dwell on it, but the Member for Oropouche East was stirred into a rousing defence for Mr. Chan Chadeesingh and talked about good citizens having to pay good money or big money to defend themselves against wild attacks.

But that is happening right now and there are citizens of this country just because they serve their country, who find themselves under assault in the courts, using machinery of the State and having to put their hands in their pockets and mobilize defences. So, Mr. Speaker, what is good for the goose has to be good for the gander, and the standard has to change. Some Members have built their careers tearing into these gentlemen. I see the Member for Caroni East is very busy with his paper, he has the list down cold, he would give me a few names that I left out. He knows exactly what I am talking about.

And then the Member for Oropouche East also boasted about the Children's Life Fund, and when they do that—and the Government must take credit for policies that they have brought forward and so on, and innovation. They must take credit for that. I understand that. But when they do it—especially the Member for Oropouche East, he is the most guilty in this regard—they totally ignore the fact that we on this side also contributed to what is now the Children's Life Fund Act. Do not pretend it is otherwise. It was unanimously passed in this House and there

were Members who made solid contributions and amendments and contributed to what is now a fund and an Act in effect for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

I was one of those Members. I was the first to respond on this side and it was not a wild political response at all. In my view, it was very constructive and we have made a number of amendments, we partnered in committee stage, et cetera, to ensure that what emerged was good and workable legislation. So, do not come trumpeting it as some exclusive political achievement even though I understand if this is an innovation of the Government, that would be the idea. But he talked a lot about saving children's lives—and he got a little emotional and so on, which is good—and their caring for children.

All that is well and good, but there was a tiny citizen who is no longer with us and who was virtually decapitated at the Mount Hope Women's Hospital, not too long ago and we have not heard much about that anymore. In fact, we have heard nothing from the Minister of Health of substance on that, and many citizens are worried because the Children's Life Fund does not come into effect for a child who was butchered in that manner, because it is too late now. And the question citizens are asking is, will anything come out of that at all from this Government that cares so much for children? Will justice ever emerge? Will responsibility ever be acknowledged? And, some details have come to me through my own investigations and queries amongst staff and others who were involved in those processes and I would not raise it here as yet. I want to give the Minister of Health a chance to bring forward whatever report he received on that matter because there are some horrific details that contributed to the butchering of that baby during the caesarean section. I will literally move on from that point.

Anything else about the Member for Oropouche East? Yes. He mentioned flooding in Diego Martin, but he appears a bit oblivious that under this administration, the drainage division has been literally starved of resources and severely depleted of maintenance crews and staff, and the only way these watercourses and underground drains and other watercourses will be cleaned is by human hands. And if the drainage division has such low levels of staff and resourcing, even after those terrible floods that affected tens of thousands of citizens and the neglect of those watercourses continue as we speak, even during the dry season, then we should not be surprised at what might come in the future. Mr. Speaker, and this involves the Ministry of Water Resources and the Environment, the Diego Martin Regional Corporation and other agencies. It cannot just be a case of old talk, it has to be about performing. So, the Member for Oropouche East needs to be admonished that there is action needed in an urgent fashion.

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The Minister of Finance and the Economy says the economy is not doing badly at all under his stewardship. He spoke about there is confidence in the economy and he went on at length, and I am actually glad to hear him speaking like that. I am not going to abuse my privilege of Parliament and stand here and say anything to lower confidence in the economy or detract, deter investors and so on, because if I did that, I will be practising what they practised while they were in Opposition and we cannot follow them down that road at all. We would not do anything to deliberately jeopardize confidence, because we cannot correct you if we do the same things that you did while you were in Opposition. Mr. Speaker, any good news for this country under the UNC is good news for every patriotic citizen of this country and it is good news for me as well.

But the Minister failed to acknowledge that much of the projected growth that he was talking about is based on sustained high oil and gas prices that he, his dear Prime Minister and the country have nothing to do with whatsoever. *[Interruption]*

1.05 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West seems to like the sound of his own voice and I predict he is not going to contribute to this debate. He wants to contribute in a cowardly fashion by sitting in his chair and throwing barbs across the floor. I entreat him to be completely silent from henceforth.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister failed to acknowledge that much of the projected growth that he is talking about is based on sustained high oil and gas prices that he has not contributed to, and his dear Prime Minister and Government have not contributed to. It has nothing to do with the UNC, Mr. Speaker, nothing at all.

The Minister failed to tell us that any local recovery from what we have to acknowledge was a global economic decline, was based on a very strong foundation that they met when they came into office in 2010, and strong fiscal policy that was put in place based on PNM vision, PNM foresight and PNM programming.

The Member talked about what they inherited, but he needs to be honest when he talks about what they inherited. The Heritage and Stabilisation Fund was established in the year 2007 and was well stocked with resources. By whom? The People's National Movement. That is part of the foundation that has assisted this Minister of Finance and the Economy, Minister Dookeran before him, and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in the years since then. They need to give credit where credit is due.

Mr. Speaker, the monetization of gas in this country which would still be burned away if the UNC had their way, whose policy was that based on? Whose vision was that based on? It is the People's National Movement. The liberalization of the economy, achieved when and by who? The People's National Movement. I heard reference just now of the vision of this Prime Minister of universal early childhood education. What madness is that, Mr. Speaker? That is not the vision of this Prime Minister. That is something they met in place. That is a vision that pre-existed. [*Desk thumping*] That is pure, unadulterated PNM policy. I am glad it has continued. I am happy about that, even though I hear the Minister counting ECCE centres as schools. He is talking about 76 schools, and when you hear the breakdown, most of it is ECCE centres. If you put a centre in a community centre you are still calling it building a school. I mean, there is a whole mix-match going on there.

I am not going to dwell on the Minister of Education. That is a whole mix-match. But the point I am making, this talk about an example of the vision of this Government is the Prime Minister's vision of universal early childhood education, that is just a trip into fantasy land because they are literally quoting chapter and verse from a policy and a vision that they met when they came into office. Let the record show that. [*Desk thumping*]

The expansion of regional and extra-regional trade and all the steps that were taken: dismantling of exchange controls, et cetera, that took place based on PNM vision and policy instituted by the People's National Movement. The introduction of major incentives and support for manufacturing and any gains that would have been made in the limited diversification of the economy that has been achieved thus far, you have to be honest with the country and draw the connection right back to the foundation for the creation of tens of thousands of jobs in this country—good paying jobs—that we have achieved—we, Trinidad and Tobago have achieved—initiated under the vision of the People's National Movement.

We mentioned the Point Lisas Industrial Estate, et cetera. If they had their way it would not exist today; product of the PNM vision and implementation. Steps to develop a modern capital city, Mr. Speaker—and they boast about it. When you arrive at the airport now, there is a huge mural as you enter, of the National Academy of the Performing Arts. These are things to celebrate. When before they were things to denigrate and tear down, that was the approach that they took when they were in Opposition.

The development of a modern capital city, again, based on PNM vision, PNM planning, PNM foresight, and if it was not for that, I do not know where we would

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be having this sitting of Parliament today, if we had followed their prescriptions. I do not know. We would be sitting in the Savannah right now in a circle, talking [*Laughter*] because that is UNC vision and that is UNC foresight. So they are reaping the benefits of the PNM—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: “We woulda be in Rienzi car park.”

Dr. A. Browne: Well, I hear a lot of fighting goes on down there as well, so I would not want to be there at all.

Mr. Speaker, so whose vision is that based on? They cannot pretend they have anything to do with any of that. Mr. Speaker, former Minister of Finance, Dookeran—the second time I am referring to him for some reason—told us about those buffers that they met in office. GDP increased from \$52 billion to \$133 billion. The debt to GDP ratio decreased from 55 per cent to 38 per cent. Foreign reserves increased from US \$2.4 billion to US \$11.3 billion. Unemployment decreased from 10.8 per cent to less than 5 per cent. We could agree on that. Those were the facts. The Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, from zero dollars to \$22 billion.

Mr. Speaker, those are the buffers and that is the reality besides their dreams. That is the reality that has assisted this country in emerging from a global economic decline. Give credit where credit is due. A part of this recovery has been based on the vision and foresight of the People’s National Movement. They are talking about rescue from ruin. It is not any rescue from ruin. Tell them the truth about our survival and emergence from some difficult global times. So the Minister will talk his good talk; he will boast about confidence in the economy and so on; he will boost confidence in the economy. I am happy about all of that, but there are other contributors to what good exists and I have mentioned some of those.

So, Mr. Speaker, every time this Minister boasts about anything in this economy of Trinidad and Tobago, every time we have a sitting of this House in this building that somebody constructed, every time there is a manufacturing success in this country, every dollar that is deposited in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, every child that got a good education today in Trinidad and Tobago; every time we utilize natural gas, every time you flip on a light switch, every time a street light comes on, every social benefit that this Government gives out, none of which they innovated. Every time a citizen of this country receives any social benefit, every time—[*Interruption*] Yes, they are saying it now—every time a citizen gets on a water taxi or a fast ferry or the air bridge—where is “Mr.

Air Bridge”; he is not around—every time a citizen benefits from one of those innovations, they are benefitting, Minister of Finance and the Economy, from PNM vision, policy and foresight. Those are the facts, incontrovertible.

I also want to talk a bit, about the cocoa industry, and we heard a lot about it so I do not need to dwell, but we heard very little details at all. As a former banker of some repute, I would have thought that this Minister of Finance and the Economy would be uncomfortable about coming with a Finance Bill and talking about the cocoa industry, mentioning this—what is it?—the Trinidad and Tobago Cocoa Company Limited, but giving the country no detail whatsoever on what the policy is with regard to this company.

So they remove something that is already in place and they just float this idea. There is nothing about the structure; there is nothing about the administration; there is nothing about oversight; there is nothing about management; there is nothing about monitoring and evaluation, reporting. What is this entity that they are referring to? I do not think that does the issue justice at all because there are persons associated with the cocoa industry; there are drinkers of cocoa; there are exporters of cocoa and there are patriotic citizens of this country who want the best for that sector, who recognize the potential but who really would have been expecting more from this banker of repute, this man whose career is about details, coming here without those details. And I am hoping maybe when he winds up, he would provide some of those.

What is this company and tell us more about it. This Finance Bill was an opportunity to do so. But it was also an opportunity, in my view, to close some of the other gaps in the agriculture sector on the issue of food production. There was an opportunity to do that and that opportunity was squandered.

I just want to touch on one example, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Food Production has been talking about what he calls the Caroni—what is it?—the Green Initiative focused largely on Caroni Lands. A lot of money has been spent on advertising and so on, but of current concern is the need for better support and facilitation with regard to tenureship and other issues for farmers who have long-standing agricultural acreage in areas outside of Central Trinidad. So while that Green Initiative might be appropriate and he is focused on Caroni lands and so on, I strongly recommend to this Government that there is an opportunity to expand to areas outside of there. There is acreage in Bagatelle; there is acreage in Fort George; there is acreage in Santa Cruz, other parts of the East-West Corridor.

Farmers have been farming for over 50 years under various administrations who would benefit from application of those same principles, to ensure that they

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are able to contribute more and in greater comfort to the food supply of Trinidad and Tobago. It could also stimulate more employment as well. It can be done and it should be done, and I recommend that this Government do it. Do not assume that the only arable lands are located somewhere else. There is also acreage in the West, the East-West Corridor and other parts of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I want to touch a little bit on the issue of gambling, and I promised the Member for Arima that I would not neglect this particular issue. Mr. Speaker, it is bizarre that this Government is claiming to now be regulating the gaming industry and they are now the custodians of this regulation, et cetera, when they have been in office—and this Minister of Finance and the Economy has been presiding over the financial sector during what I would describe as one of the most audacious heists in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, that has taken place in broad daylight at First Citizens Bank. It is a heist, well-planned and executed, and I hope the perpetrators would not get away scot-free. Just removal or dismissal from the bank, that was part of the agenda all along, because mission accomplished, Mr. Speaker.

So I see a little bit of irony in talking about regulating the gaming industry, whereas in the formal financial sector persons have pulled off this audacious heist. But I want to talk a little bit about the gaming industry, gambling, gaming houses et cetera, because it is important. The Minister gave some figures on this issue and he spoke about 25,000 electronic gambling machines, or gaming machines, in this country—25,000. Mr. Minister, is that correct?

Hon. Howai: That is the number they gave us.

Dr. A. Browne: That is a lot of machines; that is a lot of arms pulling those levers and pushing those buttons—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Howai: Not the ones with buttons.

Dr. A. Browne: Which ones?

Hon. Howai: It would be the electro-mechanical ones.

Dr. A. Browne: Thank you for that. The point I am making is that that represents tens of thousands, or even hundreds of thousands of families and individuals interacting with those machines on a daily basis and being exposed to the various effects and impacts of gambling.

Mr. Speaker, the key point I want to make on this aspect of the Finance Bill is, how is policy derived in this country? There must be some research; there must be

some basis. The issue of gambling is controversial in many ways and the Government has appeared to have come up with a formula and a position that does not seem to be based on any research at all.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell this House of ongoing research—social sector research—into the effects of the gaming industry and gambling on the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago that was initiated in the Ministry of Social Development. Such research was ongoing when some citizens made the error of putting the UNC in office in 2010. That research was ongoing.

1.20 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, what has become of that? Have the results and analysis of that social sector research informed this Minister's views and policy on the gaming industry? What were the results? The Member for Caroni Central—was he still ensconced in that Ministry—was so busy playing Santa Claus with all those cards and sharing social sector benefits—who said it? Like “chilibibi”—that the real work of that sector was being neglected. So, now we have moved forward, it has come into law now, aspects of this regulation, but we do not know what this policy is based on and whether there is any social sector research that supports this Government's very kind view, of the gaming industry. As I said, such research was initiated and ongoing prior to 2010. I do not know if the Minister is comfortable with such a position, but I can tell him that I am not.

So, I am not giving him any prescription at this stage, but there are consequences to family life; there are consequences to finances; there are consequences to the quality time that fathers—*[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker. There are consequences to the quality time that fathers and mothers spend with their children—a bit ironic for me to say at 1.21 in the morning—issues of prostitution; issues of crime and violence; issues of a—*[Interruption]* Sorry? Yes, exactly. Issues of a Mafia—*[Interruption]* You are one, as well, Dr. Gopeesingh. Issues of violence and murder; issues of mental illness. I want to talk briefly on two of those aspects: murder.

Recently we had a constituent—an individual who lives in Covigne Road—very recently, coming home; he went to a little lime, I understand at one of those casinos or gaming houses. He won a bit of money—really, really nice guy. I knew him from young. He does car repairs, little straightening and painting; he sings calypso; salt of the earth; great Trini, never hurt a fly. He was coming home and was slaughtered in the most brutal fashion. Slaughtered—just associated with his winnings and so on. It was heart-rending, Mr. Speaker.

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On the issue of mental illness, Mr. Speaker, if the Minister of Finance and the Economy or any of these Government Ministers just goes up to St. Ann's, let us say—not now—Monday morning and interviews some of the nurses or talks to some of those patients up there, they would be very surprised. I do not know if the Member for Caroni East is aware of it. They would be very surprised that a number of our mental inpatients in this country have psychoses or neuroses that are related to numbers and games of chance and so on. You would be surprised, the elaborate constructs that some individuals develop and sometimes it degenerates into mental illness.

Not going off on a rant here, Mr. Speaker, but just saying that they have such broad implications and, again, if we do not do the proper research as a country, we are going to be making decisions that we are going to pay for. Maybe some of those decisions were made in the past, but we cannot keep doing it like that. It has to be done a lot better. Policy is not just policy, policy has to be based on something. I am hoping it is evidence so that a country can make the best decisions. I have dwelled on it, but I see it as a very important point and this debate was an opportunity to really treat with that matter.

Moving right along, Mr. Speaker—I just want to say that I know that there are many jobs on the line. The Minister referred to how many jobs and so on and I am well aware of that, but the Government should realize that it is not just what you do, but how you do it sometimes. I want the Minister of Finance and the Economy—I am inviting him today, when he winds up—to convince me and to convince this House, with supporting evidence; convince us, that the decisions being made with respect to the gaming industry are based on proper social science, proper research and proper data as opposed to simply greed, as the Member for Couva South would have said, exploiting the resources that are there and so on. That is one objective, but I do not know if that should be the sole driver of policy.

The Minister glibly mentioned the issue of pool tables and he is ensuring that they are not covered anymore and so on, in these arrangements and—anyway, I had a comment to make, I would not make it because I want to move along.

Mr. Speaker, I represent a constituency that has dealt with natural disaster in the form of flooding in a very severe way. So, my heart goes out to the people of La Brea, the Member of Parliament for La Brea, with that experience that they have been going through and will continue to go through for some time.

I just want to say that somebody, some entities, have to be—there has to be accountability in such matters otherwise the issue of justice remains very elusive in this country. So,—what has happened there—it was not just one spill, it was a series of spills—there has to be an issue of accountability. If COREXIT—is it COREXIT95—was used in La Brea? If public officials—The chairman of Petrotrin stated that. If that is so, somebody has to be held accountable and the Government should be more forthright in dealing with these things, either it happened or it did not. Let us do this thing properly because there are citizens at stake.

Mr. Speaker, I could talk a lot about what happened with Exxon Valdez in 1989 and the fact, at the end of all of that, is that the captain of that vessel, somebody was held accountable and he did 1,000 hours of community service; 1,000 hours and, maybe, the Prime Minister can consider community service next time she detects transgressions within her ranks. One thousand hours of community service which included picking up trash at the side of the roads, working in soup kitchens and so on. Maybe some of these board members or whoever else—I am not here to prescribe guilt, but there has to be accountability when these kinds of—First, they said sabotage. The Minister was all over the place and the media was all over the place with sabotage. Now, it is not sabotage, apparently, now it is neglect. Somebody has to be held accountable. If it is neglect and you saw one leak, why was no action taken to prevent others? I am not sure what is going on here.

In the two situations that I researched, one was the Exxon Valdez oil spill which occurred from a vessel and the other was the bp oil leak, an explosion that occurred with the Deepwater Horizon oil platform in the Gulf of Mexico. Large volumes of oil entered the environment and, in both cases, the effects are seen up to today. There is oil on the sea beds, up to today; the marine environment, birds, fish, plants and the food chain are affected up to today. Many of the analysts postulate that it would take centuries for the effects to totally dissipate.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is not a joke; this is not something to be glib about and the key word here is accountability and learning from those mistakes. Both of those disasters I mentioned occurred before ours but it seemed this country learned very little from that.

Mr. Speaker, moving right along, I want to touch on the Litter Act because there were aspects that were covered by contributions before and there were others that were not. I pulled a copy of the Litter Act which is being amended today and, again, I am very disappointed with these amendments—I will tell the

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Minister very frankly—because they are piecemeal and I do not think they will reduce littering in Trinidad and Tobago.

I see littering as a tremendous environmental challenge and a behavioural challenge. The Government is doing very little. Remember the old “Chase Charlie Away” and all of those programmes? All that has fallen by the wayside. We seem to be very unconcerned about behaviour change via communication route. Communication in this country is more for self promotion of ministers and so on but there is a lot of work and investment; money that needs to be spent on behaviour change, communication campaigns. Just increasing fines for littering from \$2,000 to \$4,000 and if it is a corporation, a body corporate, that is found in breach, it would now be \$8,000.

Mr. Speaker, that is not going to change anything, especially when no one is being convicted. Does the Minister have any figures to tell us that anyone is being convicted for littering? I could tell you what is going on in the Diego Martin area. People are—I mean, it is very sad to see—dumping helter-skelter and that has to stop. I do not know where these litter wardens are. People are calling and saying they are not seeing the litter wardens, but somebody is drawing taxpayers’ dollars. There are dumps on Morne Coco Road, Powder Magazine, scattered all over; in Waterhole and various places. Wanton dumping of garbage and no one is being fined. I suggested earlier that cameras be implemented in some of the—we have cameras all over the place—dumping sites and we need to make examples of some citizens, Mr. Minister. This piecemeal increase of fines is not going to do anything if people know they are not going to be caught or prosecuted. It is just like the gang-related homicides. You could talk about hanging or what, but if I know I am not going to be caught—let me not say me, I am not in that. If somebody knows they are not going to be caught, it does not matter what the penalty is, you know, because they are not going to be caught. There is no detection; there is no conviction. It is only when you have a conviction you have a penalty being imposed.

Mr. Speaker, I am very disappointed in these measures and they are not going to see the results that the Minister has promised, or the Government has promised at all, and I see this, really, as a waste of time. I am being very frank on that. So, this doubling only and so on, he has not told us about any convictions at all; we need to see some examples. People are littering, they need to pay a price before our courts.

Mr. Speaker, there is another issue in the Litter Act. I would just read a section. This is section 3A:

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“A person who transports in or on a motor vehicle or trailer along any motorway, road, street, alley, lane, mall or thoroughfare, any substance or material which is likely to fall off or blow off the motor vehicle or trailer...while being so transported it is either—

...not sufficiently well secured...to prevent it from falling off the motor vehicle...or”—it is:

“...not so covered as to prevent it from blowing off the motor vehicle or trailer, is guilty of an offence...”

That is in the Act already.

Mr. Speaker, we have had some horrific recent cases of persons who have been killed in a very brutal fashion; a horrific fashion. A constituent of my colleague from St. Ann’s East experienced this. A steel object came off a truck, poorly secured and other things. You see concrete dust—you see all sorts of things blowing off of vehicles on our nations roads. You know why? No one is being prosecuted. Then, look at the penalties. Minor penalties and all that the Minister is doing here is tinkering with them.

Mr. Speaker, life and limb—this is a major hazard we are talking about. This Government has a habit of just sitting and listening and then passing the bills. I want the Minister to hear me loud and clear on this one. If there is anything that you amend in this particular Finance Bill, I am pleading on this particular clause, that we need much higher fines for those materials that are improperly secured and are not covered to prevent them from blowing off. [*Desk thumping*] There is no excuse for that. I do not know what mitigating factors any citizen or body corporate could bring to treat with that. It cannot be \$4,000 and \$8,000. Madness, you are talking about life and death. I am going to suggest—you always ask for suggestions—\$25,000 for an individual and \$50,000 minimum for a body corporate. I mean, come on, we need to get serious with some basic things in this society. That is one of them, I am strong with that recommendation.

Mr. Speaker, what about the nation’s beaches, waterways and so on? Where is CEPEP Marine and CEPEP—What is it? Cepep air force and all of that? Where are they? Where are they? I mean, recently, Maracas Beach—I mean, it is terrible. On any public holiday or weekend, there are bins on the beach, but they are filled up early in the day; by lunch time the bins are filled, no one clears them and then you end with a huge pile of rubbish around these bins. It is an eyesore, we have visitors; local and foreign visitors going to these beaches and being confronted

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with this eyesore. Littering is a serious problem and I think the Government—
Yes, I see them, but these are piecemeal amendments.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Miss M. Mc Donald*]

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. A. Browne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and colleagues.

Mr. Speaker, I was talking about the Litter Act which is being amended and I would like the Government to go much further on this issue because I am very dissatisfied with this piecemeal amendment. This is an opportunity to do better. Yes, people are asking where are the litter wardens, et cetera, and we are talking about what is happening on our nation's beaches. How many convictions have we had? We need to start making examples of individuals.

1.35 a.m.

I am going to move on, Mr. Speaker. I just have a few more points to make to the State Lands Act and, again, I think we missed the boat here completely. The Minister is amending this Act to treat with the issue of illegal—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Indarsingh: The Calcutta boat.

Dr. A. Browne: Sorry?

Mr. Indarsingh: The Calcutta boat.

Dr. A. Browne: [*Member steups*] Mr. Speaker, sometimes I get a little disappointed with Members opposite. What Calcutta boat has to do with this? Member for Couva South, come "nah" man.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister, I think, has missed the boat. That is a figure of speech and it has to do with not seeing an opportunity and seizing an opportunity which is right before you. That is what I mean by missing the boat. You missed the boat and all, even in what I am saying. Anyway, Mr. Speaker, they are trying to distract me. There is a missed opportunity here in amending the State Lands Act because one of the big problems—yes, illegal quarrying we have to deal with that definitely. One of the other big issue that is contained in this Act and we need to address as a country, is this issue of reclamation of land, especially in our coastal areas.

Mr. Speaker, I have had a number of conversations with developers, wannabe developers, people dreaming of doing developments, and persons affected by developments along our nation's seashore especially in the western peninsula.

Mr. Seemungal: It is coming.

Dr. A. Browne: It is coming? Mr. Speaker, that is a serious issue and I am glad the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo is also concerned—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Seemungal: Squatting.

Dr. A. Browne: Well I am going to talk about squatting, because I hope when the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo under whom this portfolio falls, is talking about squatting and dealing with squatting, he recognizes that the biggest squatters in this country are not the little people who might have a shack somewhere or trying to raise their family. Some of the biggest squatters are millionaires that are squatting and bodies corporate that are squatting. So if you are dealing with it, deal with it properly.

Right! Back to this issue, Mr. Speaker, of illegal reclamation of land, and I have been able to identify not very many legal reclamations, proper reclamations that have occurred on our seashore. One example I could hold up is some of the reclamation that has been done under Thomas Peake & Company Limited and let me declare an interest. That company was the place I got my first job way back when, when they had a hardware store. I am declaring that in advance. So I could vouch for the fact—because I saw some of the paperwork—that they have licences and did that reclamation in order. But, Mr. Speaker, that does not apply to much of the reclamation that has occurred and is occurring as we speak at 1.40 a.m.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: After being here since 10.00 a.m.

Dr. A. Browne: Yes, it is going on as we speak. And the State Lands Act, there is some language in here that needs to be strengthened and amended if we are to help come to grips with some of that.

Mr. Speaker, there was a High Court judgment delivered on February 29, 2012 that I want to refer to, that directly impacts this issue of reclamation. I will tell you a bit about this judgment. It was a matter between Kazim Mohammed and the Attorney General, the Director of Surveys and the Commissioner of State Lands before Justice R. Boodoosingh. Yes, Mr. Speaker, judgment delivered on February 29, 2012. In this case, the judge made reference to the State Lands Act

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and some degree of ambiguity—that is my interpretation of his words—in section 3 of the Act when it comes to the status of reclaimed land and I think some people have been exploiting some of that ambiguity, and this Finance Bill was an opportunity to tighten up some of that because section 3(2) says:

“...shall be lawful for the President,...”—to—“also...grant if he...see fit licences to reclaim land from the sea.

(3) The dominion in all lands so reclaimed shall belong to and be vested in the State or in the grantee or grantees of the State.”

So any reclaimed land—when you reclaim land, it does not belong to you. It belongs to the State of Trinidad and Tobago.

I think that will be news to a number of reclaimers in this country to begin with. I am not going to dwell on that part, but there are some issues that we need to come to grip with as a country. But the fact is, Mr. Speaker, the language of the State Lands Act only refers to the dominion over the lands that have been reclaimed and have been licensed, they belong to the State. And we are left to infer that the lands that have been reclaimed and not licensed, which is what is going on, also belongs to the State. That has not been expressly stated in this Act at all, and it was the result of some controversy during this particular matter that came up with this individual.

I am not dwelling on him as an individual or focusing on him as an individual. I think he had a hardware store or has a hardware store somewhere in the west. The point of the matter is, there is need to amend and clarify section 3 with regard to reclaimed land with no licence also belonging to the State, and there is also need to introduce and strengthen specific measures and penalties to treat with illegal reclamation of land. The State Lands Act is threadbare in that regard. It affects our marine environment. It affects everything connected to citizens on a small island or small islands like ours in Trinidad and Tobago. There are a few other points, but I will move on because I hope I will not use my full time.

I want to touch on the municipal police, the \$1,000. Who is going to argue against \$1,000 extra for the municipal police? I will not. I agree 100 per cent. Congratulate the Government on that particular measure. Mr. Speaker, there are other measures or issues affecting our municipal police and I will mention one of them here, and it is not just affecting our municipal police, but our TTPS officers, coast guard, the army, the air guard, the defence force, the defence force reserves, prison, fire, all of them, and that is the issue of housing. I am willing to bet us—

let me not talk about gambling, but I am certain that other Members of Parliament are being approached on a weekly basis.

The Member mentioned his Tuesday. Some of us have, I could speak for myself, two days when we see constituents per week in office and then out of office in the field as well, and continuous approaches from members of the uniformed services and they keep referring to commitments made by the Ministry and the Minister about different percentages, and there is a little 10 per cent or some allocation to members of the uniformed services and that is very demoralizing to these officers. There is a lack of clarity in that regard. Would you agree, Member for Port of Spain South?

Miss Mc Donald: Yes.

Dr. A. Browne: There is the perception that none of them are really being facilitated at all, and I want to ask the Minister—he has gone elsewhere, but if he was here and if he is listening—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Indarsingh: No member of the defence force getting it?

Dr. A. Browne: Well, it is unclear, so we need clarity. They need clarity, and me as their representative would demand clarity on this particular matter. They feel neglected and betrayed. They are confused. They go from pillar to post, they go to Government MPs and then they come to Opposition MPs hoping, and they are all over the place. Some of them go down to Oropouche and, you know, it is really demeaning to these officers. They serve and protect and we need to know what is the role of their welfare associations in this regard; and does the Minister respond to approaches by the welfare association? Should we be directing these uniformed officers to those associations? We need that clarity. They need that clarity.

Again, so you are talking about \$1,000 more, but something basic like housing—and some of them complained they are in such high risk areas. Their houses are being shot up and so on. They need some assistance or facilitation with state housing and they are not getting it. Again, not just municipal police officers, but all our uniformed services and I will extend that to all citizens of this country as well, many citizens of this country.

So the Minister of Finance and the Economy is happy with the economy. He has no complaints whatsoever. I believe he is unhappy with the planned heist that occurred at FCB, but he is happy with the economy. Mr. Speaker, on another

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occasion I will give some of my theories as to what happened there, but I believe that was carefully planned. There is a syndicate involved, and when these things happen, I always am very suspicious about the issue of—I do not want to say it. Should I say—let me say it plainly—drug money playing around when those kinds of developments emerge in our financial sector. There is something shady about some of those types of transactions.

Mr. Speaker, if the Minister is so happy with the economy and things are so rosy and there is blue sky or whatever, then the Government really needs to do more. And where do I start? I will give about three issues. One is with regard to our fisherfolk and fishermen in Trinidad and Tobago who are struggling under tremendous hardship as we speak. There is the issue of crime; their engines and propellers being stolen; there is piracy; people stealing their nets; there is pollution; there are oil spills; there are trawlers destroying the seabed still, even though the Minister of Food Production has claimed some successes. There is a big billboard in the zoo celebrating him with his huge face and colour celebration, thank you, Minister Devant Maharaj and so on. Illegal trawling is still taking place in our waters.

Our fisherfolk is suffering and there are some suggestions with regard to better facilities. There is the need for a jetty in the Cocorite fishing facility. That has yet to be done even though it was specifically promised by this Government. We need to start an artificial reef programme, Mr. Speaker. That is something I would encourage the Government to focus on, and the next Government as well I will hope they would focus on that—the PNM Government to come—on an artificial reef programme. It can help rehabilitate some of our fish stocks and assist recreational fishermen as well. We need to be very, very, very, very comprehensive in dealing with illegal trawling. I do not think that is occurring in a comprehensive fashion right now—that prevention.

Mr. Speaker, also if the economy is doing so well, I just want to remind this Minister of Finance and the Economy and this Government that many of our citizens and families remain at great risk and hazard, as we speak, from the risk of fire in state housing, apartment complexes and HDC developments. There was a major fire in east Port of Spain in 2011 where citizens died, were burnt alive, and there were all sorts of pronouncements, lamentation, we are going to do this, we are going to do that, fire escapes and all sorts of measures. Do you know what happened? Nothing! This is not the first time I am mentioning it. When we have a Finance Bill or the Minister of Finance and the Economy is turning to these issues, this is an opportunity to actually do something about it. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, we like old talk in this country, but we had that experience. They talk the talk, nothing was done and people are at risk right now as we speak. I want the Minister to ensure that something concrete is done before he demits office on this particular matter, and remind him that he has the cheque books for the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development and all the other Ministries. He could be a little more creative in encouraging them to do the right thing.

Two more issues, Mr. Speaker. I want to touch on the issue of innovation, support for innovation; more support for innovation, inventors and young people in this country who I believe will be the future. If we talk about diversification, they are going to drive it, but we need to do more to support them. There are good innovators and inventors among our young people, including in my own constituency, we have drone technologists who could teach the United States Government and others a thing or two about drone science. I have seen some of the demonstrations. Young Trinbagonians. We have persons who have developed android applications and other things that would amaze this Government if they were paying attention to young persons in that manner and so, I am encouraging more support for innovation and inventors.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, if this economy is doing so well, this Government, this nation needs to pay more attention to the health sector. It is not just about building hospitals and infrastructure, you know. They keep talking about a teaching hospital when every hospital in this country is a teaching hospital. Every doctor knows that. This Government is fooling the population with a lot of that old talk.

There is a crisis in health in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] We have a doctor as Minister of Health presiding over an ongoing crisis. We have a crisis of health with butchery of babies, with cocaine surgeries occurring in private hospitals being transferred to public hospitals, all of these things. There is no consequence, there is no accountability; there is no justice. There is suspicion of a medical mafia in place.

1.50 a.m.

So, we are here talking about money, Finance Bills, doing piecemeal measures in some respect when a house is on fire; there is a major crisis in this regard. Fears of cover-ups each and every time these things happen. I want to mention the issue of retired nurses. We are not utilizing them well enough at all, and there are opportunities to involve them more in raising the standards of our younger nurses, monitoring and supervising and helping to achieve better and healthier practices within the health sector.

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Finally, I want to mention the issue of random drug and alcohol testing for all our uniformed services. And what is good for the goose, is good for the gander. I will extend that to doctors in public institutions—and I am saying that for a reason—random drug and alcohol testing including those who are prepared to do surgery. I do not think they will be opposed to that. I will extend that to Members of Parliament as well, of the Lower House and Upper House. What is good for the goose—and our uniformed officers who are protecting us right now—is good for the gander, good for us as well. Their jobs are important so they have to be clean of those substances. Our jobs are also important. We should be clean of those substances as well. I said it here before, I heard it repeated in the Upper House without acknowledgement but nothing has been done in that regard.

So, Mr. Speaker, we need to be responsible. We cannot do like they did and lower confidence. I am not going to contribute to anything along those lines. But, I want to encourage this Government in their last few days in office, or however long—I mean, God is in control of the country—they remain in office. The Minister of Finance and the Economy came here and he boasted about the economy and so on, but I am wondering if he and his Government have been hearing the cries of the people because they are desperate for good governance, better governance. They are desperate for a Government that really keeps its promises as opposed to one like this one that started with a massive broken promise to senior citizens and they have not looked back since. They want their basic needs met. It is not just about a bridge here or a road there, it is about a sustainable job, a decent job. It is about security for themselves. I do not think that any of that is too much to ask for.

If I go through the measures this Minister has been focusing on, I do not think we are really addressing—we definitely are not addressing the genuine needs of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. So, Minister, try a little harder, do a bit more. I have made some specific recommendations and there are aspects of this Finance Bill that I certainly welcome and support, and I hope my recommendations do not fall on deaf ears. Mr. Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Before I call on the next speaker, that is the Member for Port of Spain South, I would like to suggest that we have some coffee seeing that we will be here for a little while again, stretch our legs and get back here at around ten minutes past two. This sitting is now suspended until ten minutes past two.

1.53 a.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

2.10 a.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Speaker: The Member for Port of Spain South.

Miss Marlene Mc Donald (*Port of Spain South*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hour is late. I have been here from twenty past nine this morning so it is 16 hours. My head is as big as this, very tired, but I am here doing the people's work. So, when they call out MPs, I do not expect to hear my name in that, because, as my colleague, the Member for Oropouche East, said in the last debate the last time we were here, all our constituents will be in their beds snoozing but we are all here doing the people's work. [*Desk thumping*] Further too, Mr. Speaker, the only reason I am making this very brief intervention is because of my constituents because I have some things to say about Port of Spain East in particular. But, let me thank you for giving me the opportunity to make a short contribution here this morning on the Finance Bill, 2014.

I would just want to respond to two persons: the Minister of Finance and the Economy and the Member for Couva South. Let me deal quickly with the Member for Couva South. One thing he said, that the PNM was only concerned with urban development and we were not concerned with rural development. Well, you see, Mr. Speaker, time does not permit but I know there might be some supplementation of appropriation Bill coming soon and I am going to reserve my comments, Member for Couva South, because I want to take my time to answer you. I want to take my time to tell you that every major development in this country happened under the PNM. I want to save it because I want to go through and tell you what the PNM has done over the years in the rural communities in terms of rural development, so I am going to save. I am going to save it.

The Minister of Finance and the Economy—[*Crosstalk*] Excuse me, Member for D'Adabie/O'Meara, at this time, I do not want to have to turn to—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: You have my full protection.

Miss M. Mc Donald: Exactly, I do not want to ask for protection.

Mr. Speaker: Member for D'Adabie/O'Meara, please.

Miss M. Mc Donald: Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I want to respond to the Minister of Finance and the Economy, but, in so doing, I would need to—two things he said and he opened up the debate, and he made reference to the fact that the economy—he painted a lovely picture of this economy. We are all sipping on honey and eating cake, and I want to find out which part of Trinidad it is happening, because I am going to take you on a journey into my constituency, and

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we will see exactly what is happening there. I have been very consistent with that because every time I stand here in this Parliament, once I could relate it to my constituency, I do it.

But, I just want to make reference to three pieces of the legislation. There are 19 pieces that the Minister is amending but my colleagues have dealt with the others quite adequately. I want to talk about the Cocoa and Coffee Industry Act, Chap. 64:20. What the Government is doing here under clause 9 of the Bill is repealing the Cocoa and Coffee Industry Act. Now, I find this really, really amazing. I searched high and I searched low. I read this book, again, looking at the budget statement last year, 2014 budget, and I could find nowhere there where the Minister told us, in September last year, told this honourable House, that this Act would have been repealed.

I thought that this Finance Bill was really giving teeth to measures which were approved—correct me if I am wrong—in the budget in September, and what we are doing now is just passing legislation, approving them, so as to give it teeth so we could implement. I thought that is what we were doing. But when I saw this, I said I do not remember the Minister telling us anything about the repeal of this Act, and so I went back and I read and I read and I say, “Well, look, you know something, you probably not reading this thing properly”, but I could find it nowhere. Mr. Speaker, I thought that the whole objective of this Act—I did a little research—was to establish a cocoa and coffee industry board which would regulate and control the purchase of cocoa and coffee, the sale of it, the exportation of it and matters incidental thereto.

Now, when the Minister presented this yesterday, the Finance Bill, he came up and he made mention of it, and he said they are going to introduce something called the Trinidad and Tobago Cocoa Development Company. But, in my research, I perused a paper entitled, “*A Review of Agricultural Policies: CASE STUDY OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO*” and this report was prepared for the Caricom Secretariat, and it is from “December 2005”, and I am going to quote what the report said:

“Although”—Trinidad and Tobago—“produces ‘fine flavoured cocoa’, a premium commodity in the export market, production has continued to decline from historical highs, despite various incentives provided to the industry over the years.”

So, I suppose that is the subsidies which we have given to this industry by the Government.

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“The industry is characterized by the residual itinerant growers in certain parts of the country. Despite efforts at restructuring raw cocoa processing...responses have been marginal.”

But, this is the part that struck me.

“The favourable conditions in the international market for Trinidad and Tobago’s cocoa seem not to have been exploited to the benefit of primary producers.”

And a similar trend has been noted for the coffee industry also.

Mr. Speaker, what these experts are saying here is that we have not exploited to the fullest potential our cocoa production, and our cocoa, as they said, is a fine blend. Many people purchase our cocoa. The Europeans purchase it, blend it with theirs and then sell it right back to us in all their Cadbury chocolates and whatnot.

Now, the Minister said this morning that production has been decreasing for the past decade; that the number of farmers over the last year has also gone down, that we are only producing 1,600 metric tons of cocoa per year. He said that the Act is archaic and restrictive and it is based on that that he is repealing the legislation and they are going to put this company in place to deal with the cocoa and coffee farmers. But, Minister, I want a little more explanation as to what will happen with the subsidies. Are you telling this honourable House and the country that you are going to be withdrawing the subsidies from this industry? Is that what you are saying? Are you saying that you will incorporate a company? Do you not think that you are supposed to bring that legislation here and have it legislated here in this Parliament, as an Act of Parliament, as opposed to what you are trying to do? I really take serious objection; this Bench takes serious objection, to the fact that it was not mentioned to us and it came like a thief overnight. Only today, you know, we looked at it and it is in between the 19 pieces of legislation.

2.20 a.m.

We knew nothing of it and only today you stood there and you told us that this company—we would have remembered that. I take copious notes. I have your *Hansard* and where have we seen this Trinidad and Tobago Cocoa Development Company? Where? Nowhere, Mr. Minister. I am very, very disappointed and so I expect that when you are wrapping up, you tell us exactly why you are dealing with the cocoa and coffee industry in such a manner.

The second piece of legislation—and I do not think that we could hammer it home more—is the Municipal Corporations Act, Chap. 25:04, where the

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Government is seeking to insert a new section, which will allow for the payment of the \$1,000 duty allowance to the municipal police. The Minister said this morning it was inadvertently—this group of police officers was inadvertently left out. That is not true! It is because they strongly objected to the fact that the other police and the prisons, and what not, they were getting the \$1,000 and, therefore, they forced you. You were in a position where you could not say no, and you had to give them and, therefore, you are now putting this into the legislation. You had to amend it in order to pay them this \$1,000.

Mr. Minister, you know, I am very, very surprised at you. You have just come into the Government and you are just floating and you are comfortable and you are coming here to us and dropping things on us. I would expect “one of dem” seasoned campaigners to do that, not someone like you, Sir, not someone who had oversight of a bank, a very productive and profitable bank like FCB. I do not expect you to do that. I expect much more from you, Mr. Minister.

Now, having done that, as I have said, in my mind, this is a very piecemeal type of amendment you are doing here. One of my colleagues made mention of it this morning where, in August to September last year, in 2013, the Leader of the Opposition, Member for Diego Martin West, decided listen, crime is everybody’s business and he wanted to partner with the Government and so we brought certain issues to the table and we submitted a 10-point crime plan for the Government to consider and one of the issues there was the enhancing, or the strengthening of the municipal police.

We are saying we need to look at our various communities, especially the hot spot areas, areas like mine, like east Port of Spain, some areas in Diego Martin. All across the country you have these little pockets, these little hot spot pockets and we are saying if each corporation should take on 100 municipal police, you are creating a force of 1,400 and they are basically going to be in the communities, policing the communities and we feel that if we put these municipal police outside there, 100 of them, I think that citizens will feel a little bit safer, wherever they live. There was general agreement between both sides, both the Government, as well as the Opposition side, on the way forward. Nothing, Mr. Speaker, has come out of that.

The Minister of Finance and the Economy came here and talked about Operation Hope. What about Operation Hope? That was supposed to be some police patrol you were supposed to have initiated since last year. What about that? It is in the budget statement, Operation Hope. Nothing! We have seen, absolutely nothing on it, Mr. Minister.

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Next one we want to look at is the Litter Act. Now, I will tell you, personally I agree with the increase in the fees for certain offences, in terms of the fees and the penalties for certain offences, but you cannot have a conversation with this House or the national community talking about littering without talking about your litter wardens. How are you implementing the measures that you are putting here? How are you collecting all these hundreds of thousands of dollars, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Minister, I want to quote you on the 30th of January, 2013, this is the *Hansard* from the other place and this is what you had to say. I quote, littering:

“This is a major scourge in the country. Many times, you know, personally, I think we seem to lack some level of national pride in the way we deal with litter. It is clear that we have to take action to deal with it. The Ministry of Local Government has advised that they have already employed 147 litter wardens.”

Training has begun in order to deploy these wardens throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

“...a big issue here has been the question of enforcement.”

These are your words Mr. Minister.

“So, we really want to ensure that whatever changes we implement that there is really enforcement.”

Mr. Minister, increasing these fees without the accompanying enforcement of the law, in order to realize these fees, will make absolutely no sense.

Only today, one of my colleagues asked a question and I think the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs responded. And the question was: how many quarries, I think illegal quarries, do you have? And I think the answer was 42 illegal quarries operating in Trinidad. How many arrests have you made from 2010 to current? Six! Six! And you should see the kind of fees for illegal quarrying and whatnot and you have just increased the fees. So, there is no enforcement of what it is we are doing, Mr. Minister.

I would not deal with the petroleum, I think my colleague from La Brea has dealt with that quite adequately. But, Mr. Minister, you went on and you painted a picture of this economy. You said our total GDP by the end of 2014 will stand at \$177 billion. My colleague from Diego Martin North/East analyzed that already for this House. You said there is strong performance across all sectors of the economy, and one that got to me was that the unemployment figure is just 3.6 per cent. All over, people are employed, people are eating, people are drinking.

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I recall, Mr. Speaker, in the budget statement of 2011—they had just come in in 2010, so they prepared the 2011 budget—at page 28: “Opening of New Economic Space”. It was not this Minister, it was the former Minister, the Member of Parliament for Tunapuna. The then Minister of Finance stated that Trinidad and Tobago needs to expand its economic space, both within and outside the economy.

“Hence”—they—”will develop five poles for expansion in the medium term, using a cluster development approach.”

These five growth poles—so they came up with the idea of the growth poles—the first growth pole, the Four Cs, this is Central Trinidad: Couva, Charlieville, Carapichaima and Chaguanas. The second growth pole will focus on developing the south western peninsula from San Fernando to Point Fortin. The third growth pole will be east Port of Spain. The fourth, the north coast area, and the fifth growth pole, the north east region of Tobago. Now, what is of interest to me is the east Port of Spain area. That is the growth pole I am interested in.

Now, at page 29 of his budget statement for 2011, the then Minister had this to say. I quote:

“The intervention here”—that is in east Port of Spain—”will also rely...on the creation of business incubators, initially targeting the arts, culture and entertainment. We also propose to restore East Port of Spain into a ‘heritage’...like old Havana...Cuba or Old San Juan in Puerto Rico. These measures are expected to reduce the impact of poverty and steadily contribute to the economic health of these communities by optimizing existing entrepreneurial resources.”

Mr. Speaker, that is 2011, absolutely nothing was done. Nothing, with that growth pole.

We went on 2012, the budget statement at page 31, under the heading:

“Sustainable city project”

The Minister again said that he remains committed to the development of east Port of Spain. That is all he said. So, nothing again, was done in 2012.

I turn my attention to the budget statement of 2013, at page 8. The Minister has reintroduced, again, the notion of the five growth poles, which would be rolled out by the Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development. The Minister stated that he remains committed to partnering with the Inter-American

Development Bank to establish a sustainable heritage city in east Port of Spain. Mr. Speaker, nothing was done.

We turn again now, we go on to the 2014 budget. At page 15, the current Minister had this to say. He said:

The East Port of Spain growth pole is focussed on urban regeneration. Government is currently establishing the necessary organisational arrangements and executing agencies. During the course of this year, 12 projects will be completed, with a further 14 planned for the next fiscal year.

Mr. Speaker, all we heard about it is from the Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development. I believe, that they are going to—what are they going to implement up there—put a cable car, which will string across from Fort Picton right across east Port of Spain down to City Gate. That is what they are going to be doing, from Fort Picton to City Gate. I have no idea who would be swinging across. When you all are swinging, look down. I want the Minister of Housing and Urban Development to hear this—look down. When you all are swinging those constituents down, look down at the land, all the acres of land which you all put now as detention ponds, where houses were supposed to have been built, where the second phase of the redevelopment and restructuring of east Port of Spain should have taken place, and now you are putting people up in cable cars to look down at the mess you all have created. I wish you all well.

Mr. Speaker, out of a budget of \$61.3 billion, what have we benefited? I will share some figures with you, because this Minister seems to think that he has done such hard work so the economy is fine. I want to tell the Minister here tonight that we are not fools, we read too, that the prices of oil and gas have been very buoyant, that your budgeted figure was US \$2.75 for gas per MMBtu, but it has reached an all-time high of US \$8 and now it is hovering between, I think 4.1 and 4.5, so you are getting extra money, not through you, Mr. Minister, global consequences.

If you look at the figures: 2011, an expenditure of \$49 billion and a supplementation of \$5.4 billion; in 2012, expenditure of \$54.6 billion, a supplementation of \$3.1 billion; 2013, expenditure of \$58.4 billion, a supplementation of \$2.9 billion and 2014, \$61.4 billion. You have not come back as yet for the supplementation.

Mr. Speaker, that is a total budgeted expenditure in the sum of \$223 billion with supplementations of \$11 billion, giving you a total of \$234 billion spent and I am asking this Government: what are you doing with the third growth pole, east Port of Spain?

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2.35 a.m.

We see what is happening in the central growth pole, we see that. We see what is happening with the four Cs, we see it. And you all stand here and you all—and you drive up the road—the Member for Tabaquite loves that. We drive up the road and there is the hospital, and the Aquatic Centre and we go through to Chaguanas, and there is COSTAATT. [*Desk thumping*]

Only on Tuesday, I was looking at television, and what did I hear? Here it is, the Minister was talking about moving three Ministries: the Ministry of Food Production, the Ministry of Community Development and the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training off to Chaguanas. What you are doing? As I said it, and I will say it again, there is a systematic dismantling of the City of Port of Spain. There is a systematic dismantling, and not only that, I will say it again. We have an inequitable distribution of resources taking place right now, and it is happening. And I know for all my colleagues sitting here, they can say yes to what I am saying, but I am telling you, well, they can do it on their own. I could tell you in Port of Spain South, when I go to my office on Wednesday morning, from nine in the morning, till four, five in the evening. I can tell you, 95 per cent of people coming in, looking for houses and jobs. So I do not understand where this Minister got the figure from, that there is an unemployment rate of 3.5 per cent. Where he got it from? I do not know; tell us.

And whilst I am at it, with all of these billions of dollars around the place, let us look at the housing issues in east Port of Spain. Mr. Speaker, in the budget statement, page 48:

“home construction will commence”—building—“on 3 new sites: to yield”—something like—“2,575 housing units in 3 years at a cost of \$858.0 million”—and these houses will be situated at—“Trestrail Lands, Eden Gardens and Pineapple Smith Lands;”

All we are saying, Mr. Speaker, is that all we need in east Port of Spain, the land is there, start the second redevelopment of east Port of Spain; start it.

Mr. Speaker, I recall last year on August 21, 2013, the residents of east Port of Spain, that is Duncan Street, Nelson Street, George Street, they met with the hon. Prime Minister, and one of the things that they talked about was housing, they need refurbishment of those houses. Mr. Speaker, I will tell you what—[*Member snores*] [*Laughter*]

Hon. Member: “Touch mih colleague dey for mih.”

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Miss M. Mc Donald: Mr. Speaker—touch my colleague there, please.
[*Continuous crosstalk and laughter*]

Yes, Mr. Speaker, I thought—

Mr. Roberts: Is not that, you put him to sleep, you know.

Miss M. Mc Donald: Thank you—that the Prime Minister would have put something in the budget to deal with east Port of Spain. Mr. Speaker, I also recall in that 10 point crime plan that we submitted to the hon. Prime Minister and her team, part of it, one of the points there was urban renewal. You see, Mr. Speaker, we are of the opinion on this side that, the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, also Vision 2020, had as a key priority, poverty eradication. One of the basic manifestation of poverty is the lack of shelter; basic shelter, and that is what we have in east Port of Spain and environs.

You see, Mr. Speaker, the Government must be cognizant of the fact that this is your capital city, and the city must be kept in a certain manner. We are going towards developed country status. We have not reached there as yet. And worldwide, believe me, Governments do take care of their capital city. A city is a breathing thing, it is a live creature.

Mr. Speaker, I do not want to begrudge. I do not want to stand here and feel, well, I begrudge those people who will be getting their—all their apartments in Eden Gardens. Today the Minister, the Member for Oropouche East said that they will be concentrating on new units down south. I just want to let the Minister know, that the East-West Corridor too, east Port of Spain, we do have a need up there also, and we cannot continue. This is your last year before you all leave. [*Laughter*] You all cannot—and believe me you may laugh now, but I will still take care of you, Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara, when you go back to Power 102, that is not a problem. You could call me. [*Laughter*] You can call me. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you that the quality, the type and tenure of housing help define a neighbourhood. It tells you the type of persons living there, and when you take people from, you know, what you may call these ghetto areas, and you place them in a nice surrounding, Mr. Speaker, it gives them a sense of belonging, it gives them a sense of security and it really, really changes their lives around. And it is shown worldwide, that areas with poor quality housing are more likely to have a range of economic, environmental and social challenges.

Hon. Member: What you did when you were in Government?

Miss M. Mc Donald: And, Mr. Speaker—what we did when we were in Government? If I take you now to St. Paul Street in my constituency, you will see four beautiful buildings, high-rise apartments, that is what we did. We bought out all those old houses there and we placed those apartments, and we said that was our first phase of redevelopment of east Port of Spain. The second phase, as you drive down the bus route, all the land acquired there which now is just a pond, with white birds flying inside of there, we were going to build high-rise apartments there also. We were going to take down Nelson Street, Duncan Street and George Street, all those buildings have outdone their life span. We were going to move those people into those buildings and rebuild the city centre. That was the plan PNM had, my dear, according to our Vision 2020. If you did not know; you know now. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, it is minutes to three, and I thought that I wanted to bring these points to the table, to this House. I just want to tell you that I want to agree with my colleague from Diego Martin North/East, that we are dealing with an economy that has stalled. There is instability in the financial sector, excess liquidity—I do not buy this thing about the businesses, they have so much money that they do not need to borrow. It shows a lack of confidence, Mr. Speaker. We saw up to March, that these commercial banks had an excess of \$7 billion. Citizens are earning virtually nothing on their deposits.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that—and do not forget, you all may still continue to enjoy the buoyant prices in both oil and gas. We are a gas-based economy, so you will continue to have more money, you understand, to filter where?—I do not know, and dare not say where.

But I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that if they look at our global ranking with respect to corruption, that should teach all of us a lesson; all of us. I hope that in whatever planning that you all do, that east Port of Spain, and the Members on this team, on this Bench, that we keep those constituencies, because as my friend from Diego Martin Central said, this is a nation. It is not you and them. It is all of us, and we are all, all, going to survive here even when we demit office and this Parliament.

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

The Minister of Finance and the Economy (Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai): [*Desk thumping*] “Doh clap too hard yuh know, ah might stay ah hour.” [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, there has been quite a long discussion on the various initiatives which we have put in the Finance Bill, in order to give effect to the various initiatives that we had put in the budget. I think during the course of the debate though, many of my own colleagues on this side, would have sought to address and answer some of the questions which were raised by Members on the other side, but there are still a few areas that we would have to address.

The first—[*Interruption*] I did not interrupt you all, you know. The first one, of course, is well, the question of the economy and what is happening with the economy. I want to say that, you know, it is indisputable, the numbers that are there available by the Central Bank. When the IMF comes and they go through the numbers, when the rating agencies go through the numbers, they are very thorough: they look at the numbers that the EMD within the Ministry of Finance and the Economy produces; they look at the Central Bank numbers; they look at what the CSO produces and then they look also at anecdotal information. And you know, I think in some cases, some of the anecdotal information which I had put forward may have been misunderstood.

For example, I did say that there were about 13,000—over 13,000 new businesses which were formed, but I was very careful to say, at the time when I said it, that certainly new businesses do not necessarily mean that there is going to be employment. Some of these are simply special-purpose vehicles and, therefore, it is not necessarily meaning that there are 13,000 new business that would have opened hiring people.

But nevertheless, it did provide some anecdotal evidence to support the various data points that we had, which showed that the economy has, in fact, been improving. When we look at both the energy and the non-energy sectors, as I said, the non-energy sector as a whole, over the last year, between the fourth quarter of 2012, and the fourth quarter of 2013, moved from—showed growth of 1.9 per cent, 3.6 per cent, 2.6 per cent, 1.9 per cent, 1.5 per cent. So at all times the growth rate in the non-energy sector has been positive. I think I just wanted to put that back into the *Hansard*, to reemphasize the point that, in fact, all the data that we have, all of the anecdotal information that is available, and all of the evaluations done by the various international bodies, support the view that the economy continues to grow broadly across all fronts.

There was an issue with—the issue that was raised about the energy prices. And yes, energy prices remain stable and we are grateful and thankful for that, that energy prices have remained stable. It did come down from \$140 for, you

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know, per barrel of oil, or \$47 per barrel of oil in 2008, and it dropped to about \$40 in 2009, but then it recovered, and it has remained relatively stable between 2011/2012 and 2013, and up to 2014.

Earlier this year, the price of gas did go up, but again, that was just a temporary phenomenon, representing the variable weather conditions existing in the northern climate during the course of this year. But by and large, the numbers for energy have remained stable over the past three to four years, but notwithstanding that, the economy has moved from a negative position in 2011, into a growth path in 2012 and 2013, and mainly because of the fact that the non-energy sector has continued to grow strongly.

Even though—we have to understand that the growth factors that we, or the growth projections, as well as the performance that we had, would have also been affected because, of course, the numbers are affected both by price and by volume and, in fact, volume had been affected because, as we said, of the major maintenance work which was taking place offshore over the past year and a half. So that there were countervailing forces that existed and in spite of that, the economy continued to grow.

I would say, Mr. Speaker, I note the comments with respect to things such as littering, and I take the point made by the Member for Diego Martin Central, about the increase in fines. I would just caution that we need to ensure a certain kind of proportionality in the level of fines between different types of offences across the range of legislation that we have before us, so we would want to be mindful of that as we give consideration to the points which the hon. Member has raised.

2.50 a.m.

I would want to dispel the notion that the Environmental Police Unit has not been actually doing its job. Perhaps we may need to further reinforce what it does, but I had indicated in my opening remarks that the EPU issues, on average, about 200 tickets per month and have collected fines in excess of \$450,000 per year just from vehicle violations that they had identified. So I think it is a little bit unfair to the EPU to be saying that they are not doing anything. In fact, they continue to issue tickets and they do continue to play a role and perhaps what one may want to suggest is that we further strengthen the capability and the forces that the EPU has under its control.

With respect to the First Citizens IPO, a lot has been said and perhaps a lot could be said, but one of the issues for us is, of course, the SEC audit continues and I think it would be inappropriate for us to comment. I fully understand the impatience of the national community that this be brought to a conclusion, and certainly to ensure that members—those who are involved— that justice is served.

I certainly want to give the assurance that the Government is fully committed to ensuring that the right thing is done in all dimensions of the problem. Again, as I said, we would not want to say anything at this stage, given the fact that the matter is under continuing audit by the SEC and we would want to, perhaps, ensure that nothing is done to compromise that particular work that is being done.

I think the comments on the quality of data produced by the different arms of the public service have already been addressed. I would want to say that, certainly with respect to the incentives for the energy sector, I am grateful for the endorsement of the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East, with respect to some of the changes. We are mindful of his other comments, but we certainly recognize the fact that he did indicate his support for those initiatives, which I think are absolutely important in the short term for ensuring the continuing buoyancy of the economy and, of course, for the continuing development of that particular industry, so important to the economy of Trinidad and Tobago over the medium term.

In general, Mr. Speaker, I think those were some of the main points which have been raised. It is almost 3.00 a.m. [*Interruption*] I would not wish to—thank you very much, ante midi. So, Mr. Speaker, I do not think I need to detain the House any longer.

With those few short words, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.

House in committee.

Mr. Chairman: What I would like to suggest is that there are 20 clauses in the Finance Bill. There are four sets of amendments to four clauses before us. Outside of those amendments, I would like, with the leave of the House, to deal with those other clauses in groups of four or five. Is that okay?

Hon. Members: Yes.

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

Clause 3.

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

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that clause 3 be amended as circulated:

A. Delete clause 3 and substitute the following new clause:

“Chap. 21:01
Amended 3(1)

3(1) Registration of Clubs Act is amended-

(a) in the definition of “Secretary” by deleting the words “includes any officer of a club or other person” and substituting the words “means a person undersection 2A”;

“Secretary

(b) by inserting after section 2 the following new section:

2A. A members’ club shall have a Secretary who shall be a member or *ex officio* member of the members’ club.”;

(c) in section 5(5)-

(i) in paragraph (a), by inserting after the word “;” the word “and”;

(ii) by deleting paragraph (b); and

(iii) in paragraph (c), by deleting the words “1997” and substituting the words “2014”;

(d) by inserting after section 9 the following new section:

“Tax qualification for
issue of certificate

9A. Every member’s club seeking the renewal of a certificate in a year subsequent to the year 2014 shall, before the certificate is issued, satisfy the Licensing Committee that there are no outstanding gaming taxes, interest or penalty payable to the Board of Inland Revenue in respect of the last six years prior to the year in which the application for renewal is made.”;

(e) in section 23, by repealing subsections (2), (3), (4), (5), (6) and (7) and substituting the following new subsections:

“(2) The Secretary of a members’ club shall, within fifteen days of the grant of a certificate by the Licensing Committee, in respect of every year commencing from the year 2015-

(a) submit to the Board of Inland Revenue, a return as to the number of tables and devices used or to be used on the premises of the club in respect of every year commencing from the year 2015, in such form as may be approved by the Board; and

(b) pay the taxes in respect of the tables and devices contained in the return on behalf of the club, at the rates specified in the Schedule.

(3) The return under subsection (2) shall be signed by the Secretary and shall contain-

(a) the full name and address of the Secretary of the members’ club;

(b) the name and registered place of business of the members’ club;

- (c) a full description of every table or device used or to be used on the premises of the members' club;
- (d) the number of tables or devices used or to be used on the premises of the members' club;
- (e) a calculation of the gaming tax payable in respect of every table or device used or to be used on the premises of the members' club; and
- (f) an address for service of notices for the members' club.

(4) Where the Secretary of a members' club fails, neglects or refuses to submit a return for a year commencing from 2015, after six months from the time required to file the return, the Secretary shall, unless the Board of Inland Revenue otherwise directs, pay the Board of Inland Revenue the sum of one hundred dollars for every six months or part thereof during which such failure, neglect or refusal continues.

Chap. 75:01

(5) The Board of Inland Revenue, in respect of the collection and recovery of the gaming tax, has all the powers as it has in relation to income tax under the Income Tax Act.

(6) Where it is proved to the satisfaction of the Board of Inland Revenue that the Secretary has paid on behalf of the members' club gaming taxes in excess of the amount in respect of which the club is properly chargeable, the club shall be entitled to have the tax so paid in excess, refunded to it.

(7) Every claim for a refund under subsection (6) shall be made within one year from the end of the year to which the claim relates.

(8) Where a members' club fails to remit the gaming tax to the Board of Inland Revenue within the times specified in subsection (2), the Secretary of the members' club commits an offence and-

(a) the certificate of the club shall be liable to cancellation by the Licensing Committee; and

(b) the Secretary shall be liable to pay together with the tax payable, interest at the rate of fifteen per cent per annum on the tax.

(9) The gaming tax payable for a new members' club which applies for a certificate shall be a proportion of the amount of the yearly gaming tax payable, corresponding to the period from the date upon which the new club applies for the certificate.”;

(f) by inserting after section 23 the following new sections:

“BIR Tags

23A. (1) With effect from January 1, 2015, the Board of Inland Revenue shall cause to be issued in respect of each table or device, a tag for which gaming tax is paid.

(2) Every tag issued under this section shall be in a form approved by the Board of Inland Revenue and shall be valid from the day on which it is issued until the time in the ensuing year when the gaming tax becomes payable.

(3) The Secretary of a members' club shall cause to be displayed on each table or device, the relevant tag for which the tax was paid, failing which the certificate of the members' club shall be liable to cancellation by the Licensing Committee and the Secretary commits an offence.

Deposit made by
members' club

(4) Where an offence is committed under subsection (3), the Secretary is liable on summary conviction to a fine of fifteen hundred dollars and in the case of a continuing offence, a further eight hundred dollars for every day during which the offence continues.

23B (1) The Secretary of a in which gambling is members' carried on, shall deposit with the clubs Comptroller of Accounts clubs the sum of five hundred thousand dollars on behalf of the members' club and the deposit shall be invested in the discretion of the Minister in liquid securities and the interest thereon paid to the members' club thereof at yearly intervals.

(2) In the event of a members' club failing to pay any claim validly made on it in respect of a betting transaction where the member's club was involved in the gambling transaction, so much of the deposit referred to in subsection (1) as is necessary to meet the amount of such claim shall be applied for that purpose.

(3) Where the deposit is insufficient for the purpose of meeting the balance of the claim the amount may, notwithstanding any rule of law to the contrary, be recovered by action as a civil debt.

(4) For the purposes of subsection (2), the validity of any claim in respect of a gambling transaction-

(a) shall be determined by the Comptroller of Accounts where the amount of such claim does not exceed five hundred dollars; or

(b) may be determined by the Comptroller of Accounts with the consent of the parties thereto where the claim exceeds five hundred dollars.

(5) Notwithstanding any rule of law to the contrary, but subject to subsection (3), an action shall lie for recovery of an amount claimed in respect of any gambling transaction conducted by member of a members' club.

(6) Where the deposit or part thereof is to be applied to meet the amount of any claim held to be valid by the Comptroller of Accounts or by a Court, the amount payable shall be paid out of the deposit.

(7) Where the amount of any claim is held to be valid by a Court, the Clerk of the Court or the Registrar thereof shall send a certified copy of the order or judgment to the Comptroller of Accounts within twenty-one days of the making of such order or judgment.

(8) Where a payment is made out of a deposit in satisfaction of any claim in respect of a gambling transaction, the amount by which the deposit required by subsection (1) to be deposited with the Comptroller of Accounts has been reduced, shall be deposited with the Comptroller of Accounts before a members' club undertakes any further gambling transactions.

(9) The Secretary of a members' club in which a gambling transaction is effected, who-

- (a) without making a deposit required by subsection (1); or
- (b) without depositing the amount required to be deposited in the circumstances set out in subsection (8),

commits an offence and is liable on summary

conviction to a fine of one thousand five hundred dollars and the certificate issued under section 5(4) shall be revoked by the Licensing Committee.

(10) For the purpose of this section, “a gambling transaction” means a transaction where a payment is made in money or moneys’ worth to, or by a members’ club, whether or not the purpose of the transaction is for payment, issue or redemption of moneys’ worth or for gambling.

Indemnifying the
Secretary

23C. (1) Except in respect of an action by, or on behalf of, a members’ club to obtain judgment in its favour, a members’ club shall indemnify the Secretary or his personal representative against all costs, charges and expenses including an amount paid to settle an action or satisfy a judgment reasonably incurred by him in respect of any civil, criminal or administrative action or proceeding to which he is made a party by reason of being, or having been, the Secretary of that club.

(2) Subsection (1) does not apply unless the Secretary to be so indemnified-

- (a) acted honestly and in good faith with a view to the best interests of the members’ club; and
- (b) in the case of a criminal or administrative action or proceeding that is enforced by a monetary penalty, has reasonable grounds for believing that his conduct was lawful.”; and
- (g) the Schedule is amended by deleting item 6.

(2) Subsection (1)(c)(iii), (d) and (e), except in relation to section 23(5), shall come into effect on January 1, 2015.

Question put and agreed to.

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

Clauses 4 to 9 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Dr. Browne: Mr. Chairman, sorry, just one query. I am really sorry to ask you to go back.

Mr. Chairman: Which clause?

Dr. Browne: This is clause 5. I did not realize you were including so many in that jump. Subparagraphs (b)(i) and (ii), with regard to—

Mr. Chairman: So, you would like the House to revisit clause 5?

Dr. Browne: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Is that the will of the House, that we revisit clause 5?

Hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: All right, let us revisit clause 5.

Clause 5 recommitted.

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

Dr. Browne: Mr. Chairman, again, to the hon. Minister with regard to these very small fines, I know it is a 100 per cent increase. I did make reference for the Minister's guidance to the case of "Flying steel kills woman" in November 2013, steel rods flying off a truck. This has been happening too frequently and the strong recommendation to the Minister—this is an opportunity; it may never come again under his tenure—is to impose more substantial fines—the scale would be up to his guidance—for these unsecured loads and flying and blowing debris from these vehicles. The fine of \$8,000 for a body corporate and \$4,000 for an individual is insufficient. It is a matter of grave concern to the population.

Sen. Howai: Hon. Member, last year we had increased it by 100 per cent and this is a further 100 per cent increase. I appreciate what you are saying, but the whole issue of the proportionality of the fines in relation to the offences, we would have to look at it in the context of the level of fines generally for different

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[SEN. HOWAI]

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types of offences. In the circumstances, we do not think that it should be further amended at this time. We need to take a look at fines generally and in that context we may be able to make some adjustments; but given the increase that we had before, I do not think that it is something we can do at this stage.

Dr. Browne: Just one more bite at it, Mr. Chairman, for the Minister's benefit. The problem is not necessarily the way you are viewing it because what I am seeing here is that there is equality. The Act is equating litter deposited from a motor vehicle, the same fines apply there as to when there is the issue of the unsecured or insufficiently secured load or uncovered debris blowing off a vehicle.

That is where my major concern is, the fact that those two very different offences with regard to gravity are equated in terms of penalty. I do not think it is sending the right signal at all, but at the end of the day, the Government has its votes and if they want to stick with this, well we will see what happens after.

Sen. Howai: I am advised that, in fact, there are other offences which come into play if there are other types of breaches. In other words, if something comes off a truck and kills someone, it is not just a question of littering, it is a different type of offence that will come into play at that time. Therefore, this fine is really in relation to what happens as a result of littering.

Dr. Browne: Okay.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 5 again ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 10.

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

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Chairman, I beg to move that clause 10 be amended as circulated:

A. In the proposed section 23B-

- (a) in (1)(a), delete the words "or electronic money" and substitute the words ", electronic money or any other method of transferring funds electronically approved by the Treasury;"
- (b) in the proposed subsection (4), delete the definition "electronic funds transfer" and substitute the following: "electronic funds

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transfer means any transfer of funds through electronic means that is initiated by a Department or a client, so as to instruct or authorize a Central Bank in the case of a Department, or a financial intermediary in the case of a client, to debit or credit an account held with the Central Bank of financial intermediary, as the case may be;” and

- (c) in the definition of “public official”, delete the words “public official function or acting in a public official capacity” and substitute the words “public function in an official capacity”.

Question put and agreed to.

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

Clause 11 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 12.

Question proposed: That clause 12 stand part of the Bill.

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Chairman, I beg to move that clause 12 be amended as circulated:

- A. Delete the words “section 10F”.
- B. In paragraph (b) insert before the words “by inserting” the words “in section 10F”.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 12, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

3.05 a.m.

Clauses 13 to 15 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 16.

Question proposed: That clause 16 stand part of the Bill.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: There are two areas under clause 16 which I wish to make reference. To begin with, 20A, I just seek your clarification; firstly, is it that bars are now able under this section to host amusement games?

Sen. Howai: Yes.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Yes? Well, I want to register my strongest objection to this, and your consideration that it may be removed. Amusement games tend to attract young persons and, really, young persons should not be on the premises of bars where alcohol is sold to seniors.

Sen. Howai: Well, that was the reason—in other words, they are not supposed to be there, so if they are there for whatever reason, it is an offence and the owner of the bar would be liable.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Okay, but they are allowed to play the amusement games.

Sen. Howai: No.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: What is this?

Sen. Howai: No, they are not supposed to be there at all.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: They are not supposed to be there at all?

Sen. Howai: No, that is why we did it that way.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Okay.

Sen. Howai: They cannot go into such premises. In other words, they should not be playing those games.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: So where does it say that then?

Sen. Howai: They will be captured under the Liquor Licences Act, because you are not allowed to allow minors into a bar.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Okay, and that is the existing law?

Sen. Howai: Yes.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Onto the premises at all?

Sen. Howai: Yeah.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: My understanding is that you are not supposed to sell drinks to minors, but is it that entrance to the bar is prohibited? Is that so?

Mr. Howai: Just now, let me ask CPC.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: You are not supposed to sell drinks to minors.

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Mr. Howai: Hold on, let me just confirm it. Let me just check to be sure. Hon. Member, it is being checked, but I am just wondering if right now they could enter into a bar—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: They really have no interest in entering a bar and there is nothing that appeals to them; they cannot buy drinks or anything like that. But where are you actually going to place these amusement games there, that is what they are interested in, and they are going to be spending time there and you know the kind of activities that take place there; people are cursing and so on. You know what happens; really youths should not be there. [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Thomas: Mr. Chairman, is it that where the school boys now go to play these games are arcades? Like you know they have a video arcade and not necessarily a bar or a restaurant.

Mr. Roberts: These are different games. These are the gambling ones.

Mrs. Thomas: Okay.

Dr. Moonilal: Member for Point Fortin, could you repeat your main concern in this matter?

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Well, the thing is amusement games are now being allowed in bars. I think that youths tend to have an interest in amusement games and, therefore, I am concerned that these children or young persons would be lured in the vicinity of bars.

Dr. Moonilal: To play the games.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: To play the games on the premises of bars. So, what exactly is meant by these amusement games?

Mr. Roberts: That is the point.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Let us go back to that. What exactly are these amusement games and who can—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Roberts: These are the gambling games.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: I do not know.

Sen. Howai: These would be the electro-mechanical devices for which you can bet, and you win small amounts up to \$5,000.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Okay, is there a definition that we can go to?

Sen. Howai: There should be—I am not sure if it is in this or if it is in—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Roberts: This one is just to win money, so they cannot play it anyway.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: What is meant by amusement games?

Mr. Roberts: The ones that win money. You have to be 18 and over.
[*Interruption*] That is a different thing.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: I am not sure. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Roberts: These are specifically gambling machines.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Well, let us find out what the definition is.

Dr. Moonilal: I understand the concern, but I am not sure we could deal with it in this way and at this time. The technical people will look at it and consider it a bit more between the Lower House to the other place and, if necessary, we can propose an amendment elsewhere and return to the House.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: So you were not able to put your hands on the definition of amusement games? Is that it?

Mr. Chairman: It is there, you know.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: It is there?

Hon. Member: Clause 2 of the Bill.

Dr. Moonilal: You will see it in clause 2, but it is a deeper policy issue involved here, and if you try to impose now another restriction it could also reshape the character of the Bill involving a majority; a special majority.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: I will be satisfied if you tell me that only persons 18 and over can engage in those games; in amusement games.

Dr. Moonilal: I cannot tell you that.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Can our people advise us?

Dr. Moonilal: We will consider this and all the implications of that for the other place and if need be, we can propose an amendment elsewhere and simply return to this Chamber to adopt, if we decide to. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: The hon. Member for St. Joseph.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Chair, may I just for clarification, is it that a person under 18 can enter a bar where alcoholic beverages are sold and not buy an alcoholic beverage and, therefore, play one of these games?

Hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. Deyalsingh: So that is what we have to clarify.

Mr. Howai: Yes.

Mr. Deyalsingh: So would your technical people know under the Liquor Licences Act, can, in fact, a person under 18 enter a bar, lime in a bar without buying these drinks?

Hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Yes, they can.

Hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Well, then we have a problem.

Dr. Moonilal: That is why we want to give it some more careful thought.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Okay, so you have given us the assurance on that. There was one other aspect under 16 and that is 16(6)(b) and it reads:

“the licence of the premises shall be liable to cancellation by the Licensing Committee”.

Yes, are you with me? Sorry? [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Moonilal: It is drawn to our attention that in the Gambling and Betting Act, no person 16 years and under can engage in a game of chance. So, it is already the state of the law that that person cannot engage; so they cannot play.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Right, but it means that those between 16 and 18 can, in fact, go there and legitimately play and be exposed to alcohol and whatever else happens in the bar.

Dr. Moonilal: But not to purchase.

Mr. Gopee-Scoon: They are not purchasing, but we are saying that those young persons 16—18 really should not be within a bar.

Dr. Moonilal: Well, then it may require further amendment—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Gopee-Scoon: So, I think we need to look at that.

Dr. Moonilal:—to the gambling—it is a policy issue. It requires a further look at the Gambling and Betting Act.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: So, you have a look at that before it gets to the Upper House.

Dr. Moonilal: Yes, we understand the concern.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Okay. So, 16(6)(b) now:

“the licence of the premises shall be liable to cancellation by the Licensing Committee.”

Is there a Licensing Committee in existence here?

Dr. Moonilal: Yes, under the Liquor Licences Act.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Is it existing as we speak, or is it now being introduced under the amendment which is before the House?

Dr. Moonilal: There is a current licensing committee.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: There is a current licensing committee? I thought all the liquor licences were granted by a Magistrate, but you are telling me that currently—is there a committee currently?

Dr. Moonilal: Under the Liquor Licences Act, 84:10, it provides in section 5 for a Licensing Committee for each licensing district which consists of the Magistrate and another authorized officer and a person nominated by the Minister.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Okay.

Dr. Moonilal: That is the committee that exists.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: And this is the committee to which you are referring here?

Dr. Moonilal: Yes.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Chairman: You have to move the amendment to clause 16.

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Chairman, I beg to move that clause 16 be amended as circulated and I further beg that a further amendment be made to clause 16, a typo in the first instance, at 20A(2)(b)—20B(2)(a).

- A. Delete the words “amended by inserting after section 20, the following new section:” and substitute the words:

“amended-

- (a) in section 20, by inserting after subsection (4) the following new subsection:

“(5) With effect from the year 2016, an applicant for a licence under section 16 who desires to host amusement games in his premises shall, in respect of a year subsequent to the year 2014, provide the Licensing Committee with a certificate from the Board of Inland Revenue that the applicant is not in arrears of any gaming tax, interest or penalty payable to the Board of Inland Revenue in respect of the last six years prior to the year of application.”; and

- (b) by inserting after section 20 the following new section:”.

- B. In the proposed section 20A—

- (a) by deleting the words in the Marginal Note and substituting the following: “Certain licensed premises to host amusement games”;
- (b) by deleting the proposed subsections (3) to (9) and substituting the following:

“Annual tax on amusement games

20B.(1) Commencing in the year 2015, there shall be charged on all amusement games to be operated on premises referred to in section 20A, a tax to be known as a ‘gaming tax’, which shall be payable annually at the rate of three thousand dollars in respect of each amusement game.

(2) The holder of a licence specified in section 35(3) or (4) who desires to operate an amusement game on licenced premises shall, within fifteen days of the issue of the license, in respect of every year commencing from the year 2015—

- (a) submit to the Board of Inland Revenue, a return as to the number of amusement games to be used on

the licensed premises, in such form as may be approved by the Board of Inland Revenue; and

- (b) pay to the Board the gaming taxes in respect of every amusement game to be used on the licensed premises.

(3) The return under subsection (2) shall be signed by the holder of the licence referred to in that subsection and shall contain—

- (a) the name and address of the holder of the licence;
- (b) the operation and address of the licensed premises;
- (c) the exact number and description of the amusement games to be used on the licensed premises;
- (d) the calculation of the gaming tax payable in respect of every amusement game to be used on the licensed premises; and
- (e) the address for service of notices.

(4) Where the holder of a licence fails, neglects or refuses to submit a return for a year commencing from 2015, after six months from the time required to file the return, the holder of the licence shall, unless the Board of Inland Revenue otherwise directs, be liable to a penalty of one hundred dollars for every six months or part thereof during which such failure, neglect or refusal continues.

(5) The Board of Inland Revenue, in respect of the collection and recovery of the gaming tax, has all the powers as it has in relation to income tax under the Income Tax Act.

(6) Where it is proved to the satisfaction of the Board of Inland Revenue that the holder of the licence has paid gaming taxes in excess of the amount in respect of which the licence holder is properly chargeable, the holder of the licence shall be entitled to have the tax so paid in excess, refunded to him.

(7) Every claim for a refund under subsection (6) shall be made within one year from the end of the year to which the claim relates.

(8) Where the holder of a licence specified in section 35(3) or (4) fails to remit the gaming tax to the Board of Inland Revenue within the time specified in subsection (2), he shall be liable to pay together with the tax payable interest at the rate of fifteen per cent per annum on the tax.

(9) The gaming tax payable for the applicant for a new certificate who applies for a certificate shall be a proportion of the amount of the yearly gaming tax corresponding to the period from the date upon which the applicant for a new certificate applies for the certificate.”

BIR Tag

20C. (1) Where a gaming tax has been paid in respect of any amusement game—

- (a) the Board of Inland Revenue shall cause to be issued in respect of each amusement game a tag for which gaming tax has been paid; and
- (b) the holder of the licence shall cause to be attached and displayed on each amusement game the tag issued by the Board of Inland Revenue, prior to installation or operation of such amusement game.

(2) Every tag issued under this section shall be in a form approved by the Board of Inland Revenue and shall be valid from the day on which it is issued until the time in the ensuing year when the gaming tax becomes payable.

(3) Where the holder of a licence specified in section 35(3) or (4) fails to display the tag issued by the Board of Inland Revenue on the amusement game situate on the licensed premises or fails to display the maximum payout on the amusement game-

- (a) he commits an offence and is liable to a penalty of fifteen hundred dollars and in the case of a continuing offence a further eight hundred

dollars for every day during which the offence continues; and

(b) the licence specified under section 35(3) or (4) shall be liable to cancellation by the licensing committees.

(4) A tag issued under this section is non-transferable.

(5) For the purposes of this section, “amusement game” has the meaning assigned to it by section 10 of the Gambling and Betting Act.”.

3.20 a.m.

Mr. Chairman: What page?

Dr. Moonilal: Page 12, 20B(2)(b), where it reads:

“pay to the Board the gaming”—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Chairman: Is that in the amendment?

Dr. Moonilal: Yes. In the amendment at 20B(2)(b), page 12. It should read:

“pay to the Board the gaming taxes in respect of every amusement game...”

And not:

“...very amusement game...”.

At the bottom of page 11, (b):

“pay to the Board the gaming taxes in respect of every amusement game...”

And not:

“very amusement game...”

Mr. Chairman: That is a typo?

Dr. Moonilal: Yes, it is a typo.

Mr. Chairman: It is just editorial.

Dr. Moonilal: It is not necessary? Okay. Further, to 20B(4), on the fifth line, to read after “directs,”:

“pay to the Board of Inland Revenue a sum of one hundred dollars for every six months...”

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And delete:

“be liable to a penalty”

So it should read, Mr. Chairman, after “directs,”:

“pay to the Board of Inland Revenue a sum of one hundred dollars for every six months or part thereof...”

This reflects the current practice regarding the returns, for the record. So we are deleting “be liable to a penalty”.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Yeah. Is that all?

Dr. Moonilal: Yes, for 16.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 16, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 17 to 20 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.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Leader of the House, the Minister of Housing and Urban Development.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the very morbid sense of humour [*Laughter*] from the Member for Diego Martin Central, for what reason we do not know, but, Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now stand adjourned, not for one week from now, but for six days from now on the Friday, Friday, April 11, 2014, at 1.30 p.m., and serve notice that it is the intention of the Government to debate two matters: Bill No. 3 on the Order Paper today, to complete debate on an Act to amend the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, Chap. 48:50, and also, Mr. Speaker, to debate through all its stages, Bill No. 9, the Administration of Justice (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill.

So, Bill No. 9 and Bill No. 3 will be dealt with next week Friday, April 11, 2014, 1.30 p.m. Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Leave of Absence

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Leave Of Absence

Mr. Speaker: Before putting the question to the House, I would like to advise hon. Members that I have received communication from the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Member of Parliament for Siparia and Prime Minister, who has asked to be excused from today's sitting, yesterday and today's sitting, of the House of Representatives. The leave which the Member seeks is granted.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 3.28 a.m.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Rural Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago (RDC) (Contracts Issued to)

62. Mr. Jack Warner (Chaguanas West) asked the Minister of Local Government:

For the period May 2010 to September 10, 2013, could the Minister please state the details of each contract issued by the Rural Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago (RDC) for infrastructural works including but not limited to:

The location of the project and scope of works;

1. The name of the company to whom the contract is/was awarded;
2. The initial estimate cost of the project;
3. The date on which the contract award was decided by the Board of Directors;
4. The date on which the contract was signed;
5. The date of commencement of works;
6. The projected and/or actual completion date;
7. The method by which the successful contractor was selected for award of the contract;
8. The status of the project; and
9. The amount of money paid to the contractor to date.

Answer lodged in the Parliament Library.

Illegal Quarries

65. Miss Marlene Mc Donald (*Port of Spain South*) on behalf of Miss Alicia Hospedales (*Arouca/Maloney*) asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs:

- A. Could the Minister state:
- i. How many illegal quarries have been identified throughout the country?
 - ii. Where are these illegal quarries located?
 - iii. How many persons have been arrested and charged for illegal quarrying from June 2010 to date?
- B. Could the hon. Minister list all the licensed quarries that operate within the country?

The following reply to part B of the question was circulated to Members:

The list of licensed quarries are as follows:

1. S&P Phakira Limited
2. Cumana Enterprise Limited
3. Harripersad Dookeran
4. Saiscon Limited
5. RRJ Limited
6. Aggregate Industries Limited
7. Anita Singh-Dipnarine & Shevanan Dipnarine
8. Dondi Emamdee
9. Hugh Glenroy Thomas
10. Rohan Singh
11. Wilson's Quarries Limited
12. St. Alban's Sand and Gravel Company Limited
13. Zoett Enterprises Limited
14. Gowrie Persadsingh Contractors Limited

15. Harry Persad and Sons Limited
16. Hugh Glenroy Thomas
17. Hugh Pius Lee King
18. John Dick Sawmill and Transprot
19. Trinidad Aggregate Products Ltd.
20. Trinidad Aggregate Products Ltd.
21. Thirbhawon Seegobin
22. Coosal's Construction Company Ltd. Block C
23. Dipcon Engineering Services Ltd. Block A
24. Coosal's Construction Company Ltd. Block B
25. Neville Rajnauth
26. Watervis TT
27. West and Associates
28. KenKur Ltd.
29. Reynold Patrong
30. Thirbhawon Seegobin B2
31. Thirbhawon Seegobin B3
32. Trinity Asphalt Pavers
33. Atlas Energy and Mining Corporation Ltd.
34. Universal Projects
35. Chang's Construction and Maintenance Co. Ltd.
36. Lutchmeesingh's Transport Contractors Ltd.
37. Hermitage Limestone Ltd.
38. Siriekissoon Seegobin & Seegobin Co.
39. Springbank Quarry Limited
40. Cumaca Blue Limestone Products Ltd.
41. Readymix W.I. Ltd. (101 acre)
42. Readymix W.I. Ltd. (480 acre)