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Debates of the House of Representatives

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OFFICIAL REPORT (HANSARD)

THE HONOURABLE BRIDGID ANNISSETTE-GEORGE
SPEAKER

THE HONOURABLE ESMOND FORDE
DEPUTY SPEAKER

Friday 23rd February, 2018

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Leave of Absence

Friday, February 23, 2018

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, February 23, 2018

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from the following Member: the hon. Camille Robinson-Regis, MP, Member for Arouca/Maloney, who has asked to be excused from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Member seeks is granted.

PAPERS LAID

1. Audited Financial Statements of National Entrepreneurship Development Company Limited for the financial years ended September 30, 2015 and September 30, 2016. [*The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh)*]
To be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.
2. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Children's Life Fund for the period from commencement of operations to September 30, 2012. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
3. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Students' Revolving Loan Fund for the year ended December 31, 2005. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
4. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Students' Revolving Loan Fund for the year ended December 31, 2006. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
5. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Students' Revolving Loan Fund for the year ended December 31, 2007. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
Papers 2 to 5 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.
6. Administrative Report of the Export-Import Bank of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the year ended December 31, 2016. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
7. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of National Security to the Third Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an Examination of the System of Inventory Control within the Public Service. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]

URGENT QUESTIONS**St. Benedict's College
(Closure of)**

Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh (*Oropouche West*): Mr. Deputy Speaker, to the Minister of Education: In relation to the indefinite closure of the St. Benedict's College since Monday, February 19, 2018, due to an overflowing sewer system, could the Minister indicate when the issue will be rectified and the school reopened?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. First of all, I would like to correct the notion that the school has been closed indefinitely. That is not so. The school has suffered some problems with sewer, and we have had our persons from the Ministry of Education, in conjunction with EFCL, visit the school. The work was scoped and the work will begin on Monday. Hopefully, it will take four days. So we are hoping that by Thursday next week, our students will be able to return to the school. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Follow-up question, the Member for Oropouche West.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Hon. Minister, does the Ministry have an ongoing process or a system of maintenance, because we are seeing several schools have this ongoing problem? Does the Ministry have a maintenance crew that will check other schools and all schools to see that this—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One question please, Member.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: It is one question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: So we will go with the first question. The Minister of Education.

Hon. A. Garcia: Again, thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Ministry of Education itself does not have a maintenance crew. However, the Education Facilities Company Limited is the company that has been given the responsibility to oversee maintenance of all our schools. In terms of sewer problems, as we know, those are problems that we cannot predict because, as you know, the sewer is underground. So whenever the sewer problems arise, we deal with them effectively and immediately. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Charles: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is the Minister prepared to tell us whether the Education Facilities Company has an effective preventative maintenance system in place for schools and do they report to the Ministry in this regard?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The first question, Minister of Education.

Hon. A. Garcia: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the simple answer to that question is yes. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Point Fortin Constituency
(Evacuation due to Foul Emissions)**

Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh (Oropouche West): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries: With regard to reports indicating that numerous schools within the Point Fortin constituency, as well as the Point Fortin Borough Corporation's Town Hall, had to be evacuated due to foul emissions emanating from work done on behalf of Petrotrin by a contractor on Wednesday, February 21, 2018, could the Minister indicate if there was any intervention by the Ministry to rectify the situation?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, on Tuesday the 20th of February, reports of a pungent odour in the Techier, Mahaica area in Point Fortin surfaced. Immediately, the following state agencies and companies were called into action: the EMA, the ODPM, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, Petrotrin, Trinmar and Atlantic LNG.

Air quality testing was conducted the next day by both the EMA and Petrotrin. Preliminary indications are that this odour did not emanate from any petroleum installation or facilities. By Wednesday afternoon the odour had dissipated and has not returned since. Petrotrin and the EMA continue to monitor air quality in the area on a daily basis.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. To the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries: Given this scare, in the event of further gas leaks and other emissions in that area, would Petrotrin be prepared to respond, given that they have just removed three vice-presidents and the president of the company is due to leave?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, you were going well, but the end of the question. [*Crosstalk*] Member, right. So in terms of first part of the question, The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: There is no first part, he was continuing. So if you want to repeat, please.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Oropouche East, repeat your question.

Dr. Moonilal: Let me repeat the whole thing, yes. What I am saying is that with this scare, in light of the question, in the event that there is a real problem for Petrotrin to address, would Petrotrin be prepared, given that they have removed three vice-presidents and the president is due to depart?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, I will not entertain that question.

Dr. Moonilal: Say again?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I will not entertain the question.

**Balmain Presbyterian Primary School
(Resumption of Classes)**

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (Couva South): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To the Minister of Education: Could the Minister inform this House when classes for the 354 students of the Balmain Presbyterian Primary School which ceased on Friday 16th of February, 2018, will resume?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In direct answer to that question, we are hoping that classes can resume by next week Friday. Thank you.

Mr. Indarsingh: Taking into consideration the existing problem at the school, Mr. Minister, could you inform this House how much it will cost for the repairs to be effected?

Hon. A. Garcia: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am not in a position at this time to state what is the cost of the repairs. Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second supplemental, Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Has the issue in terms of resolution been scoped by the Education Facilities Company, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I would not entertain that question. I think he already answered on the initial question. Member for Couva North, next question.

**Jordan Hill Presbyterian School
(Action to Prevent Entry of Criminal Elements)**

Miss Ramona Ramdial (*Couva North*): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To the Minister of Education: In light of the recent incident at the Jordan Hill Presbyterian School, could the Minister indicate the action being taken to prevent another occurrence of criminal elements entering school compounds to commit criminal offences targeting staff and students?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The most important responsibility of any principal is to safeguard the safety of the students and the teachers, in fact, all those who operate within that environment. What happened in the case of the Jordan Hill Presbyterian School was a breach in the security and safety protocols. As a result, the Ministry of Education has taken decisive action to ensure that those breaches do not recur.

In addition to that, we have engaged the assistance of all our stakeholders, including the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, to ensure that breaches like these will be something in the past, and I want to give the assurance to the national community and, of course, to this august House, that everything is being done to ensure the safety of all those persons who occupy all our schools in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you. Given that the school has 25 teachers and 548 pupils, does the Minister think that one unarmed female security guard is sufficient deterrence?

Hon. A. Garcia: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the answer is yes. Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Tabaquite.

Dr. Rambachan: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it the intention of the Minister of Education or the Government or the security forces, including the Ministry of National Security, to consider arming security guards at these high-risk schools, given even that the Biche High School was also robbed in the last 24 hours?

Hon. A. Garcia: Mr. Deputy Speaker, arming security guards has been something that has been on the agenda for a number of years because we have had similar incidents going way back. However, in cases where it is necessary for a

security guard to be provided with a firearm that must be concealed. But as a broad principle, the Ministry of Education is not favourable to the notion of arming of security guards. Our schools must not be seen as jails. Our schools must be seen as places where learning and teaching could take place in an environment where it is conducive to such, and where everybody would be able to enjoy themselves. [*Desk thumping*]

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): If I may, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are five questions for oral answer, two of which were deferred for two weeks. We are prepared to answer them today, one week early. So we are answering all five questions, and the written question has already been laid and will be circulated. Thank you very much.

WRITTEN ANSWER TO QUESTION

Wrecking Service in Regional Corporations (Details of)

84. Dr. Fuad Khan (*Barataria/San Juan*) asked the hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government:

Could the Minister indicate:

- a) the total quantum of money made by the wrecking service in each regional corporation over the past two years;
- b) the total quantum paid to the wrecking service provider(s) in each regional corporation over the past two years; and
- c) the total quantum retained by each regional corporation over the past two years?

Vide end of sitting for written answer.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Housing Development Corporation (Details of Board of Directors)

86. Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*) asked the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Development:

Could the Minister state the name, occupation and appointment date of the recently appointed members of the Board of Directors of the Housing Development Corporation?

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Randall Mitchell): Mr. Deputy Speaker, the names and occupations of the recently appointed members of the Board of Directors of the Housing Development Corporation are: Mr. Newman George, Civil Engineer; Mr. Rasheedali Mohammed, Civil Engineer; Mr. Ian Downes, Management Consultant; Mr. Keli Gbekor, Project Manager; Mr. Keston McQuilkin, Attorney-at-Law; Mr. Mitra Dharamsingh, businessman; Ms. Melissa Kellawan-Persad, Management Consultant. The appointment date of the aforementioned persons to the Board of the Housing Development Corporation is December 22, 2017. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sandals International/Technical Consultants
(Payments of Public Money to)**

87. Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*) asked the hon. Minister of Tourism:

Could the Minister indicate whether or not any public money has been paid to Sandals International and/or any investment or technical consultants pursuant to the intended construction of a hotel and resort facility in Tobago?

The Minister of Tourism (Hon. Shamfa Cudjoe): Mr. Deputy Speaker, question No. 87 was passed to the Minister in the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister, Minister Stuart Young. Thank you.

The Minister in the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you, Minister of Tourism. Mr. Deputy Speaker, no public moneys have been paid to Sandals International for the proposed hotel resort project in Tobago. The sum of \$65,000 was paid for a survey of the proposed lands for the project.

**Quarry Operators
(Retrieval of Outstanding Monies)**

81. Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh (*Oropouche West*) asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries:

Could the Minister indicate the actions to be taken to retrieve the estimated \$196 million of outstanding monies owed by quarry operators?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Ministry's records show that a sum of \$155 million is owed by operators of 103 quarries, both on state lands and private lands. [*Interruption*] The records also

show that 21 of these operators individually owe more than \$1 million each—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister. Silence on the Government Benches please. I would like to hear the Minister.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: Well, let me repeat it for my colleagues then. The records also show that 21 of these operators individually owe more than \$1 million each and collectively owe \$148 million, which is 95 per cent of the outstanding receivables.

There is an outstanding receivable of \$90 million due for royalties unpaid by operators on state lands of which half, \$48 million, is owed by state-owned National Quarries Limited and a contingent liability of \$65 million in unpaid royalties by operators on private lands. The Ministry is in active discussions with the National Quarries on a payment schedule for the liquidation of the debt of \$48 million.

With respect to the other operators on state land, the Ministry is now aggressively pursuing the collection of outstanding royalties of \$42 million. In the event that the operators refuse to comply, their licence could and maybe would be revoked. As a result of a greater focus on data collection and receivables management, Mr. Deputy Speaker, revenue from the sector increased from a mere \$1.39 million in 2014—the height of the boom and the construction sector—to now we collected \$7.8 million, which is five times more last year, fiscal 2017. The collection of the estimated royalties of \$65 million attributed to quarry operators on private land is subject to the determination of the holder of the mineral rights of these lands, that is, the state or the operator.

These matters have been referred to the Office of the Chief State Solicitor for determination. Where the State is the owner of the mineral rights, even though the surface rights are privately owned, the Ministry will be pursuing the collection of outstanding royalties from the operators of these lands.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Thank you, a follow-up supplemental. Hon. Minister, at this time, do all the quarry operators have licence to operate in Trinidad and Tobago on private lands?

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: It is public knowledge that there has been, I would not say a proliferation, but a sizable amount of illegal quarrying taking place in Trinidad. We are now working closely with the police and the DPP to stamp down on that. Most of these illegal quarries are operating in north-eastern Trinidad.

Dr. Rambachan: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Minister, to what do you attribute the negligence for the collection of royalties, especially for a company like National Quarries which has control of so many quarry assets and really are making money from the sale of these assets?

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: Well, I guess it is just the malaise of state enterprises because we have an issue with the non-payment of royalties for petroleum from Petrotrin. We have a state of non-payment of state royalties from National Quarries, which is the biggest national company in the quarrying business. So I think we have no choice but to get very draconian even though you are a state company.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Tabaquite.

Dr. Rambachan: Mr. Minister, in that regard, do you intend to take action against officials who have been charged with the responsibility for collecting these taxes in the same manner in which the Minister of Finance has dealt with the petroleum senior engineers?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, the first part of the question.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: In the case of National Quarries, the National Quarries is not taking royalty payments from anybody else on behalf of the state. National Quarries has quarrying licence to mine on state lands and owes the State royalties. The issue is—and let me make it clear, Mr. Deputy Speaker—that these companies see the payment of royalty as the last resort on their cash flow, whereas the inverse is true based on the taxation system. When you are depleting a wasting asset, your first port of call is royalty payments to the owner of the resource, which is the State. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize—Members—the Member for Chaguanas West. Member.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Hon. Minister, you indicated that there is a malaise affecting state enterprises, is it because historically and currently we have placed in these state enterprises, incompetent political hacks?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I would not entertain that question, Member.

Flooding in Oropouche West (Mitigation Measures)

82. Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh (*Oropouche West*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

In light of the flooding which affected the Oropouche West constituency, could the Minister indicate:

- a) whether the Tulsa Trace flood gates will be repaired;
- b) if the answer to (a) is in the affirmative, the expected completion date for repairs; and
- c) whether the Ministry has considered the suggestion of the Chairman of the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation to dig retention ponds in order to alleviate flooding.

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of Works and Transport, through the Drainage Division, has developed a programme of work to be executed in fiscal 2018. With reference to the flooding in Oropouche West, in Tulsa Trace, Penal, there are three sluice gates located at the Kalloo pump facility site. These gates were built just before 2000 and they began to deteriorate in 2006, which has led to the current state.

As part of the Ministry's drainage programme and maintenance work, two of these gates at the Quarry River needs complete reconstruction of the entire structure, and one gate at the Black Water Channel has been identified for major repairs. These can be undertaken based on the availability of funding in the fiscal 2018 programme.

The answer to part (b): these gates are included as a priority in the national gate repair and reconstruction programme and repairs will commence as soon as funding becomes available.

The answer to part (c): the Drainage Division has embarked on a flood control programme to alleviate flooding within the Oropouche Lagoon and environs. One of the recommendations approach is the construction of retention ponds in the main watercourses that lead to the lagoon. It is estimated that each pond will cost at least \$2.5 million to construct, to which must be added the cost of land acquisition which will cost significantly more. This makes the construction of these ponds extremely costly.

Accordingly, the Drainage Division is continuing to research and examine other flood alleviation and mitigation methods with the view to determine a suitable and cost effective long-term solution. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Oropouche West.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Hon. Minister, you said “as soon as”, could you give us perhaps a tentative time or a date when funds may be available? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Minister of Works and Transport. Members. [*Crosstalk*] Member for Couva South, I am on my legs. The Minister of Works and Transport.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As soon as funding becomes available. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: If the Minister is telling us that works will begin as soon as funds are available, are we correct in saying that it will never happen under this Government? [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Mr. Deputy Speaker, based on the spending that went on between 2010 to 2015, we feel we will recover from that and funding will be available soon. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Could the Minister give the assurance—we are into the dry season at this point in time—that these gates would be repaired before the rainy season arise?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have learnt one thing in this job and that is do not give an assurance on what you do not have control over. [*Desk thumping*] As soon as funding is available, I give you the assurance that work will start.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Supplemental Member.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If \$400 million is being found for an overpass on the Churchill Roosevelt Highway, why can you not find money to deal with urgent problems that affect the citizenry of Trinidad and Tobago? [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I would not entertain that question.

Camouflage Clothing (Measures to Curtail Importation)

83. Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh (*Oropouche West*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

In light of the seizure of the camouflage clothing during a December 31, 2017 anti-crime exercise, could the Minister indicate the measures in place to curtail the illegal importation and circulation of camouflage clothing?

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the authority to address the existing measures in place to curtail the illegal importation and circulation of camouflage clothing is within the remit of the Customs and Excise Division, Ministry of Finance.

Notwithstanding, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, which is the Division within the Ministry of National Security with responsibility for the apprehension of offenders and enforcement of all laws and regulations with which it is charged, is guided by the following pieces of legislation that address the arresting and charging of persons disobeying the law regarding camouflage clothing: Legal Notice No. 33 of 1984; the Customs (Amdt.) Act, Chap. 78:01 of 2013; the Summary Offences Act, Chap. 11:02 of 2000; the Defence (Amdt.) Act, Chap. 14:01 of 2000.

Legal Notice No. 33 of 1984 explicitly prohibits the importation of camouflage patterned material unless the Minister of National Security certifies that the importation thereof is for the use of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force.

Consequences to breaching Legal Notice 33 of 1984 are addressed in section 213 of the Customs (Amdt.) Act, Chap. 78:01 which states that it is illegal to:

knowingly harbour, keep, conceal or cause to be harboured, kept or concealed any prohibited goods;

knowingly acquire possession of, or carry, or remove, deposit or in any manner deal with any goods to evade any prohibition applicable to the goods; and or sell, offer for sale or expose for sale any goods which are prohibited.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Thank you. Hon. Minister, has there been any report of members of the defence force loaning out their uniform?

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have no such reports drawn to my attention.

Dr. Rambachan: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Minister, despite all the laws that you have enunciated which should prevent these camouflage

clothing coming into the country, would you agree then that there is an element of corruption in the customs that allows it to come into the country in the first place?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I would not entertain that question, Member.

Hon. Members, since the commencement of the Sitting this afternoon, there has been a running commentary, especially at the Lower Benches on both sides. Please, curtail it. [*Interruption*] Member. Member.

2.00 p.m.

**DIVERSIFICATION OF THE ECONOMY
(GOVERNMENT'S FAILURE RE VIABLE PLAN)**

[Second Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [January 26, 2018]:

Be it resolved that this House take note of the failure of the Government to present a viable plan to diversify the economy and to place Trinidad and Tobago on the path of sustainable growth. [*Mr. F. Karim*]

Question again proposed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I will now call on the Member for Diego Martin Central who has his additional 15 minutes to conclude his contribution. [*Desk thumping*] Member for Diego Martin Central.

Hon. D. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Fifteen minutes I have from the last sitting, I was winding up so I would not be that long. Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the things I did first, coming in as Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs in 2015, was to meet with all the NGBs, all 50-plus within 100 days, and that was to meet and learn, and to work with all the leaders of sport throughout Trinidad and Tobago. And that was to ensure that we were all aligned on the same vein with regard to, at that time, the manifesto of the People's National Movement which won the election, which is now the policy of the country.

The main features of that policy were to work with the young people of Trinidad and Tobago and ensure that each of these governing bodies worked with the youth in terms of the primary and secondary schools level, tertiary level—and we have seen an increase in that, and you will hear a little bit more about that at another debate at another time, how we have increased the participation with regard to that mandate in primary and secondary schools in most sports; to work at the grassroots level, which we have seen an increase; to work with females in

sport, which in the last Olympics we saw the most female athletes representing Trinidad and Tobago in our history; with any of the sports which had affiliations with the handicap aspect of the sport, to work and enhance that; and the final aspect, which to me is one of the most important, is to booster the sports tourism aspect of this sport. That is something that has been neglected and not taken on, not just in Trinidad and Tobago but overall in the Caribbean region.

I must commend the NGBs for working in all and checking off most of these check boxes, but in particular with sports tourism, because to host these events, of course, they have to work with the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs and the Sports Company with regard to funding, with permission. We have cross ventilation with regard to working with a number of the other Ministries, whether it is the Ministry of Works and Transport, with PTSC; with the Minister of Tourism to help promote the events and brand the events; the Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts for opening and closing ceremonies; National Security, and so on. We work very closely together to ensure that these tournaments and events are hosted well.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I said earlier in the debate, 2017, and ironically enough the same weekend of that debate the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs published a press ad in the newspaper showing all the events that we hosted for 2017, it being the most international events that we have ever hosted in our history; more importantly, meeting with most of the governing bodies' presidents, the most presidents that we have ever met with on our shores to make sure that we bolster the sports tourism thrust.

One of the things that they did as well early in this fiscal year was to meet with all the NGBs—as you know difficult times that we are facing—to get a better idea and to give the NGBs a better idea so they could go back to their clubs and to their athletes, and to their various communities, and we invited one of the PSs from the Ministry of Finance to present, to give them a better idea of the economic situation. The PS at the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, members of the Sports Company and myself presented our budget, and we sat down collectively and digested, but more importantly we came together to work to see how we could get through 2018, and thus far they have all understood and we are working together with it.

Most importantly, we brought in a number of private sector organizations for these NGBs to understand what these private sector companies are looking for when we request sponsorship and funding, and a number of them were very pleased that for the first time they now understood what corporate Trinidad and

Tobago was looking for, for their brand, and for the branding during these sports. We are going to see a closer networking among all stakeholders with regard to hosting that. One of the things that we came out with, we came up with a number of ideas with raising revenue, instead of these NGBs constantly coming to the Government, and they all collectively agreed that with the sports tourism aspect—and we were able to work out the math to showcase when you do host events, international events—and we are moving away from just actually hosting tournaments. We are talking, case in point, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you were with me the other day at the Racquet Centre at Tacarigua in your constituency for the opening of the Pan Am badminton tournament, which is the highest level of badminton that we have ever hosted in this country.

You would have seen it is not just about the tournament, what we have done is also encouraged the NGBs to host conferences, and they were able to have a CAREBACO meeting where a number of the heads were at that meeting for the region. We also had a coaching session where Pan Am sent a number of the top coaches here, and they had athletes who were not even in the tournament coming to train and learn from these top coaches. We coach the coaches as well. So we had coaches from around the world and the Pan Am area coming to learn from coaches new technologies. We also had a session for the referees and the umpires where there is new net technology, how you line up the net, and so on. So it is not just about play, it is about all these different aspects of the sport, and you were there in the flesh with me a few weeks ago to see all four or five aspects of a tournament not just being hosted, but all the different elements that could occur in a sport. But even in this quarter, the second quarter of the fiscal year, and the first quarter we are already on par to beat 2017 with regard to the hosting of international events.

For the year already we hosted for the first time a Women's CONCACAF Under-20 at the Ato Boldon. I just spoke of the Pan Am badminton tournament that we just hosted. Last week as well we hosted for the first time a Caribbean youth conference, because we always talk about the sports tourism aspect of it, but we also at the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs work closely with the youth. We had a number of countries coming here from the Caribbean at the Racquet Centre, meeting for a weekend to discuss what is going on in the Caribbean region, and how the young people could have a voice and put their stamp with most Governments in the area. Last weekend we had the World All-Fours tournament where we had over 40 countries, the top prize being \$250,000, a quarter-million-dollar first prize. That was held in Trinidad and

Tobago as well. We have the MMA Caribbean title being hosted in a few months as well, and there are a number of other international events that will be hosted in 2018, and we are on par, on course to surpass 2017 record with regard to hosting of international events.

When I closed off last time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was speaking about Trinidad and Tobago manufacturing, and as you know cricket and wind-ball cricket, especially, is very prominent in Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, it is growing very steadily in the grassroots community area, and it is a thriving industry in the St. James district where there are a number of bats that are sold, not just in Trinidad and Tobago, but across the islands by a local in the St. James area that is doing quite well with the manufacturing of wind-ball cricket bats, which I am very proud of, and I was able to discuss it with some other cricketers from other islands about this brand of bat that we have here. One of the things that we are seeing as well at the Ministry, and a number of countries like Brazil and Africa, and so on, in the African continent, is that they have remittance from athletes, professional athletes that play abroad. Brazil, as you know, is one of the top countries, and a number of their players play in Europe and stuff, and that money that they send back home for their family, and so on, plays a big part of the money that they send back.

We are seeing a number of our athletes being endorsed by a number of international brands, the Nike's, the Adidas, and so on, but more importantly playing professionally outside, football, and there are a number of them playing in the MLS, in Europe, and so on. Volleyball as well, we have a number of our ladies playing volleyball in Europe. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think your daughter is one of them as well, playing professionally out there in Europe, so you will understand that, if she is sending back a little Euros and stuff for you as her father. There is cricket—*[Interruption]* Yeah, the Deputy Speaker's daughter, you all did not know that, is a national player, and she plays professionally. We should give the Deputy Speaker—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, I will prefer if you do not bring the Deputy Speaker into your session, please.

Hon. D. Smith: Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is just that I am very proud of the young lady, she is a star, and a shining star for the region. I apologize, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but you should be very proud of her. *[Desk thumping]*

One of the things that we are looking at as well, that we are speaking with the TTOC is looking at this buzz that is going on now with regard to how sport is

changing, and we have the Olympics, we have the Paralympics, and there is a new kind of Olympics that is out there, and I am hoping that Trinidad and Tobago—the MP for Tobago West and I have spoken about it, it is called World Beach Olympics, and that is going to incorporate a number of the beach sports which I think we could tap into with regard to beach football, which we did very well in. In fact, our females won a gold medal for the first time in a tournament and the guys won a silver. There is volleyball, which we do quite well as well, beach volleyball. The sailing, as you know we have young Lewis who does quite well in sailing in the Olympics, and there are a number of other sports. Triathlon, which is one of the number one growing sports in Trinidad and Tobago, closely followed by dragon boat which is another beach sport, which is the second fastest growing sport right now in Trinidad and Tobago with a number of young people getting involved in those two sports.

So, again, this is something that in 2018/2019 that we are going to be trying to tap into in terms of our tourism, and I am sure the Minister of Tourism will talk a little bit about that because she has hosted a few events, and has worked very closely with them. In 2019, we have won the bid for the Carifta Games. For badminton, we are working very closely with them to host the world's youth championship in 2020, which will bring—between that tournament and the Pan Am world juniors, we hope to bring as much as 40 countries and over 1,000 athletes to our shores within those two years from across the world, which will be the highest level ever hosted in the Caribbean for badminton. And there are a number of other sports that are working with us and talking with us to host these types of events. But what we have noticed with those events is the NGBs who have hosted these events, the events are also revenue earners for them, where while we may waive the use of the facilities as part of our contribution as a Government, in kind, they are able to sell tickets to these events and also merchandising with regard to the Trinidad and Tobago jerseys, caps, cups, and so on, and, of course the concession.

So they are seeing a revenue earning from these NGBs that host these events, but more importantly when you do host these events here it cuts your cost with regard to having to pay for travel abroad. Case in point, badminton hosted the CAREBACO tournament and we won it. We broke the record with regard to 41 medals, but more importantly we were able to also break the record for the most local athletes to participate. And we had as young as eight year olds, people that are eight years old playing in an international tournament on our shores simply because it was at home. Some of them, we may not have been able to host so

many and spend to buy tickets and hotels for those young people to go abroad if it was hosted somewhere else. So these are the benefits that the NGBs are seeing when we host a tournament here or event here.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in my last—because time is winding down, I just want to say that we are in good hands with regard to sports tourism. We are trying our best to diversify the economy. We are working very closely with the NGBs with this. They understand the benefits of it, and between 2018 to 2020 in our term we will continue to see a number of international events, where not only the benefit of bringing in revenue, but more importantly for the public of Trinidad and Tobago to see top-class international athletic events, tournaments, and so on in our backyard, rather than having to watch it on television. Mr. Deputy Speaker, with that, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Caroni Central. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie (*Caroni Central*): Thank you very very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Member opposite from Diego Martin Central in his contribution indicated what he was doing in his Ministry, some of the things that he is thinking about and some of the things that he will do, or is doing in his Ministry, but I want to say to him that the key issue in relation to the thinking that informs what he was speaking about is the fact that you can do all of this and spend a lot of money and then it becomes a cost to a country, or the institutions associated with it, or you can do many things that really become an income generator, or a series of income generators, and instead of becoming an expenditure it really becomes a source of revenue in multiple ways. I will give you one example. When I was principal of the University of the West Indies—as you know we have a major sports facility there, it was done by my predecessor principal but I inherited it, and we had to find a way of making it work.

I was lucky to have a good person in charge of that institution at the time who understood sports and who understood the international dimension of sports and also the financial potential of sports. And when we sat down we said, look, what we will try to do is to see how we can make 300 days a year a source of income for that facility. So that there are 365 days in the year and you take 300 days and you basically dedicate that by scouting the national landscape, the regional landscape, the international landscape, and then you figure out a way of turning what is an idle asset, most of the time, into an income-generating asset. So I think that the Member for Diego Martin Central has a few good ideas. I will simply leave him with these two, which is, one, it makes a big difference whether

something is an income-earner or a cost-demander, and it makes a big difference if you look at an asset as something to be monetized, and you know that what you really have is time, and that is all you have in order to turn an opportunity into money. So I will leave him with that idea.

But I really stood up to support my colleague, the Member for Chaguanas East, [*Desk thumping*] who put forward this very, very timely Motion, and I will read it:

“*Whereas* there has been a noticeable decline in the level of investment in Trinidad and Tobago;”

And that is something I think the country needs, and all citizens would probably agree that we need that and we need more. And it continues:

“*And whereas* there has also been a failure by the Government to create job opportunities;”

And I think that is an important thing which the Member for Chaguanas East is highlighting in this particular Motion.

“*Be it resolved* that this House take note of the failure of the Government to present a viable plan to diversify the economy and to place Trinidad and Tobago on the path of sustainable growth.”

So he talks about jobs, he talks about investment and, basically, he laments the fact that there really is no plan or strategy in order to make diversification possible, which will—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, Diego Martin North/East and Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, I am getting a constant drone coming out from there and it is slightly disturbing. So please, you all are free to exit if you want to have a discussion, but please, keep the tone down. Proceed, Member for Caroni Central.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As I was saying, the diversification of course is what will provide the opportunity for job creation through investment and other forms. So the Motion by my colleague, the Member for Chaguanas East, really takes note of the significant decline in investment in Trinidad and Tobago, and he spoke to some of that. I will just give you some quick figures, investment in 2010 when this Government came in was about \$500 million; in 2011 it was about \$700 million; over the period 2012, 2013 and 2014 it was \$4.5 billion, an average of \$1.5 billion; in 2015 it was in fact about \$2 billion, just, I think, \$1.9, but in 2016 there was a minus \$60 million

figure—minus \$60 million in 2016—and in 2017 we could not get the figures. I suspect they are not yet available, but I would suspect that there is some investment but not a lot. The Minister of Trade and Industry mentioned some small investments, I do not think they were international investments, but she mentioned some of the investments here.

Now, Aleem Khan, writing in the *Express* on June 14, 2017, said that it was the first time in four years that Trinidad and Tobago suffered a negative flow on investment, and I quote from him. In 2016:

“...more foreign investors pulled money out than put money in to the economy.”

He was drawing on the World Investment Report which had reported for that year. So the mover of the Motion, the Member for Chaguanas East, is taking note of that fact, and that fact is that there indeed has been, since 2015, a decline in investment in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

The other issue that the Member for Chaguanas East raises in his Motion is the issue of Government failure to create job opportunities. So he takes note of this matter also that Government has failed to create job opportunities. Now, if the unemployment rate was 3.1 per cent in the lowest unemployment rate, a quarter for 2014, it was the second quarter of 2014, and that was the lowest rate ever in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, [*Desk thumping*] then I think common sense will tell all of us that job losses over the last 30 months will mean higher unemployment in the marketplace. I do not think anyone will deny that there have been significant job losses. If we have higher unemployment and a lower labour force participation rate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, both of which we do have, then the Government could not be creating jobs. Even if it is creating some, it could not be creating jobs anywhere equivalent to the joblessness rate in the country.

What they are doing, I think, and we are seeing it everywhere, in some instances is firing people whom they label as coming in under the last administration, the Kamla Persad-Bissessar Government, and replacing them sometimes with party supporters. So political patronage lives on. But let us look at a broader view, I do not want to get into any petty politics here this afternoon because we are dealing with serious matters which are jobs, investment, diversification, and I do not want to get into any petty politics. So if we look at the broader picture, I draw on tradingeconomics.com where in one of their articles, drawing on the CSO and Central Bank statistics, they wrote this:

“Unemployment Rate in Trinidad and Tobago averaged 10.14 percent from 1991 until 2017, reaching an all-time high of 21.10 percent in the first quarter of 1993 and a record low of 3.10 percent in the first quarter of 2014.”

This is an important thing to remember, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because Members on the other side often behave as if—and the Minister of Trade and Industry, who was here, in fact said we did nothing for five years. She said we were on vacation. People often forget that in the history of the country we took employment up to the point [*Desk thumping*] where it was in 2014, 3.1 per cent.

Now, the actual percentage now, according to the CSO, is about 4.5. Now that is not very high, and it is not a bad number in percentage terms, but when you look at the number of retrenchments, the number of unemployed people, the number of people who are losing their jobs in the thousands, and the Member for Couva South, my colleague, spoke on that particular issue, you begin to wonder what is happening with the figures which tell us about the reality of unemployment in the country. Because, I mean, I live in a constituency, as most of the Members here live in their own constituency; I know some may live outside of it, but I am sure they visit their constituency. And if you walk among the people you realize everywhere you go people are complaining about the fact that they have no income, that is their main concern and, secondly, they have no base on which to have their income, which is the joblessness situation in the country.

So my colleague, the Member for Chaguanas East, is very right, investment is dramatically down and unemployment is up, and we know that underemployment has been a persistent reality in our economy in Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for some time. I want so say something about something that we do not pay too much attention to in this country, we look at the numbers, we look at the percentages—the labour force participation rate fell to 59.8 per cent in the first quarter of 2017, and this implies a falling of the labour participation rate, which is a critical thing. What it means is less and less people in the labour force pool are in fact engaged in either working or being involved in any kind of interest in working. This is a disturbing trend we are seeing and it comes from the CSO statistics. I would ask the Members on the other side, the Minister of Planning and Development, the Minister of Finance, of course, the Minister of Trade and Industry, all the Members who are involved in the strategies that they might have for facilitating this business of job creation and employment, the Minister of Works and Transport, I would ask that they pay serious attention to what is happening to the labour force participation rate in the country, which is dwindling.

So when the Minister of Trade and Industry comes here to try to convince us that investment is buoyant and that employment creation is proceeding apace, I do not think that anybody will be convinced by what she said or the arguments that she made, or the information that she provided. All we have on the unemployment front is bad news. I will just take an opportunity to read a couple of headlines. On April 16, 2017, which is a Sunday, the *Trinidad Guardian* of Sunday, “Job Loss can rock one’s life...” says psychiatrist. On March 19, 2017, another Sunday, “Workers fear more job cuts” in the *Trinidad Guardian*. In the *Trinidad Guardian* on February 18, Sunday, “500 workers could be cut”, and so it goes on. I thumbed through a lot of these things which some of my staff prepared for me and I looked at it, and almost every four or five weeks in the papers, let us say over the last 12 to 18 months, you would see things like that.

2.30 p.m.

There was one striking headline which was:

“CSO: Unemployment rate down”

This was in September 2014. But when I read below it said:

“The labour force registered 631,300 people at the end of the fourth quarter 2016, representing a decline of 7,900 or 1.2 per cent decline compared to the third quarter 2016...”

And then it went on to say:

“Meanwhile, the number of persons with jobs declined by a 5,200 or 0.8 percent.”

And then they pointed out in the same article in which they said the unemployment rate rose that:

“‘Elementary Occupations’ 11,700 or 10.1 per cent...”—lost their jobs—
“‘Craft and related workers’ 10,900 or 11 per cent and ‘Plant and machine operators and assemblers’, 6,000 or 10.6 per cent, when compared to the third quarter of 2016.”

So in investment and in the protection of jobs as well as the creation of jobs, the Government, the Members on the other side, I would have to say the facts indicate very clearly that the record is extremely weak. [*Desk thumping*]

What about the plan for diversification? The Member for Chaguanas East raised that in the last paragraph of his Motion. Of course, in that he talks about a path for sustainable growth because that is what you want to have in your

economy. Now the Government has put forward a Vision 2030, but that is not a plan for diversification. I want to let the Government know that I have the plan which was circulated here and I have read, in fact, the plan. I will not stand here to diss the plan, but I want to say that there are serious problems with the document and I want to point to some things.

Now in order to do any plan, in order to execute any plan, in order to address the diversification matter, then you have to first get out of the recession. If you are going to have growth, if you are going to have sustainable growth, if you are going to have a plan for diversification, one of the elements of that plan has to be how to get out of the recession. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, the decline in 2016 was the worst in decades; that is a documented fact. It was minus 6 per cent. We do not have figures for 2017 yet, but there is a projection of minus 2.3, which is very modest in terms of a decline, compared to 6, but I am cautious about that figure, and we will have to wait later to see maybe if it is adjusted.

Now the Minister of Trade and Industry, as I said before, said we did absolutely nothing when we were in Government, for diversification. I wonder if she understands that Caroni Green, which was funded by the European Union and which her Government closed down, was meant to be an intervention in the agricultural diversification process.

I wonder if she understands what the development of a small percentage of lands in Chaguaramas was about, with the boardwalk, with enterprise booths, with entertainment and a restaurant and a water park, which has opened partially and will expand to open again. I wonder if she understands that the—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, you continue to use the pronoun “she” on a continuous basis, so you can probably—

Dr. B. Tewarie: I see; I am sorry.

I wonder if the Minister understands that the Mitsubishi/Massy NGC plant, designed to produce more methanol and then to take part of that methanol to DME, and even further downstream to plastics manufacturing, which is why Massy got into the project, I wonder if the Minister understands what that means in terms of diversification.

I wonder if the Minister understands what the Maracas project, which they now seem to be botching up, and the Manzanilla boardwalk—I wonder if the Minister and the Members on the other side understand that that is about diversification, that those are about diversification.

I wonder if the Minister also appreciates that the IDB study which was done on energy services in Trinidad and Tobago, and on which we engaged energy services stakeholders, that that was about diversification and links squarely into the growth of energy sources of business that now surround Trinidad and Tobago.

I wonder if she appreciates that the \$20 million loan which we took from the IDB to support ICT-based service exports, and which the Minister of Planning and Development has supported, and which they are pursuing, I wonder if the Minister appreciates that all of these were part of an active action-oriented diversification strategy of the last Government. [*Desk thumping*]

We were committed to expanding the production base.

Mr. Charles: Tell them!

Dr. B. Tewarie: We were committed to creating destinations with different attractions. We were committed to creating new products and new opportunities. We were focusing on exports. All of these are vital elements, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of diversification. Everyone knows that diversification can be a slow process and that five years is a short time, but we made significant progress during that time. [*Desk thumping*]

I had a teacher at Queen's Royal College when I was a little boy and his name was Martin Riley. He was a good man and he was a good teacher. He was a jovial person and he engaged the boys very well. He had a way he used to come in class, you know—QRC has, of course, its own very, very unique culture and it is a very democratic place and a very engaging place, but he used to say when you learn you know, when you are not learning you do not know and then you come here and you bray like a donkey. [*Laughter*] But he used another more expressive word for “donkey” which always made the boys explode with laughter.

I am glad to hear from the Minister that some of our local companies are investing, focusing on exports. It is the only way to survive, and I commend the companies that are doing that. The Minister of Trade and Industry mentioned some companies: Fresh Start, a 20-year-old company that I am familiar with. I know it is in Diego Martin. Advanced Foam, another company that I am familiar with. That company is exporting to 22 countries. I cannot remember how long, but they have been here for some time. KC Confectionary, which is close to my constituency and which has been an export-oriented business for some time. Habanero, which was involved in initiatives by CARIRI when I was a Minister. Vemco, going into manufacturing. All of these companies, I commend what they

are doing because they are dealing with the realities of Trinidad and Tobago. They are export-oriented. They are investing their money, they are trying to survive, and they are trying to grow. I commend them all, and I am glad to see them all prosper. I want them to export more. That is good for Trinidad and Tobago; it is good for them. I would like to see all of these companies do well, and I would like to see their leaders, the entrepreneurs in their business and their employees all prosper. God bless all of them.

But the Minister came here and told us about Scotia Bank BPO services as if the Minister brought it here. [*Laughter*] That happened in 2014 and continues. [*Desk thumping*] Do not tell me Peterson Logistics—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member. Member for Naparima, you constantly make some outbursts ever so often. Please try to desist. Proceed, Member for Caroni Central.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Do not tell me that you brought Peterson Logistics here, because it is not true. That was in place when you came in. Do not tell me you brought in BHP Billiton Business Process Accounting Services here, because that is not so. The CEO of BHP Billiton and I had a discussion on the transfer of BPO services [*Desk thumping*] in accounting and related matters from Australia to Trinidad and Tobago since the end of 2014, when the first set of processes came to Trinidad and Tobago to hire local people. All of these things happened in 2014 and 2015 under our watch, as did the approval for UNICOMER construction in Freeport; the C3 mall in Corinth and so on. [*Desk thumping*] I can mention others. So do not come here and say that we were on vacation for five years.

Dr. Rambachan: They are on vacation.

Dr. B. Tewarie: We were a hard-working government, and the development of the country shows over the period. And your Government, despite your persistent denials, is the beneficiary of work that we did. [*Desk thumping*]

We know that you like to blame the last government for everything, but sometime soon you are going to have to tell the population what you have done and what you have produced. It is you who must demonstrate, it seems to me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and you have put 30 months into effort, and what this effort reveals in terms of tangible achievement and advance for the country.

I think that one can confidently answer, very little, and if I am wrong all I am saying to them is, show me, show the population, show the country.

Mr. Singh: Show me your motion.

Dr. B. Tewarie: But on March 7th, a few days from now, this Government will have been 30 months in office.

Hon. Member: “What dey do?”

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, your initial 30 minutes have expired, you have an additional 15. Do you care to avail yourself?

Dr. B. Tewarie: I think it is fair to say that in those 30 months, given the passage of those 30 months, the climate is not right, nor is it ripe for investment. We have crime, we have extremely heavy taxes, we have a loss of confidence, we have a foreign exchange problem, and we have a lack of clarity and a lack of direction. [*Desk thumping*] We need to stimulate a constructive conversation about economic survival in Trinidad and Tobago because I want to say that that is what is facing business, and that is what is facing citizens in Trinidad and Tobago. Businesses are facing the challenge of economic survival, [*Desk thumping*] and especially small and medium enterprises. Individual families are facing the challenge of economic survival.

Somebody called me the other day indicating that one of their children—I mean a professional person working—was perhaps in danger of being put on the bread line, and they were out loud wondering to me what would happen to the house and the mortgage, you know, and that is the kind of situation that people are under. I want to give the country an understanding of what is happening here because it is very important.

Now, what is the most hopeful scenario now in Trinidad and Tobago? The most hopeful scenario is that Juniper is at full capacity. That is something that was done because of decisions we made in our time. [*Desk thumping*] But it does not matter, I am not harping on that. The point is that it has been a good for the country and we are getting the benefit of that. Oil is between \$60 and \$70 dollars a barrel now, so what it means is that things are little better than the \$45 target that we set in the budget. [*Interruption*] Well, you know it goes up and down. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: “Don’t argue with them; they don’t know that.”

Dr. B. Tewarie: Putting this into context, the surge from Juniper was expected. Everybody knew that we would get a surge from Juniper.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence.

Dr. B. Tewarie: All of us know that oil prices are likely to go lower rather than higher. And as an aside to the Minister of Finance, you know, I went through the numbers from September—I do not have it here—but I went through the numbers from, I think January 2015, until, well I mean this month, and I looked at all the numbers on average. When you look at that, the crisis situation that has been portrayed here in terms of the price of oil and natural gas, is not as severe as the Government portrays.

Hon. Member: Makes it out to be. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

Dr. B. Tewarie: I am prepared to debate that at the appropriate time. I am not saying that we do not have a problem. Yes, the price of oil is down and it is not likely to go up. I am not saying we do not have a problem. I am not saying that we do not have a production problem. Yes, the production is less, and I concede that. I am not even fighting, I am not even arguing about that with the Government, but let us deal with the reality of the situation.

One of those realities is that Juniper is going to taper off in about 18 months. It will not finish, but it will begin to taper. And I want to say that there is a difference between political survival of a government or a party and the economic survival of the country. [*Desk thumping*] That is it.

What we are concerned, and I think what all citizens are concerned about, I think what all business people are concerned about, what all professionals are concerned about, what ordinary citizens are concerned about, is the survival of the country and that is what we are concerned about.

Now there are some realities to ponder. We need to bring Government expenditure down to about \$45 billion. That is a reality. The Government has, indeed, brought down expenditure, I will not, not acknowledge that, because that is a reality. But the revenue is pretty bad. The Minister of Finance acknowledges that, and the revenue side needs to be increased by about \$10 billion to support the level of expenditure that we have now. To wipe out the deficit of this country at this time oil would have to be at \$120 per barrel and that is most, most unlikely. It is very, very unlikely. So what we are faced with in the country is continuing deficits.

I have not even begun to address the issue of the capital investment necessary, beyond revenue and expenditure, for Government operations. So it is one thing to keep the Government going by managing income and expenditure, it is another thing to begin to address the issue of beyond expenditure and revenue.

We need capital expenditure from Government, from the private sector, the foreign private sector, from the local private sector, the public private sector. Why do we need this? Because that is what will get us out of the recession. That is what will stimulate growth. That is what will create a buoyant economy with jobs. That is what will generate confidence, and therefore more investment and more jobs, and that is what will establish a platform for further diversification. [Desk thumping]

But the problem is that we really have a lack of direction and clarity, leading to a deep erosion of confidence. We have little investment by Government that impacts. I do not think a swimming pool, whether it is in East Port of Spain or in Hilton, is going to help. [Laughter] We have burdensome taxation on the private sector. [Crosstalk] That was part of a whole plan setting from Chaguaramas to here. [Crosstalk]

We have foreign exchange rationing, which is not working; it is creating scarcity. We have several exchange rates because of the black market in currency. We have depreciating foreign reserves, shortage of local currency. The shortage of local currency really is shown every time we cannot pay a bill or pay the public servants and so on, and that raises other issues. We have already raised the ceiling for borrowing from the Central Bank, and there are options there that might be things that you want to avoid, given the situation in the country.

There have been some bad judgments made and statements made leading to further uncertainty. For instance, when the Minister of Finance said that maybe the Central Bank should begin to deal with the business of foreign exchange, and deal with it in such a way that there was an implication or suggestion that we might have to go to a kind of exchange control regime. It made a lot— [Interruption]

Mr. Imbert: Rubbish!

Dr. B. Tewarie: I am not saying that he said that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members! Members! Member for Diego Martin North East, please. I will not tolerate the little outbursts across the floor, please. Continue to address the Chair, Member.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Mr. Deputy Speaker, through you, once you raise the spectre of the Central Bank controlling again the whole business of the flow of foreign exchange, you know that you create a problem. Because when you do that, if I am a foreign exchange earner, let us say in manufacturing, and I am earning my

foreign exchange and normally bring it to Trinidad and Tobago, what I am going to begin to think now, I would say, “Boy, I better leave my foreign exchange abroad, because I do not want the Central Bank telling me how to spend my money.” So it causes a kind of consternation, and that is what creates the conditions in which people are concerned, and therefore it provokes people not to want to invest, not to want to commit.

So the Minister of Trade and Industry though was right when she talked about the fact that we had an economy that needed restructuring. What needs to be done, you need to restructure the production base, of course, the market reach, the market expansion, the cluster strengthening, the new investment, the conditions for new investment, the investment in new areas, the value chain issues, and you need integrated connectivity. So that if you do agriculture, for instance, you also want to link that to tourism, you also want to link that to ICT, you also want to link that to entertainment. These are the things that are critical.

She did not mention fossil fuel dependence, which is why we talked about a green, a blue, a grey economy, a silver economy, because you also want to restructure in that way. Not just in terms of the structure of the production base, but also away from energy.

One of the things that I want to say is that we have reached a critical stage in the evolution of economic history in the world, in which artificial intelligence is going to be the most significant thing that makes a difference to the world economy. It is already happening everywhere. This is not something that we can import into Trinidad and Tobago willy-nilly, but what it means is diversification is not just about the production base and so on, it means that you have to do new things.

So I want to say that even if we do agriculture, it cannot be on the basis of traditional agriculture. It has to be done on the basis of science, technology. It has to be done on the basis of the use of artificial intelligence, and perhaps we could then do agriculture with less land but more production. And if you are doing tourism you have to understand what is happening to the tourism market that is very, very different. That you are dealing with millennials now, they have different tastes. They are the ones that are travelling the most, they are the ones that are spending the most, and therefore you need to take those things into account. So there is need for a whole new—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, you have two more minutes.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You have to do a whole rethinking now of the business of diversification.

So my own sense in closing here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that not only do we have to do diversification in the way we think about it, that is to say, broadening the base of production and markets and so on, but the critical elements now are research, science, technology, innovation, and that is where the intellectual capital of high numbers of graduates, which allowed us to basically benefit from the competitiveness assessment of where we place in the index, those are the things that we need to rally now and bring together in order to achieve things.

I want to say that I am very pleased to see that the country is moving up on the corruption index, that is to say, there is a perception in the world that the country is perhaps less corrupt than it has been perceived before. I think a key element in that has been the procurement legislation [*Desk thumping and laughter*] and the appointment of the procurement board. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence!

Dr. B. Tewarie: A second element in that has been the FACTA legislation which we worked together to pass here. [*Crosstalk*] And the third element in that may very well have to do with, what can I say, the vigilance of the banks after the FATCA legislation but growing, and then obviously the role of the FIU in flagging a number of suspicious transactions.

Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before I recognize the next Member, Members remember cell phones are to be on silent. I now recognize the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

3.00 p.m.

The Minister in the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And on the outset, permit me to thank my colleague from St. Ann's East for allowing me the opportunity to just come in here and deal with some of the issues, important issues raised by those on the other side.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to start by bringing it into context. We heard the Member for Caroni Central tell the population that the crisis situation of the Government on oil and gas revenues is not real and he disbelieves it. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Tewarie: I did not say that.

Hon. S. Young: Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Imbert: Those were your words. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members. Proceed.

Hon. S. Young: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think this is a good example of how, once again, those on the other side unfortunately seek to mislead the population and to take them off of the correct path because, the facts are as follows.

Oil and gas-based revenue for the country of Trinidad and Tobago in the year 2011 stood at \$16 billion. Oil and gas revenue for the country of Trinidad and Tobago in 2012 was, again, \$16 billion. Oil and gas revenue for the year 2013 stood at \$15 billion; 2014, \$17 billion. Billions, these are in the billions. So when they came in, in 2011 they had \$16 billion from oil and gas alone. In 2012, \$16 billion, again, from oil and gas alone. In 2013, \$15 billion, they may have thought that was a crisis because it dropped a billion dollars for them in 2013, but in 2014 it was \$17 billion in oil and gas because, of course, and I will come to the prices that they had under their regime. In 2015, it dropped to \$10 billion, in their last year.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, in the year 2016 the oil and gas revenue for Trinidad and Tobago dropped to \$1 billion. In 2017, the oil and gas revenue for Trinidad and Tobago dropped to \$472 million. So in two years the oil and gas revenue was \$1.472 billion as opposed to the \$16 billion, the \$15 billion, the \$17 billion and the \$10 billion, the \$74 billion that they wasted under their regime [*Desk thumping*] in that period of time.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is a shame to come here and to try and tell the people of Trinidad and Tobago that this Government, this PNM administration is not dealing with a crisis when you have your revenue dropping from \$17 billion in a year to \$470 million in the same year.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence.

Hon. S. Young: I expect them to behave that way. So, now let us move to diversification. And my friend the Member for Caroni Central talked about a water park and he talked about diversification that took place in CDA under him as the line Minister. Mr. Deputy Speaker, allow me to respond and allow me to remind the people of Trinidad and Tobago what we came in and found in the CDA under my friend the Member for Caroni Central.

Trinidad and Tobago and the members of the CDA board—what the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago need to be reminded of, is on the night of elections, the 6th of September, 2015, into the early morning of the 7th of September, 2015, Member for Caroni Central, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what was taking place is the board of the CDA under that line Minister was signing away a number of leases on the night of elections in 2015, two o'clock in the morning. [*Crosstalk*] That is their idea of diversification. That is the idea of those on the other side on what took place on the night of elections. [*Crosstalk*]. And what happened—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members. Member for Couva South, I may not be seeing you directly, but I am hearing you. Please, desist from those comments. Proceed.

Hon. S. Young: Now, let me remind the country once again what went on with the CDA. When we came in we had to do an investigation into the CDA. One of the leases that we found was a lease that my friend the Member for Caroni Central condoned where land was given to persons to build a car park on and they were to pay a rental for 30 years of \$1 a year. So the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago and the CDA were to get \$1 a year for lease of the land. And what were they going to do in return? They entered into an arrangement where the taxpayer would be burdened with paying \$300 million to the owners of this car park over the same 30-year period. So taxpayers get \$30 in 30 years, but pay out \$300 million in that period of time, diversification. That is diversification.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members. Member for San Fernando West, he is quite capable. Please desist.

Hon. S. Young: As I hear the Member for Oropouche East continue to make these comments, I will go to the Corruption Perception Index, and I want to tell the country what it is and why we really went down in the Corruption Index. It has nothing to do with the procurement legislation because the procurement legislation has not as yet been proclaimed. It has nothing to do with FATCA because FATCA is specific to one country in the world, only the United States. It has nothing to do with the banks' vigilance because as we saw what was going on with the FIU, is all of the money that was gathered by those between 2010 and 2015, they seemed to be panicking and pushing it into the system now and that is what is raising the red flags. We found the money going to Panama and we found the money going to the BVI. What really brought down the Corruption Perception Index and there are now cases in court that the Member for Oropouche East will be familiar with, is a case bought by EMBD for the expenditure of \$200 million to a handful of contractors.

What also brought down the Corruption Perception Index is the case that has been brought by HDC and the Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago for the Eden Gardens transactions. Right? So these are reasons why, and there are a lot more investigations that are taking place, and the foreign allies that we work with are very aware of it. Actions have been commenced in New York, actions have been commenced in Miami and this is what is taking place. That is the reason why, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Corruption Perception Index rating for Trinidad and Tobago has gone in the direction it has. Because what we had to do, this is the best level it has ever been since 2012 when they changed the whole measurement, and it happened under this Government for the work that is taking place. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I heard him say, again, my friend the Member for Caroni Central, a number of things, one of the areas of diversification, because he is right, we do challenge and the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry who is not here today did say that nothing happened with respect to investment, nothing real happened with respect to investment between 2010 and 2015 unless, of course, they call the Couva hospital an investment that they put us into.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me remind—my friend raised the Mitsubishi deal, the CGCL deal, Mitsubishi and Massy and said that with “a great sense of pride this is what was achieved” under their Government in 2010 to 2015. Again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to remind the population of Trinidad and Tobago and the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago what happened with that transaction. As we now know, NGC and the gas supply in Trinidad and Tobago had been suffering from curtailment issues, they buried their head in the sand. Kevin Ramnarine stood here and said, “Oh, it is maintenance, it is maintenance issues taking place, there is no curtailment on Point Lisas”. We now know that to be completely untrue.

That Government exposed Trinidad and Tobago to billions of US dollars in claims as a result of something called their Green Field Gas Policy that they never told the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago about. Mr. Deputy Speaker, citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, what that was is that all of the plants at Point Lisas who have been here with us and have grown our industry and have grown us into an international leader in the downstream gas industry and in the commodities of ammonia and methanol, what that Government did is, they said, CGCL come, Massy/Mitsubishi come, we will give you gas and we will take it away from the existing plants in Point Lisas, and they did not tell them that, they did not tell the country that. That immediately led to exposure of billions of dollars in claims in

US currency, because what it meant then is that all those persons who had existing contracts for supply of gas, who have been here for all of these years would now not get the gas because they promised the gas to CGCL, and what we learnt as well at prices that were unsustainable.

So what we had to do is immediately go and commence negotiations with Massy and Mitsubishi, fly to Japan on two-day turnaround to meet with the Government of Japan, and thanks to relationship that we built with them and respect that the Government of Japan had for this Government of Trinidad and Tobago, we renegotiated it, turned it around and no longer are we exposed to any Green Field Gas Policy or any billions of dollars in claims. I hear my friend talking about CNC and what is currently going. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: He said he went Japan and negotiated that deal.

Hon. Member: No. I did not say that.

Hon. S. Young: I would not be surprised if that is what happened. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: Members. Member for Naparima, I am now discussing with your Whip here about your conduct, Member for Naparima.

Mr. Imbert: Put him out.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: Member for Diego Martin North/East, I did not ask for any comment. All right? So Members, please. Proceed.

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much. So what happened with CGCL, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that we managed thankfully to renegotiate a better deal. Another element of the deal that they had left Trinidad and Tobago with was, if there was no supply of gas, if the plant could not meet its financial obligations, the shareholders, they wanted to pass that directly over to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago; that is the debt. So the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in those circumstances would have had to pay the debt, but not even get the security and ownership of the plant.

So this is how my friends on the other side diversified. This is the state, just a few examples, of the state that they left the economy in. They want to talk about investment. They used NGC to enter into a contract with a company called SIS, and we all know about SIS. They entered into a contract with SIS/NGC to build a Beetham Waste Water Plant. They gave out a billion, \$1 billion in cash, diversification. They did not even have a route for whatever water could be built

there in that waste water plant to send it down to Point Lisas. They did not have a route, they did not have an approval, but they made sure to give out \$1 billion in cash, and now the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago are burdened with their concept and idea at diversification.

Anybody driving down to San Fernando or coming up from San Fernando, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and when you look at the Point Lisas turn off, you would see what appears to be something from the future. These lights up in and these round circles, et cetera, with solar lights. They must tell people, again, they gave that contract to SIS in diversification, spending over \$30 million dollars for a useless project a few feet from the main highway that cannot even be used up to now. That is their way. Over \$30 million dollars, \$30 million dollars for that construction. Their diversification, again, the same company, and a whole series of other small companies that are their subsidiary companies.

What they did is that they went around and chose in their constituencies, in specific constituencies where to build recreational grounds. What we found going in there now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is those facilities that should have cost the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago \$2 million, cost in excess of \$12 million. Those facilities that were supposed to have, for example, when you look at the sketches, the drawings and the scope of works, facilities for handicapped people; none of that. All money paid, again, in cash. Their idea of diversification, I would just like to remind the population of Trinidad and Tobago, their idea of investment was to take \$16 billion in cash from the NGC that has now left the NGC crippled when we want to invest in upstream and downstream projects and invest in new pipelines and invest in gas from Venezuela, they left the NGC short of \$16 billion in cash, and they one day will have to account to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and tell us exactly where that money was invested in, because the NGC got nothing for that \$16 billion.

When we came in the Minister of Finance came to Cabinet within the space of two weeks and told us that he had done analysis at the Ministry of Finance as to how much cash was in our accounts, how much cash was in our accounts because they used the cash to invest. There was no cash left in any of the accounts, all of the overdrafts had been maxed out. They will explain to the people of Trinidad and Tobago what it is they did with that money.

What they also did, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to remind the people of Trinidad and Tobago, the various funds, the Business Levy Fund, the Green Fund, the unemployment fund, they took those funds and they mortgaged them. Understand a government taking those funds, the amounts that had built up in those specific

accounts and they mortgaged them against an increase in the overdraft and spent out all of that cash. That is how my friends on the other side invest.

So to come here now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to talk out of that mouth with that forked tongue is an insult to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, please retract. Use a different term, please.

Hon. S. Young: I retract it, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To now come and speak in the manner that they are and to pontificate as though they had done anything to help Trinidad and Tobago, it irks every law-abiding citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, now to turn to exactly what the Motion is about. They say there has been a noticeable decline in the level of investment in Trinidad and Tobago. The truth is when you look at the figures that are compiled between the period of 2010 to 2015, and the investment figures during those years, and I have just called out a few of the areas that they took billions of dollars and gave it to specific persons, nine out of 10 times in a non-competitive procurement, because let me tell you what we found as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because they talk about procurement legislation that they put in place, literally, at the 11th hour of the Parliament just before the election was called and they never proclaimed it either. What they did is they only proclaimed the sections to appoint persons to positions.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they talk about procurement. You know what we have found in places like EFCL? We found that when they invited five contractors to tender for a job, four out of the five contractors are owned by the same shareholders. So what appears to be, to the public at large, five different companies are really two different companies, but what happened is that of that fifth company, we found was in cartel arrangements with the other one who owned the four companies, and that is how they did it. That is how they invested the money for the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago, and these matters are now before the court.

They talk about CEPEP, Member for Oropouche East, again, talking about the levy on CEPEP. They should explain to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago what CEPEP, which is a Community Enhancement Programme, what they were doing at the health facilities, and painting the health facilities and the types of contracts that they gave out for these health facilities. And what happens now when persons come to challenge for that money, there are no records at CEPEP, there are no records at EFCL. In fact, what we found at EFCL was a secret room where

persons employed under the former administration were working on laptops overtime to backfill documentation. [*Crosstalk*] What they were doing is they were now creating the tender documents, and so sloppy in the work that they were doing, that they used same handwriting on all four of the tender documents. So it was supposed to be four different individuals, the same person filled out all four to try to backfill tender documents.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it really is difficult as a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago to sit here and to listen to them talk and pontificate about how we should invest in Trinidad and Tobago and how this Government is pretending and falsifying a situation, an economic situation that they are in. I have shown using facts, not using old talk, Mr. Deputy Speaker, how our oil and gas revenue dropped from a high in 2014 of \$17 billion to \$472 million last year. I heard my friend the Member for Caroni Central say, we need to cut expenditure to \$43 billion.

Dr. Tewarie: Forty-five.

Hon. S. Young: Forty-five, he says, he corrects it now. He actually did say 43 and the *Hansard* would reflect it. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is irrelevant, 43, 45. When one goes and looks at the records when they came into office that was actually the figure of the annual budget, thereabouts in the \$40 billion. They took it up to the \$62 billion and every single budget that was under them from 2010 to 2015 was a deficit budget. So to come here now and criticize, where they had oil, and let me tell you the oil prices that my friends on the side experienced.

In 2012, the average, so it had actually spiked higher than this, it was the average for the year, 2012 was \$94 a barrel. In 2013, the average was \$98 a barrel. In 2014, the average was \$93 a barrel. In 2016, which was our first full year in office we faced an average of \$43 a barrel and it had actually dropped to below \$30 a barrel at certain times in that year. We had to cut expenditure, but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is a fallacy and a belief that you can cut from \$63 billion down to \$43 billion. They sit and talk about jobs and job losses, et cetera. The truth is, the majority of the State's bills are in the wages of workers, and this Government has done very well, and the Minister of Finance has done a fantastic job [*Desk thumping*] in ensuring that there is not a level of job loss that has taken place over this period of time, where you have barrels of oil dropping from a high of \$98 on average per year to \$43.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: Silence.

Hon. S. Young: Mr. Deputy Speaker, my friend the Member for Caroni Central likes to always talk about the energy sector and what we should be doing

with gas. He obviously was not able to have any conversation with his colleague, Mr. Ramnarine, at the time when he was the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs because let me tell you what we found when we came in.

Methanol Holdings, in 2013, the Methanol Holdings contract had expired with NGC, they did not seek to renegotiate it. They rolled it on a month-by-month-basis, leading now to the country facing over \$6 billion in claims, and we are working assiduously to negotiate and get out of it, and to find it. My friend, the Member for Naparima, talks about tedious repetition. Of course, what they are trying to avoid is being told and the population being told, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the state of the oil and gas economy and what the downstream is now facing, because they did not negotiate and conclude a single downstream contract apart from CGCL for 2019, and God knows how they were planning to supply the gas for 2019 because they had not negotiated any upstream contract for 2019 go forward.

So, I want the people of Trinidad and Tobago to understand the crisis that was faced immediately. You had your upstream contracts which mean the gas supplies to NGC to be then provided to downstream in Point Lisas and Point Fortin expiring in 2018. They did nothing. They did nothing to renew those contracts or to negotiate those contracts.

The downstream contracts now with ammonia, urea, methanol and all of these companies, again, some had expired, they did not even seek to renegotiate those contracts, because you know why? They were so focused on that \$16 billion piggybank and how to spend that money, and where that money would go, that they completely neglected what would happen to Trinidad and Tobago from 2018, 2019 downstream and upstream.

And the people of Trinidad and Tobago will never know how close we came to a complete crisis and collapse of our gas industry and our hydrocarbon industry in Trinidad and Tobago.

There is a level of investment coming to Trinidad and Tobago now, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As we all know, we had a question on it today. In Tobago, we are working on a Sandals project, first, a one of a kind that will come. [*Crosstalk and laughter*] And it is actually, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the unpatriotic behaviour and the way they have just behaved on the other side— [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Singh: Withdraw that.

Hon. S. Young: I am not withdrawing it. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, please proceed.

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much. That made our project in Tobago go down the priority line for Sandals and that is why they went now to St. Lucia and they went to other countries. [Laughter] They may laugh because their single-handed purpose, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the single-handed purpose of those on the other side is to be destructive and to be non-compliant and to be non-cooperative in moving Trinidad and Tobago forward. I hear my friend, the Member for Princes Town, talking about blame. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The people must be reminded what it is took place, but this Government is not harping or waiting on it. There are a number of initiatives that have been taking place. The Government has been hamstrung with its cash flow, based on what we have just described, but you know, they want to talk, my friend, the Member for Couva South who always likes to muffle and crosstalk from down in that area, I want to remind him and the population about a boat called *Galicia*. I want them, again, to tell the population how the *Galicia* was procured, and who procured the *Galicia* for Trinidad and Tobago, and was paid money for the procurement of the *Galicia*?

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: Silence.

Hon. S. Young: And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what I can now report to the people of Trinidad and Tobago is, yesterday an action was filed and served on the broker Intercontinental Shipping Limited by the Attorney General's office for the losses and damages incurred by Trinidad and Tobago for the whole *Galicia*. [Desk thumping] And as the Attorney General reminds me, there is further action to come out of those transactions.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they are all mumbling and grumbling on that side, the point is that this Government has taken the fight to corruption. There are some who are very, very nervous and we are seeing the reactions. This Government is dealing with a crisis situation, with a complete collapse of oil and gas—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, remember, each individual will have an opportunity to enter the debate. So, please.

Hon. S. Young: He is living in 111 Tobago Plantations owned by T.N. Ramnath, bought in December 2015. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, please. Members, Members. [*Crosstalk*] Members! [*Pause*] I do not know where those remarks are coming from, but please, I will not tolerate it in this House, on both sides. Each Member will have the opportunity to enter the debate and to rebut accordingly what has been said by a previous Member. But I will not tolerate the continuous outbursts across the floor on both sides. Proceed.

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, the population of Trinidad and Tobago needs to know about villa 111 in Tobago Plantations purchased in December 2015 by T.N. Ramnath and his wife and which former Government Minister—

Mr. Lee: 48(1), Mr. Deputy Speaker. 48(1). [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, again, tie it in, in order—to relevant Motion before the floor. Right? Tie it in.

3.30 p.m.

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much. We are talking about investment in the tourism area, and we are talking about one of the areas of investment in Tobago is to purchase villas [*Desk thumping and laughter*] and one of the ways—

Mr. Lee: 48(6), he is imputing improper—

Hon. Member: To who? To who?

Mr. Charles: You have to be brave and call the name. [*Continuous crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member! Member! [*Pause*] Overruled! Member, tie it in, right. You are talking about investment, tie it in quickly and let us move on.

Hon. S. Young: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are pleased to see—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: And on another note, your speaking time has expired, initially. You have an additional 15. Care to avail yourself? Proceed.

Hon. S. Young: Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a Government we are pleased to see an investment in a villa in Tobago, Villa 111 in Tobago Plantations, purchased in December 2015. And we are pleased to see that certain persons were able to enjoy that villa on a weekend basis, exclusively, every single weekend in 2016 until he got wind that it was being surveilled.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is quite interesting to sit here, as I say, and listen to what we are being told by those on the other side. It was actually the persons who

do the landscaping and the cutting of the lawn that were the whistle-blowers in that instance. So, I think what is happening here from the Member for Couva South, and what we are looking at in Couva South is a number of CEPEP contracts as well, and the investment for the Member for Couva South in CEPEP contracts and buying weed whackers and the support system that he had with respect to it.

Dr. Moonilal: Who is talking about Couva?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, okay, retract the statement.

Hon. S. Young: Retracted.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Couva South! In terms of—[*Crosstalk*] Members!—a Member calling a Member's name with regard to the particular contract, retract and move on.

Hon. S. Young: Retracted. My friends on the other side seemed to have been throwing out CEPEP a lot, so it just reminded me that CEPEP is a way that persons can invest in weed whackers, and certain people in here who maybe invest—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Naparima, kindly vacate your seat for a couple of minutes. At least five minutes. [*Interruption and laughter*] Members, I am on my legs! [*Pause*] Proceed. I sit for him to proceed. Hold on, Member.

Mr. Imbert: You still here?

[*Mr. Charles exits Chamber*]

[*Mr. Deputy Speaker stands*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the necessary ingredients for successful investment in a country is the type of laws you have in place, and in particular the type of laws that deal with, explain your wealth, and follow the money. And one of the areas that shall be coming to Parliament is the whole area of beneficial ownership of property, and that persons who think they can hide behind other persons holding property in their names for them, or the sale agreement of property and it not being registered, or that they set up companies and leave the shares with somebody else, all of that is soon going to have a massive spotlight shine upon it, when we bring the legislation to deal with beneficial ownership.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I put the country on notice now that as I have said previously, and as I will say again, when you have these types of pieces of legislation, explain your wealth. In other words, you are a Member of Parliament

earning a salary of X but during your tenure as a Minister, your property values, those that you have declared, and we will get to the beneficial ownership of the others you have not—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, again, I will give you certain leeway, but I want you to tie it in as quickly as possible—right, as quickly as possible—and then move on.

Hon. S. Young: This is one of the responses to the whole thing of the corruption index, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But also, as I said at the outset, for foreign investment in a country, one of the things foreigners look at is the type of laws that you have. And, for example, the global forum is one of the bodies. My friend raised FATCA.

So anyway, Mr. Deputy Speaker, all I am saying as I begin to wrap up, is that those pieces of legislation are coming to Parliament: explain your wealth, beneficial ownership, et cetera, and there can be no legitimate reason to oppose those types of legislation and those pieces of legislation. So we wait and see what happens.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to thank you and the Members for the opportunity to have contributed here this afternoon, and to deal with some of the issues that my friends had raised. And with those few words, I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before I recognize the Member for Oropouche East. Members, as Speaker in the Chair—[*Interruption*] Members, I am on my legs. [*Interruption*] Members! Again, as Speaker in the Chair, I am not tolerating any untoward decorum in this House. I now recognize the Member for Oropouche East. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (Oropouche East): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is a pleasure to join this debate, and I want to begin by asking the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West to commit himself to staying in the Chamber because there are some issues I would like to respond to that he raised. And if he would be kind enough to remain in this House, at least, I would like to raise a couple of matters that he touched on dealing with diversification, the energy sector, our record in terms of economic opportunity, and the impact upon income redistribution.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to begin by thanking the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre and the Member for Couva North, for allowing me the opportunity

to speak, because the Member for Couva North was quite prepared to respond. So, like the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, I thank a colleague for the opportunity. Unlike the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, I am prepared to speak on this Motion. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Chaguanas East has done a great service to the Parliament and the country, at an opportune moment, by filing this matter for debate; a matter that touches and concerns the economic management, the job creation strategies, the state of employment in this country, and the solutions that are required to save this beloved country of Trinidad and Tobago, and we want to congratulate him. And, I would speak today, on the issue of the labour market and the impact of the current lack of a plan by this Government on employment. I would also speak on the issue of diversification. And, not only the vision of the former administration as articulated by my colleague, brilliantly, the Member for Caroni Central, who really has the encyclopaedic knowledge of the diversification approach in this country, but across the globe as well. But also to my own work over the years with the Government—the Partnership Government—at the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development as it relates to diversification.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it would be remiss of me if I did not take the opportunity to respond to a few issues raised by the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West had a disturbing fascination with houses and homes, and sought to raise all types of insinuations but could not go one step further. So, it was, you know, a bit of foreplay with issues, but not really getting into the issue. And when encouraged by those of us on this side to go further and state names and so on, obviously could not do that. Now, that may be a result of other matters, but I do not want to get there.

You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Government has presided over, in a very short time of two years or two years plus, the collapse of the economy, the collapse of the society, the state of high joblessness in this country and rampant crime and insecurity. All of that has implications for the economy. You cannot have investment if you do not have confidence. In fact, economic activity from a purely Adam Smith perspective, if you want to go back there—the Member for Chaguanas East understands that—in classical economic sense, you cannot develop any economy without something called confidence, which is not an economic principle. It is a very strange phenomena that economy needs a social and psychological principle to develop. It is called confidence. [*Desk thumping*]

If, for example, I tell everybody here—I call a name of a bank and indicate that I have information since last night that this bank has a run and it is going to collapse, colleagues will fly out, some, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West may fly out through the window, through a door and go quickly to bail out their money. It happened in our history. There was a time in this country when there was a scare on a finance and insurance company, and leading Government Members on Old Year's Day in their nightie and in their duster, and with curlers in their hair, and in a bedroom slipper—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member.

Dr. R. Moonilal:—flapping to bailout their money.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member! Again, tie it in with regard to the Motion at hand, with regard to the economy.

Dr. R. Moonilal: So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am speaking about confidence in the economy [*Desk thumping*] and confidence in the banking financial service sector. [*Desk thumping*] That is what we are talking about.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will permit me, I am sure, an opportunity to respond to a few issues raised by the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. Now, to me, when I heard the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, and this really provoked me to enter the debate. What are you accusing us of? On the one hand you said we spent a lot “ah” money and on the next hand you said, well, they had a lot “ah” money to spend. So you call out—and they do this all the time, they call out how much was the price of oil, “ah” \$102; how much money we got from the energy sector, \$16 billion; and then they seem to want to beat us for spending it for the people. [*Desk thumping*]

When you look in this country, if I take you on a quick drive, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I could tell you diversification by driving you. As you go down the highway you will see the construction project for what was an oncology centre. If you go down further in Chaguanas you would see the Ministry of Agriculture building. If you go Caroni you would see the licensing office new building; you go down the road you see the children's hospital; you go further you see a south campus of the University of the West Indies. [*Interruption*] You see a cycling velodrome—I will come to that—cycling/swimming. That is diversification. What else? [*Desk thumping*] [*Interruption*] Sorry, I was looking at one side because I was driving south.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence!

Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you reach to the campus in south, diversification, you see a capital investment in a highway to Point Fortin. [*Desk thumping*]

Okay, you say I gone south, I want to come back north, you go down Chaguaramas you see the Boardwalk; [*Desk thumping*] you go and see investment projects in entertainment, sports, recreation; the aviation campus; the Carenage health facility. When I hear persons speak about, we giving out lease for people to put up a car park and so, you know, it betrays a sense of what is diversification. It is not a car park by itself. It is a complex, an entertainment/recreational complex [*Desk thumping*] that will hire their own constituents.

This is a Government that speaks out against projects that hire their own constituents. [*Desk thumping*] No wonder their own constituents are burning tyres on the road and dumping garbage. [*Desk thumping*] Do we really understand what is diversification? When we had a swim meet some months ago, and they said all the hotel rooms in Port of Spain were booked because international teams came for swimming in Couva, that is diversification, generating foreign exchange. [*Desk thumping*] That is what we were about. They speak about those projects as if they are something evil. So we expended money on behalf of the people, money that was there to be expended within the law. Speak about corruption and all deals, and their favourite beating horse, SIS. This blame the last administration, blame Siparia, blame Kamla. You know in two and a half years or what they have not one project that you can look at. [*Desk thumping*] Not one! So, we are hard pressed because there is nothing to see. Nothing!

We heard the Minister of Trade and Industry on the last time on this debate, give this bombshell information, that they were increasing bubble gum, or toffee, or Dinner Mint, or something somewhere they are producing. We are happy for that. But, come on, that cannot be the be-all and end-all of diversification.

So, the last administration put in place, in Chaguaramas, entertainment. That is becoming—Chaguaramas we saw as becoming a Disney World of the English Caribbean, where people will come for entertainment. Instead of going Florida they come Port of Spain, spend their US dollars here. The children's hospital was not meant only for Trinidad and Tobago, but for medical tourism where you will come in [*Desk thumping*] and you will stay in Trinidad, spend your money in hotel. I mean, I do not want to say it this badly, but when people ill they travel with family for medical expenses, and they spend money. Many of us know of

colleagues, friends, family who go abroad for illness and treatment, and so on, and they spend. They have to. That was the vision for Couva. That was the vision. They condemned that. They condemned that as if it is something wrong.

Health tourism—they condemned the Chaguaramas project. We built nine police stations in about five years, and two more, I think, they opened, which we started construction of, a fire station in Mayaro. You can see with your eyes the projects that we expend money on. [*Desk thumping*] If anyone on our Government or any government—[*Interruption*]—I mean, I am not speaking about a hundred schools and so on here, but if you have evidence that someone broke the law, take it to the police, take it to the Integrity Commission. [*Desk thumping*] I want to tell the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, my colleague, I have filed integrity forms every year for 17 years. Have you filed integrity forms? [*Desk thumping*] You have not.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, again, tie in—once you are going down that road, I want you to tie in what you are saying with regard to the Motion. Simple! I am giving you the opportunity, but tie it in.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to indicate that quite recently I had an opportunity for a mini vacation. I am almost scared now to say where I went for vacation. I went to St. Kitts, and you could check house and thing there too.

So, just a short mini vacation. I was amazed with how far St. Kitts had gone in terms of the diversification of what was a sugar economy. An economy that was built on sugar and small provisions and so on, is today a leading light in tourism, services, hospitality, entertainment, and they do not even have the benefit—as yet, maybe—of a Caribbean Airlines flight. And I was amazed that a small island like that monetized sand. What they have done is monetized sand. You pay a hundred dollars so you could go and build a sand castle. We with all the beauty we have, with all the beaches, with all the facilities and culture we talk about, and so on, we are not even a quarter of the way to St. Kitts in terms of what they have been able to do.

International restaurants and shopping, and so on. There is a port facility there, an eating place and so on; the who is who of the world there. I mean, thousands and thousands of people come in there. That is diversification. What we are talking about is getting into health, into entertainment, recreation, and so on, and we expended money on that. We make no apologies for spending the resources of the people on the people. [*Desk thumping*] And if you have

evidence to the contrary then take action. “But doh come here and sound like the maco, you “macoing” people in this house, in that house, and we have information, and so on.” Expend the—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, again, I do not like that word. Retract, use a different word!

Dr. R. Moonilal: Okay, do not talk as if you are spying or you are involved in any underhand manner because next thing somebody see you and they think that you are like Pink Panther out in the bush with a binoculars or something like that. [*Laughter*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know, a luckless Inspector Clouseau, they remind me of.

So, it is true, and the Member raised matters and so on, that the Government—I am responding to what the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West has said. It is a fact that contractors sued the Government, and the Government in its defence made counter claims and sued contractors. That is a fact. That is a fact. But those matters are in court. They are in civil court. That is a matter that the Attorney General, in his wisdom, has embarked upon, and he is free to do that on behalf of the Government. But if you have information of criminal wrongdoing, why are you scared? Send it to the police, the Integrity Commission, and so on. That is all the point we make. But do not come every week and, you know, “boo, boo, boo”, frighten this one, frighten—and that one frighten, everybody frighten except them. “Eh?” And I assure you—well anyway, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me do not go there.

The matter of CEPEP was raised, so I am responding to that, just in a minute or two, because I have much more to say. The CEPEP issue is the first time since Eric Williams’ days we are hearing that you levy on a state company. [*Desk thumping*] It is the first time that they have brought this country into disgrace and shame. Imagine somebody go to make coffee at CEPEP and they put on water to hot, when they spin around the kettle gone. [*Laughter*] They gone with kettle, microwave, table, chair. I understand the chairman had to hide a van somewhere, because they are looking for the Prado to take as well. It is a shame and disgrace.

So, the Government tells us that you cannot find documents at CEPEP and so on. Okay, assuming that you are right, but not admitting that you are right, why did you not put that in a defence in the court? These are default judgements. [*Desk thumping*] CEPEP did not go to court to defend a matter. They could not defend a matter in court and then you jump up and say, corruption, what you were doing. For the record—because I am responding—when we came into office we

took a position. CEPEP was not about only painting stone and cutting grass. It is not. Cabinet approved a policy change, and the board of CEPEP agreed with Cabinet with policy changes. They can take a policy decision at Cabinet any day to tell CEPEP go and fix an aeroplane in Piarco. They could do that. That is a policy issue. We took a policy issue that CEPEP should be involved in minor construction projects, CEPEP should be preventing flooding.

I got fed up as the relevant Minister, every time it floods I have to be on the phone with CEPEP managers, send people here, clean up here. I had an experience in San Fernando West in the Green Acres area, I believe. The Member for San Fernando West knows that area. I went there a morning during the flood and I went with some elderly folks to see what had happened to their homes. I called CEPEP to go and wash down their place, and I made a promise that day that this thing has to stop. We are not here to clean up mud after flood. Let us prevent flooding, and CEPEP was about that. [*Desk thumping*]

So, CEPEP got involved in projects in the health sector, in national security, in environment, and that was a policy change. There is no magic to that. If you want CEPEP to paint stone and cut grass alone that is your prerogative. You can do that. You can do that.

We have heard a lot about the energy sector. I just asked in the diversification issue, what contracts have you renewed? You talk about what we did not do. What did you do? CNC, today 400 workers their necks are on the block, the chopping block. Have they concluded negotiations yet on the gas price? I do not know. What contracts—you know, this Government comes to the table and 99 per cent is blame the last administration, and then next one per cent is insult the last administration, but you know they will not say what they are doing, eh. They will not say. [*Desk thumping*] I thought the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West would seize the opportunity to announce the 16 new contracts that they have signed off on. But they signed off on none, so they cannot announce anything. They signed off on none.

And I come to a major issue, the Mitsubishi plant in La Brea controlled by the People's National Movement, it is Kamla Persad-Bissessar who turned the sod for the construction of the Mitsubishi plant that will be finished in 2019. [*Desk thumping*] We did that. Unicomer Estate—

Hon. Member: Freeport.

Dr. R. Moonilal:—Freeport. It is our Cabinet, under our Cabinet we did that. The Minister of Works and Transport had to give some permission to access the highway. I remember that story well.

So when you drive on the highway and you see all these buildings, and all the industry taking place, you had nothing to do with it. When you came into office you went to turn the sod to build a car park in Port of Spain. We are still waiting for the car park. Not a car park yet. There are problems, I imagine, with that. But that is the only project. The C3 Mall off Corinth there, the Member for Caroni Central was involved in that as well, to create a shopping space. The South Park Mall, same thing. What have you done? Or do you really think you can go to the electorate, as they sought to do last evening, blame the former administration and say vote for us again? We make no apologies. The former Member for San Fernando East, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a great leader in his own time. He was my Member of Parliament, he had a famous saying—Mr. Patrick Manning—he said we spent the money for the people because it is the people’s money. If we spent it wrongly deal with that. That was when we had a man of honour as a Member of Parliament for San Fernando East. A man of great honour. So, San Fernando East has been led previous to today by persons of great honour and grace.

Mr. Al-Rawi: 48(6), Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: 48(6) for what?

Mr. Al-Rawi: Insulting.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: That is insulting?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members! Members! Members!

Dr. R. Moonilal: “Ah”, so—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member! [*Pause*] Members—Member, again, come direct to it, and again, in terms of the implication of past San Fernando East and present San Fernando East, be careful! Proceed.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Mr. Deputy Speaker, Tobago clearly ought to be a focus for any diversification effort. Apart from spying on people on vacation and so on, all of that is nice for by the bar. You can have a brandy and discuss that. But apart from that, Tobago clearly is earmarked.

The Government had a central pillar when they came into office. I asked a series of questions, the questions have been answered in this Parliament. I deliberately asked those questions for written reply. Colleagues wanted to know what I was up to, because they thought I was up to something. I was up to something. I did not want people stand up in Parliament and rhapsodize, and just

talk all over the place. So, I asked simple questions for written answers. You know the answers came back and what they were, eh? In Tobago, the Government says that when they came into office they saw Sandals and they liked Sandals, so there was no open tendering.

So, you have in the Caribbean operating: Macdonald Resort and Spa, you have Cap Maison, you have Royalton, you have some of—you may know others—Four Seasons. You have all of them. But the Government says, “We like Sandals, that is what we want. Sandals it is. They did not invite any other provider of resort, spa, casino, in the Caribbean to put in a bid or put in an interest in Tobago. They said, no man, Sandals is what we see, Sandals is what we want. So, they go with Sandals. Then, saying that they are negotiating and so on, one day they announced an MOU. So, we asked, when you signed this great MOU? Because normally, if a government signs—I mean, the Prime Minister met three or four diplomats the other day. We saw a nice big picture, posing with the diplomats and so on, and that is fine. I think the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West was acting for the Member for Point Fortin, so he was there.

Mr. Young: No, I was not.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Well, the newspapers portrayed that because they assumed you would have a reason for being there. You would not have been there for nothing. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you take out a picture with the diplomats—so, we were saying, but when you signed this agreement there is no photo of you signing, there is not a speech, there is some great fanfare, this is a great decision you make, Sandals coming to Tobago.

You know, when we get the answer, they said they signed something with Sandals, part was signed in Port of Spain and part was signed at an undisclosed location, somewhere else outside of Trinidad and Tobago, somebody signed.

Hon. Member: That is the answer.

Dr. R. Moonilal: That is the answer.

Hon. Member: In writing?

Dr. R. Moonilal: And in writing. And, I said—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence!

Dr. R. Moonilal: And, I said, what are the terms and conditions of this secret deal? They say, no, we have a confidentiality clause, we “cyar” tell you the terms

and conditions of the secret deal. So, we have a secret deal over a secret MOU, signed in two or more countries at the same time. What are we doing, and we are talking about transparency and openness? When we asked further—

Mr. Indarsingh: Just like the *Galleons Passage*.

Dr. R. Moonilal: I am coming to that because it relates to Tobago. When we asked further on that Sandals deal, what arrangements do you have in place in terms of environmental issues, labour issues, services and so on? He say, “No, no, we have not reached there yet. We have not reached there yet.” But telling the country that Sandals is on board.

Now, the truth of the matter which came out I think by accident, is that Sandals require this Government to expend about US \$500 million to go and build the facility in Tobago, and then like the Hyatt and the Wrightson Road project, they will come and brand when you build. And then you would have an arrangement for profits every year and so on.

4.00 p.m.

This Government, I do not know where they are finding US \$500 million from or part of that, but they would like—that is why that project will go nowhere. The sea bridge has collapsed. You talk about diversification. Diversifying what if you cannot get to Tobago; your prime tourist destination? I mean, not even I could go back now. [*Laughter*] The sea bridge down. So if you are not seeing me there it is because I just cannot make it by boat or plane and I do not want to swim half the way.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know they are looking for me and I will give my itinerary of vacations to the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West soon. So the sea bridge collapsed—told us that the *Galicia* was extorting and blackmail. Blackmail what? They cut that contract and to this day we do not have a new vessel or any vessel that they have procured. [*Desk thumping*] We do not know when, how and if the *Galleons Passage*, is it, will be arriving.

Mr. Indarsingh: Chinese New Year’s Day.

Dr. R. Moonilal: They said it was leaving. Imagine where we reach in the country. The people in this country must find out about the *Galleons Passage* by Twitter, by tweet and Instagram. They cannot go to the post—they have abandoned apparently the Cabinet press conference. They have abandoned that in talking to the media. They now tweet to tell you information that you need on critical matters as \$120 million purchase of a boat. We want to know, who is the

crew? Where did you get the crew from? Who is bringing this boat to Trinidad? We do not know, but then come today to talk about, you know, charges.

When they got into office, anybody remember ghost workers at the Attorney General's Ministry? Did the ghostbusters come in and you know, expose that? Do we have anybody before a court? Anybody was charged for ghost workers at the Attorney General's office? But they come again with this business. And, you know there is so much I could say there, I do not want to say.

I want to come to a recent issue, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There will be no hope in this country for investment, for job creation. Today workers, and I want to come to workers now, I want to come to workers. Three health centres in Port of Spain this week, employees said they not going to work there because they are scared for their lives. A couple of days ago, Jordan Hill, employees there, teachers, workers, these are workers, the Motion deals with employment. Teachers there are threatened, one was robbed at gun point. Last night, at Biche High School, was it, broke in to the school. So you are looking at the schools, you are looking at the health centres. Very soon, public officers will not want to go to—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members on the Government side, again, the continuous chatter. Silence. Proceed.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you. Very soon, public servants will not want to go to work, they will claim that their lives are in danger and nothing you can do to deal with that.

So you have unemployment, people losing their jobs. And I have a take on this. The Government as they stood today and last evening I believe, want to boast about this figure of the corruption index and so on going down and the Member for Caroni Central suggests that if that is so, it could well be the passage of legislation that we have put in place and so on. It could well be. But, you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, every Tuesday as a rule, many of us, if not all, meet our constituents. Today, people are coming to us, reminiscent of years ago, crying for jobs, young people, parents are coming with their children to beg for jobs, grandparents are bringing their grandchildren to plea with you to help them to get a job. You open the newspaper, it is blood, blood, blood. You see it today a protest for a school, tomorrow a protest for jobs, the next day a protest for something else.

Anybody notice the corruption index for the Gaza Strip? Anybody know what that figure was? I am sure nobody took note of the corruption in the Gaza Strip or

is Kashmir in the disputed province. The reason, because nobody writes about corruption in the disputed province. It is only murder and mayhem defines them. The Gaza Strip is defined by conflict and war. Trinidad and Tobago is in a state of war. [*Desk thumping*] So headlines now do not reflect corruption. People do not talk about corruption the way they used to before because they are consumed with murder, with blood. This is survival time, because the perception index is based on news. It is based on newspaper, radio, TV. It is called the perception index. Murder has taken over. [*Crosstalk*] You have a situation in this country where every Monday morning is protests on the streets for something or the other, and I come to that because it affects the economy.

Within the last 24 hours we have heard from the head of the Mission of the United Kingdom in Trinidad and Tobago, he made a very critical point. He said, do not take terrorist threats as a joke. The Prime Minister says, the terrorist threat is not a joke. I want to ask him, who was laughing? Who said it was a joke? But it is a cliché “nah”, do not take it as a joke, although nobody did. The US Embassy, and this has to do with business, it has to do with diversification. In an advisory dated February 22nd, yesterday, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and this has to do with business, with investment, with jobs, with trade, with banking, finance, insurance. When I saw a travel advisory from the US Embassy, I asked my colleagues in our internal system, I said, could somebody check to tell me this is not fake news. I could not believe that a United States Embassy could write, “Exercise increased caution in Trinidad and Tobago due to crime and terrorism.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member—[*Interruption*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker:—your speaking time initially has expired. You have an additional 15. Care to avail yourself?

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Dr. R. Moonilal: [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, this has to do with business, we are diversifying an economy. The Member for Tobago West, a reveller, I saw her during the Carnival, as a reveller. Well, I am not going further than saying as a reveller, but you are encouraging the tourists to come, we want the visitor arrivals to increase. Hear this; “violent crimes such as murder, robbery, assault, sexual assault, home invasion and kidnapping is common. A significant portion...is gang-related.” Hear this one, for the tourist. This is

people in America or Europe. I have had the opportunity to live in Europe for several years, renting a student apartment, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West and [*Laughter and crosstalk*] and if any time you are in need, we have homes available for you at the shopping mall. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we could have helped him instead of going by the chairman of Petrotrin house. Mr. Deputy Speaker, they continue:

“Terrorists may attack with little or no warning, targeting tourist locations, transportation hubs, markets/shopping malls, local government facilities, hotels, clubs, restaurants, places of worship, parks, major sporting and cultural events, educational institution, airports, and other public areas.”

Where the tourist should go?

Miss Ramdial: They are not coming.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Where they should go, in your house?

Miss Ramdial: They are not coming.

Dr. R. Moonilal: But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is the whole country. So someone saved their money. They have their family, they work hard for a few years, they save some money, they are looking to go for their vacation. They say, you know I have heard of Trinidad and Tobago, I think we should go down there. They look on the state department website, they read this, but who is coming here. Who is coming here? An assassin? Who is coming here? And this will impede investments. Who is coming to invest in Trinidad and Tobago when they read that you are not safe at any place? Well, any public place. You are safe privately, maybe. You are not safe there, but that is what they write. And this has the potential to lead to an investment strike.

Mr. Singh: A capital flight.

Dr. R. Moonilal: A capital flight. Because you see, the energy sector is so designed. I mean, many people know it, but we just repeat it. Crime does not affect terribly in energy investment because nobody comes. Money comes, they start a plant, they work there and then they make their profits, they take it out. But you see manufacturing, manufacturing, small business—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Tourism.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Tourism. This is where insecurity and terrorist threat affect. [*Desk thumping*] But do you know those areas are the job creating sectors? The energy sector make money, we know that, but they employ 3 per cent, I think of the labour market.

Mr. Karim: Capital intensive.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Capital intensive. Labour is going into the service sector, into insurance and banking, hospitality, increasingly entertainment. That is where labour goes to and you are reading a report like this. So you will come with your children on a vacation and walk the street, we want to buy some food and so on. You cannot do that here. So that the Government should be responding to this. [*Desk thumping*] They should be responding to this, telling the population what you intend to do apart from blame the Opposition.

Now, if you would hear the Government you would think that if we pass the anti-gang legislation we will deal with the climate change problem. Yeah, we would fix climate change if we do that. Everything will be solved by that, everything and we come to the table, we will negotiate. I am confident, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a negotiator from the old school, I am confident that we will come to some arrangement on that. I am confident so I am not going there. But this approach of blame the Opposition has to stop, [*Desk thumping*] because as you blame the Opposition the next side of the coin is, what did you do? What did you do, just spin a coin, blame opposition one side and what did I do? But you would have done nothing. And the country believes that you have no plan.

So instead of quickly getting the country on board with your policy measures, your policy framework and so on, you do nothing. And a key area—the Government took an approach when they came into office and that is their right, I guess they are in Government, they can do that; we will fight the business community. We will fight them, we will jail them, we will throw them out, we will take them to court and sue them for moneys and so on. That has been their approach. Instead of meeting and treating with the business community, getting them on board to construct projects, hire people, use equipment—and I assure the business community today, and the construction sector in particular, that it is only time, only time, that the United National Congress, the Member for Siparia, returns to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And we can fix that problem because we fixed it before.

When we got into office 2010, I was there. Contractors came to us, they say the former Manning administration owed them \$7 billion. What did we do? Did we sue them? Did we tell them they are crooks and involved in cartel? Did we take them to court? And there is a question to be answered as to the legal fees that this Government is chalking up. [*Desk thumping*] For those on this side to pay, eh, they are going to chalk up \$100 million in legal fees that we will have

one day to pay, because every time they talk court, court is not cheap. Court is not cheap. So they are taking everybody to court. Today, we hear they are taking Intercontinental somebody to court. Who is paying the legal fees? Is it the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West? He is in trouble by himself. He "doh" have time for legal fees to pay. He has to look for house and so on. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Al-Rawi: 48(6).

Dr. R. Moonilal: It is us who will have to pay the legal fees.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Point of order. 48(4), 48(6).

Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I withdraw—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: And again, Member. Earlier, you had alluded to the same scenario. So please, as you said you have withdrawn, move on.

Dr. R. Moonilal: I am very sorry if the Member feels he was reflected upon—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, move on.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes, Sir. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, please the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West is disturbing me.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, Member. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, I have ruled, he is moving on. [*Crosstalk*] Member, Member, Member—[*Interruption*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: Can I move on?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We are moving to tea folks, again proceed.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West is understandably provoked, but I will ask him to just give me 10 minutes to finish.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, so this issue of meeting and treating with the construction sector, we had to face that problem. Persons who I have never seen before come up to me, they say we are owed millions of dollars. Who owe you that? They say Uthara Rao, whoever he is. Whoever he is, he owed money. But I say, I do not know this man, I never see him in life. He has never been seen since. It was the EMBDC and I want to get to the EMBDC, because the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West raised that matter. I want to raise that matter. The EMBDC under Uthara Rao in the Manning administration run up bills with

contractors and those are the same bills today this Government want to take the contractors to court for, for money under the Manning administration. [*Desk thumping*]

But what did we do? You know what we did, Mr. Deputy Speaker? We called the contractors together. We say listen, it have no way we could pay all that money you claim you are owed. Let us negotiate, reduce here, reduce here, in some cases interest was very high. We made a deal, we say listen, take the interest away, take it off the table and we are starting to pay some moneys that you are owed because they had their paper work. And you know what the Government do not understand is that contractors have better paperwork, have better accounting systems, have better systems in place than a Government Ministry. So when you take them to court be careful because you see they have all their certificates of completion which you claimed lost. They say CEPEP lose papers. They did not say the former chairman of CEPEP under them brought in his own staff and throw out public officers so they could go and dig up in papers. Today they say papers gone. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am telling you the approach. If you go to the contractors and tell them let us negotiate, but while we are negotiating you can continue working on projects and you will be paid.

This Government has continued to deal with this country in a certain way. There is a myth. They say they do not have any money. Every time you see them they are crying blood, we have no money. They increased every conceivable tax in this country. [*Desk thumping*] How much money did you raise from that? The price of oil today is higher than that which you budgeted for. They have spent over \$100 billion, more money than the People's Partnership did in the comparable period. [*Desk thumping*] They have spent more. What do you have to show for it? If you call the contractors in and indicate that, listen, we want you to continue working, we will pay you for work that you do now, but continue working and let us negotiate all these back pay and back wages, you would do well. But no, no, no. You pick up the contractors and you say you have to sue them. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to quote from an article in the newspaper of just yesterday, February 22nd:

“No signs of recovery yet for construction sector”

It is in the *Business Guardian*, I believe, yes. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is telling where the President of the Contractors Association, TTCA, is saying:

“When they speak, they talk about projects that were happening and will happen. So far nothing is happening.”

I quote him:

“So far nothing is happening.”

“No new projects have really started.

The Minister of Finance talked about housing project but so far, nothing has happened...”

Hon. Member: What!

Dr. R. Moonilal: This is the Contractors Association saying that. They say:

They talked a lot and explain all their projects but nothing is taking place, nothing has started.

The PPP Unit, which is private/public sector partnership unit, established and that was a big song and cry, but to this day no contractors and no projects have gotten off the ground. Contractors are still not being paid and no projects have been executed. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this speaks volumes where the construction sector is saying machinery parked up. All their equipment idle. Some people are selling away equipment, some giving it away, some being seized by the banks and so on. You see, to understand that industry they do not understand. This Government is antibusiness. They do not understand business. [*Desk thumping*] They do not understand the private sector; that is why you can stand here and say we lease a car park for \$300 million and we are getting \$30 a year and so on.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, your display, you can probably put it aside if you are completed.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Sorry. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is why they could talk about a car park and not understand a development, because when you meet and treat with contractors on projects you get the contractor working quickly. For a Government, any time a contractor threatens to stop work that is doomsday, because that is loss of jobs, loss of income.

They began their term of office where ArcelorMittal closed down, 500 gone. CNC today, 400 on the chopping block. In all the Ministries, in Methanol, a company, and they sit there on their throne, on their pedestal, and they say nothing and they do nothing. They said they creating 90,000 jobs driving trucks in Canada. To this day we do not know anybody who went, come back or still there.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Government, I am advising them that they are in the second half of the game. The game is in the second half. When you blink, the second half gone. In terms of a working week they are on Thursday, they have Friday left. They have no project to show, they have nothing to show. They have stopped in the housing sector. The Member for San Fernando East, he has an ability now, I noticed he is disappearing in quick sight. Every time you look for him—there was a time when he stayed in this House at least. But I notice—I cannot see him, I do not know what he is about. They have 19 construction projects.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, you have two more minutes.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much. They have 19 construction projects in housing unfinished. They will not finish those projects, distribute the homes, many along the East West Corridor eh. I can call Trestrail, I can call Arima, River-Runs-Through, and so on, many. They will not finish that but they are going now to move out the nurseries in St. Augustine where the farmers use to put housing there. That has a political purpose. [*Crosstalk*] Bon Air Gardens, Bon Air has—Mr. Deputy Speaker, you have to protect me from these delinquents.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, Member, Member. Members on the Government side, again, we will be breaking for tea shortly, so again, silence, let us listen to the Member, he is winding up.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Deputy Speaker, in winding up, I want to alert the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, that you can get away sometimes, but not all the time, by deflecting opinion and by seeking to confuse and seeking to change the games and you can play games as much as you want. At the end of the day, all Governments are tested on performance. [*Desk thumping*] And the time has already come, where the population are seeing you without your clothes, and it is not a pretty sight.

Mr. Al-Rawi: 48(6). [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member. [*Crosstalk*] Member, again, your metaphor, you know your metaphor. Change it.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I put back on that clothes, [*Laughter*] they are seeing them for what they are. They are seeing them for what they are, and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what we see on the part of the Government is not a good sight. And unless this Government takes seriously, opening and finishing some of the projects started by the Partnership administration, we will not get to

any journey to diversification, we will not get on any journey to diversification in this country. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Tobago West. [*Desk thumping*] And keep in mind, Members, Members, keep in mind that we will be suspending at 4.30 p.m. Proceed.

The Minister of Tourism (Hon. Shamfa Cudjoe): [*Crosstalk*] Thank you very much—I cannot hear myself, Member for Couva South. Mr. Deputy Speaker, could you protect me from the Member for Couva South, please. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, please. Each Member will be allowed to enter the debate. Right now it is the Member for Tobago West. Kindly proceed.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I want to thank you for the opportunity to join this debate at this time. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to say it is always very discomfoting coming to this House to listen to the now Opposition speak about diversification and what we should do and what, a host of things that they did not do. And the nation needs to ask the question: When you were in Government what did you do to diversify the economy? What did you do to advance economic development for Trinidad and Tobago? It is interesting to stand here and listen to the Opposition, because I could recall, we were in Opposition at the point in time when it was in four months that the People's Partnership Government would have sent home over 10,000 people and the newspaper records show that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Caroni Central would have spoken about the need for diversification and so on, and the Member would have been a part of the Government, both, under the NAR and under the UNC and had more than one opportunity, pretty much several opportunities to contribute to economic diversification in Trinidad and Tobago. It is interesting, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and might I say disheartening to sit and listen to all this talk from a previous Government or Opposition that during their time when they had the precise opportunity to invest in the future of Trinidad and Tobago would have spent millions to move a fire truck from the side of the road, would have done all kinds of stuff like Hoops for Life and Life Sport and some of these programmes that would have caused much chaos, confusion and corruption in Trinidad and Tobago.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, allow me to stand here and raise issues. I want to talk to Tobago first and foremost. Because if you listen to the Members opposite

you would believe that they have some kind of interest in tourism development in Tobago. I have listened to the outburst from the Member for Couva North, even the Member for Oropouche East here today. And I want to say, I could remember returning home from school [*Crosstalk*] in 2008—Mr. Deputy Speaker, can you protect me from the Member for Couva South, please, and please let him know he will have his chance to speak.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All Members will be given the necessary protection, Members. And again, we are just roughly six minutes away from the suspension. Members, let the Member complete her contribution. Proceed.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I could remember in 2008 when I moved back home from completing my studies in the US and the people of Tobago, under the leadership of the then Chief Secretary, Mr. Orville London, were reaching out to Sandals. In 2012 again, Mr. London was reaching out to Sandals. Tobago had been reaching out to Sandals for years and here we are at this point where we have engaged Sandals in discussions and negotiations are ongoing.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are at a point where we could seize the moment to have this kind of development take place in Tobago. We see what Sandals has done for Barbados, for Jamaica, for St. Lucia which is now building its fourth Sandals and the people of Tobago would like the opportunity also to participate in that kind of development. So if Sandals is good for Jamaica, for Barbados and for the rest of the region, why is it not good for Tobago, a nation that has been knocking on the doors of Sandals for years? The stakeholders are ready, the people of Tobago are ready for this level of economic activity and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, may everybody who is not happy for Tobago at this time or not supportive let them—sit back and allow us to strive, “nah”. Give us the opportunity to seize the moment and to attract this kind of investment to our shores.

I want to let the people of Trinidad and Tobago know that even in this negotiation the Government of Trinidad and Tobago would not make any kind of commitment that would damage the people of Trinidad and Tobago especially the people of Tobago and we would continue to interact with the nation and communicate with them so they would know what is taking place.

It is unfortunate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that Members opposite and their peers and supporters take to social media, ill-speaking Tobago and trying to dissuade people from investing and coming to Tobago. And there are several social media posts that state so, but I would not use my time to treat with them. But this is an

Opposition that was in Government that would have spoken to, oh, they love Tobago and they want to invest in Tobago. At the point in time when they were there, let us ask, what did they do for Tobago and Tobago's tourism? We have the room upgrade programme that was instituted in 2011. Not one hotelier, not one business person in Tobago had the opportunity to participate in that programme whilst the business people in Trinidad were benefiting from the room upgrade programme, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I could remember as a Tobagonian, a parliamentarian travelling weekly to Trinidad, the promises about refurbishing and expanding the Crown Point Airport. They would have cordoned that area with galvanize for years, promising to do works on the airport in Tobago and that was never done. And this Government would have made the decision to ensure that the airport is fixed and expanded. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am talking about works with WASA and Cove Plant, it is this Government that has come at this point in time to improve infrastructure for Tobago and it is this Government in December 2015 that would have taken a note—I took that Note to Cabinet to get the Tobago stakeholders to have access to the room upgrade programme, because they sat there and suffered while they did not help them. [*Desk thumping*]

So to come here and to pretend that you have any love or any care for Tobago, I do not know who they think they are fooling. I could remember under the UNC, when the UNC was in Government, it was one international flight coming to Tobago per week. One, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But in November and October of last year we could now speak to Thomas Cook now flying to Tobago directly. We could now speak to Condor flying to Tobago directly from Frankfurt. And that did not happen under their watch. So it is all well and good for the Member for Couva North to sit there and shout, "Nobody is coming, nobody is coming", but what did you do when you were there for people to come? [*Desk thumping*]

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is about what you have done and what you are doing. Rome was not built in a day and this Government is working with the Tobago House of Assembly to help to improve tourism in Tobago and to afford the opportunities to the tourism sector.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, allow me to speak to some of the infrastructural development that is taking place in Tobago because it is not just about development specifically for tourism, but it is for the people of Tobago in order to have a proper business environment. So, we are developing Tobagonians and developing Tobago so that people would be attracted to Tobago, to invest in Tobago so we could further diversify the economy of Tobago and Trinidad and

Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me speak to some of the projects even under WASA to improve water services in Tobago. The development of wells in Goldsborough, Roxborough, Calder Hall [*Desk thumping*] among other areas and these projects would bring four million gallons of water per day to these areas, the upgrade of the Charlotteville water treatment plant which is expected to be completed by July of this year.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, sorry to interrupt at this time, but it is now 4.30 p.m. and we would like to take the suspension for tea. This House will resume at 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: As we resume after tea, I recognize the Member for Tobago West. You have your continuance of 21 minutes of your usual time.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to continue my contribution. I want to say before I continue, before the break, while I was speaking, there was much crosstalk and much comments and I want to seek your protection from early because “I doh wanna protect mehself” today. Right? So I want to just put you on guard as it relates to that.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are here today to treat with this issue as it relates to a Motion speaking to the need to diversify the economy and so on and this country has been in this place before. We could all recall the 1980s when there was an economic recession and at that point in time, the NAR was in power, and there are Members who now sit opposite that were a part of that administration. We ended up in the—the dollar was devalued in August of 1988 and in 1988 November, we were in the hands of the IMF. I was six years old at the time but I am sure there are people who are around who would recall what we would have experienced when we were in the hands of the IMF. There was reduction in wages and salaries, there was retrenchment; unemployment went from the 10 per cent to 22 per cent; the price of food went up extremely high because price controls were removed.

And this Government, at this point in time, when we are facing low oil prices once again, we are trying to prevent this country from ending up in the hands of the IMF, especially coming after some of the hardest five years that this country

Diversification of the Economy
[HON. S. CUDJOE]

Friday, February 23, 2018

has ever seen in our development, where moneys had been wasted by governments, squandered, given to the friends, given to the families. We are now here to restore order to this country and bring back this place to a place of normalcy where we can feel comfortable and lift our heads as Trinbagonians again and feel proud, so we are here for that.

So allow me to say that I am here for that. So the snide remarks and the comments and what they post about me on their Facebook pages, that is not my business, I am here to protect the people of Trinidad and Tobago from them. [*Desk thumping*] That is what I was created for; “I here for that.” So what they have to say about me in their—the remarks they are throwing at me and on their social media—I heard it because I was here standing—that is their business, that is not my business. I am here to protect the people of Trinidad and Tobago from them and I am not looking for likes. Likes and love is “for yuh boyfriend and yuh husband and yuh mother and so”. Right? I am here to serve and is “ah battalion ah red people behind me”. [*Desk thumping*] “So let me place on the record, this is what I here for”.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Government is serious about transforming this economy. This Government is serious about diversifying the economy and one of the ways we intend to do that is through the tourism sector. For the most part, our history shows and our economic activity shows that we have been dependent on oil and gas for quite some time and we are now at a place where oil and gas prices are no longer favourable to us. In order to maintain this standard of living that we now enjoy and we have grown accustomed to, we have to diversify. We have to find other means and methods in order to bring in revenue. So we would have undergone a study to evaluate, to review the economic situation in Trinidad and Tobago, especially the tourism sector. We did our studies, we brought in our consultants and we look at the numbers over the years. We have been experiencing declines in our tourism arrivals numbers and tourism spend for close to a decade.

So, there are people who sit opposite who would try to make you think since Shamfa Cudjoe became Minister of Tourism, nothing is happening in tourism and I stop to ask them. Anybody come to me with that, I say, “Name previous tourism Ministers under their watch and what did they do?” Because there were at least four tourism Ministers under their watch. [*Crosstalk*] At least four in a term of five years. There was Cadiz, there was Hadeed, there was Sharma, there was Delmon Baker at one point in time, and my question is: What was their

contribution? And if you cannot tell me what their contributions were, highlight some achievements of those Ministers under your watch—and you know what too? The Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla served as a personal adviser to Minister Cadiz and in four months, would have made at least four trips going out to solicit business for Trinidad and Tobago, and I want to know: What did you bring back? “Since yuh down Shamfa Cudjoe throat”, what did you bring back?

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are here doing this work in order to transform the economy—and I was talking about the decrease. In 2010, the numbers went down by 62,000; 2011, a decrease of 22,000; in 2012, it went back up by 13,000; in 2013, arrivals declined by 10,000; 2014, declined by 22,000; 2015, up by 27,000; 2016, down by 31,000; 2017, down by 14,000. So we have to employ strategies so that there is constant and consistent growth. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, the question coming from opposite is: Have we done so?

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so we have taken the initiative to have two separate entities. One for Trinidad, one for Tobago and the country is well aware because we are talking about two different sets of tourism products and services being offered. The Tobago House of Assembly which is responsible for tourism development in Tobago, has established its company and here in Trinidad, we are doing the same, so we are making the necessary move to place laser focus on our product. Because it is difficult to get the necessary airlift to Trinidad and Tobago for tourism purposes because we are so far south, the cost of airline tickets are usually more expensive; the cost of cruises to come to Trinidad and Tobago is usually more expensive because of how far south we are and we have not been traditionally building the tourism sector. We have to ensure that our product is up to standard and up to quality.

We also are working to provide the necessary assistance to stakeholders. The Government Loan Guarantee Programme where the Government stands as guarantor for the tourism stakeholders to ensure that there are no foreclosures. We could provide the necessary support so that they could face the bank to improve their businesses, to expand their business operations and so on, that is taking place and we are subsidizing those loans to the tune of 5 per cent of the interest rate and each loan could stand guarantee of up to \$10 million. We have had 19 success stories in the past under this programme and we have expanded and extended this programme and we are working with the banks to ensure that it is successful.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have identified an office for the Government Loan Guarantee Programme through the TTBDL in Tobago. We have worked with

CAST and they have identified an office space. Because under the previous Government, the TTBDL was kicked out of Tobago and the person who was the Tobago officer was operating out of her home in Signal Hill. This Government has identified an office space so that they could operate in Tobago so that Tobago stakeholders could have access to those services. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, allow me to move now to the room upgrade programme. The tourism room upgrade programme that was instituted in 2011 and never ever available to the stakeholders in Tobago. When you upgrade a room, you get 50 per cent back if you have under six rooms and above, and if you have under six rooms, you get a reimbursement of 40 per cent, and the stakeholders in Tobago who they care so much about and feel so sorry for did not have the opportunity to improve their properties because they did not have access to this facility under their watch because they were back and forth with the Tobago House of Assembly about who has responsibility for tourism in Tobago. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I took a note to the Cabinet in 2015 and now that programme is under the remit of the Tobago House of Assembly with the necessary funding to provide those services to the stakeholders in Tobago for the very first time. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, a regulatory authority so that we can have basic standards in the tourism sector. We claim to be so caring about tourism, we want tourism to grow and this country has never had mandatory standards for the sector. “So anybody with ah room downstairs dey mother house could say, yeah, ah running ah guesthouse down there” without any kind of interruption. We are establishing basic and mandatory standards. The consultations are ongoing. We have had the assistance of both local and international stakeholders in order to bring this to life and for the first time in the history of this country, Trinidad and Tobago is working towards a regulatory authority to have basic standards. That has never happened. We are the only country in the region that claims to be serious about tourism development that do not have a standards authority or a basic standards scheme for tourism. So we want to talk about marketing and we want to talk about all the other areas that are related to developing the tourism sector but you do not want to talk standards. How could you stand up against “ah Barbados, ah Bahamas, ah Jamaica”? And that has never happened before in the history of this country and it is now happening for the first time.

And alongside these developments, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are working in Tobago and in Trinidad to develop the infrastructure to make a proper business—

a favourable business environment for stakeholders and for investors from outside to come. So we talk about the desalination plant in Tobago. We talk about the new wells to bring us up to nine million gallons of water per day, more water per day. We talk about the Cove plant and the improvement in electrical facilities to Tobago. We talk about the street lighting programme that is taking place from east to west. The south west where most of Tobago's tourism activity happens, the south west wastewater treatment that is happening in Tobago now under this Government and that did not happen before.

So when you hear those opposite talk about what are you doing for tourism? We have to ask them, "Well, what did you do for tourism especially in Tobago?" And the Member for Oropouche East would have said he is taking a ride and he is pointing out developments in Tobago, you could not have done that under their watch. All the development taking place in Tobago or would have taken place in Tobago under the last decade is under the People's National Movement in Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

You know, I could remember the Chief Secretary writing the then leader of the House, the Prime Minister at that time, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, now Member for Siparia, writing over and over for assistance to provide relief to the people of Tobago, and they were laughing on their political platform saying he is going to write until his ink done. I remember that. I remember having URP in Tobago and no allocations made for URP projects. I remember no allocations made for CEPEP projects and you claim to be concerned about the people of Tobago. Today, I am pleased to see the new Chief Secretary in Tobago, Mr. Kelvin Charles, revamping the CEPEP project, [*Desk thumping*] helping the people. Everybody who is enrolled in CEPEP now has to take an evening class to develop their skills and it is about improving productivity in Tobago. Because to enter this new chapter of development as it relates to tourism, people have to change their culture, change our attitude. Tobagonians have to become more productive and the new Tobago House of Assembly is working with Tobagonians to ensure that that happens.

And even as we look to welcoming Sandals and other new developments in Tobago, you have the Tobago House of Assembly, Division of Tourism, working with the Tobago Hospitality Institute to provide classes and courses to Tobagonians preparing us for when Sandals comes, and not just when Sandals comes but preparing us to be better service providers in Tobago because oftentimes, people complain about customer service and Tobagonians are not

ready to seize the moment, well we are developing Tobagonians in a developing Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are not where we need to be but the work is taking place and Rome was not built in a day and yes, there were days when Tobago saw figures of 80-something thousand visitors and those were days when we were better able to record information because we could have picked up people coming into Trinidad and coming into Tobago. In 2008, that process was changed and we are only now picking up numbers of people flying directly to Tobago, and we are now working with CSO and Ministry of Planning to have a better system where we can capture those who would have landed in Trinidad and going on to Tobago, and that would help us to figure out what is really taking place as it relates to our figures. So work is happening.

I am pleased to see the Tobago House of Assembly working with agricultural groups to bring agricultural projects and programmes in sync with tourism. So now there are tours on cocoa estate. You have Tobago agro processors doing work and working along with tourism stakeholders in Tobago. Yes, airlift has been a problem. We are happy to welcome Condor, happy to welcome Thomas Cook. And the Tobago House of Assembly alongside the Ministry of Tourism and Airport Authority went out to Ecuador a couple of weeks ago, Carnival week, to the Routes conference to speak to airline service providers to bring direct flights to Trinidad and to Tobago also, so the work is ongoing. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we talk about Grange Police Station, Crown Point Police Station, Shirvan Police Station making Tobago more attractive for investment and I like to say a good place to live is a good place to spend your vacation. The Ministry of Finance is in talks with the Tobago House of Assembly about the marina for Tobago.

And under this Government, I remember sitting opposite and bringing complaints from maxi men in Tobago and the tourism operators in Tobago, because there was a quota on the number—a limit on the number of buses that could have served Tobago at the time—I think it was 25 at the time—asking that that limit be raised so that when cruise ships come in, we have enough buses to transport both the school children and to transport the visitors and we did not get that help from that Government. It is under this Government [*Desk thumping*] in that 2017/2018 budget that would have lifted the limit so that Tobagonians could now invest in that kind of business and provide better services. And you want to sit there and ask what is happening with tourism in Tobago. Yes, it is going to take some time to get there but we are now doing what you did not do.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to speak also about the wedding fraternity in Tobago because we are moving towards improving our capacity to do weddings in Tobago. We are a better attraction to do weddings than Trinidad; destination to do weddings than Trinidad. We do destination weddings for tourists. And it is this Government that would have extended the time so you could have early morning weddings, late evening weddings. We would have also reduced the residency time so that foreigners who come into Tobago to get married do not have to wait three days anymore, they could now do so within one day, and it is this People's National Movement Government that listened to the people of Tobago and had that done.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, allow me to turn my attention now to some of what the Ministry of Tourism has been doing. It is this Minister of Tourism and this PNM Government that would have introduced to Trinidad and Tobago the first mobile app for tourism. [*Desk thumping*] Member of Parliament for Caroni Central would have talked about "if we are talking about diversification, we have to talk about digital technology" and so on. It is this Government, this Ministry of Tourism that introduced, for the first time, the GoTrinBago app. We have now accessed over 19 countries and have over 90,000 downloads of the GoTrinBago app at the touch of a button. From your smartphone, from your iPad, you can see what there is to offer in Trinidad and in Tobago and that is run alongside our LIME 365 campaign. Let us talk about "Stay To Get Away" because we have to change the culture and improve people's knowledge and understanding, an appreciation for tourism so we launched the "Stay To Get Away" campaign so that locals will be encouraged to go from village to village, seeing different sites and attractions, experience Trinidad and Tobago for themselves.

Today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of Tourism hosted I think the programme—no, the programme would have ended around three o'clock, a symposium called digitalization of the tourism sector and we are looking at how technology has impacted the tourism sector because here in Trinidad and Tobago, at least 40 per cent of our stakeholders do not have an online presence, and in order to make it today in business, you have to have access to your customers far and wide through online presence, using the Internet, using social media, Instagram, Facebook and that had not happened before.

Prior to that, we would have solely depended on going—spending moneys to go out there to different trade shows and so on, millions and millions and millions, even billions of dollars to do so, but now we can access a wider range of

customers and potential travellers to Trinidad and Tobago by the use of technology. So we brought over 300 stakeholders to the Hyatt today and we partnered with Massy, we partnered with stakeholders, we partnered with the private sector, in order to teach our stakeholders, to properly equip them so that they can better stand, be on a stronger footing as we look to expand our business and improve our attractiveness and competitiveness here in Trinidad and Tobago and that has not happened before. Further, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a part of our PSIP project, we have a digital technology programme where we are going to help our stakeholders to establish social media and Internet presence, and that is the kind of work that is taking place.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are reviewing the national tourism policy which is now nine years old. We are also reviewing the master plan, the tourism master plan, which was developed in 1995 when I was in Form 2.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Tobago West, your initial 30 minutes have expired. You have an additional 15. Do you care to avail yourself?

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Yes, thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Kindly proceed.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So I was in second form, wearing ribbons at Scarborough Secondary School when the master plan was developed and Governments came and left after that and we are still here working with a master plan that was developed in 1995. The UNC came and left twice and did nothing with it and it is this Government, this administration that is working to improve the master plan so that we can all be on one page.

As I said, in order to have the necessary improvements to move to where we want to go, we have to bring our young people on board so we are engaging in school caravans. We have gone out to different schools educating the young people about tourism, helping them to develop an attitude and appreciation for service where you are doing social media campaigns to encourage young people to take pictures, to develop their skills in short video production and in writing short stories about Trinidad and Tobago and that is the work taking place under the Ministry of Tourism.

I want to talk a little bit about the junior Minister of Tourism initiative that they are working with Caribbean Tourism Organization. For the first time in the history of this nation, Trinidad and Tobago, through the Ministry of Tourism, entered the junior Minister of tourism conference and caucus. That initiative had been around with CTO since the year 2000. Ministers and Governments came and

left and that did not happen, we did not participate. We participated for the first time year before last year and our participant who came from Manzanilla Secondary placed second in the competition and our participant for last year, Miss Telesford from Naparima Girls' High placed third and she is our junior Minister of Tourism for today. Encouraging young people; making that paradigm shift; bringing everybody on board and you did not participate during your time.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to move now to our fiscal projects. We are doing improvement works at the stands—of course, well let me talk about Maracas first. Many have come and gone and talked about developing Maracas and the Maracas project. Package one has been completed and we have moved from 140 parking spaces to 360 parking spaces of international standard. [*Desk thumping*] As the Member for Oropouche East said, this is not just “ah” car park, this is an entertainment facility. [*Desk thumping*] Yeah? This is a place for economic activity. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to thank NIPDEC for coming on board, for helping us to run that car park. We have the retention pond already built so that flooding of the area should be a thing of the past. We have the new booths being built that had not been rebuilt since the 1960s and that is happening under this Government; that is some of the nothing happening in the Ministry of Tourism.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, allow me to speak a little bit about our trip to World Travel Market done last year November and we were able to attract DER Touristik, a German company, which is the largest German travel agent company and they are going to be coming to Trinidad for the first time to do a mega fan trip in November of this year and that has never happened before where Trinidad has been able to attract the Scandinavia market. We have 140 travel agents coming to participate in a mega fan trip. We are now participating in negotiations with them and we look forward to bringing this thing to life. We go to ITB in a couple of weeks in order to further our discussions with them. I hope, Mr. Deputy Speaker, some mischievous person do not go sending bad notes to them because that has happened before. Whenever this side sets out to do something good for this country, there is always somebody mischievous, opposite or otherwise, trying to do something negative in order to negate our actions.

But, as I said, we are here for the development of the people of Tobago. We are here for the development of this country. And I mark with interest, the Member for Couva South. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was looking at the news a couple days—probably last week and there was the Member for Couva South saying—responding to one vagrant. I think it is one vagrant who stole “ah tin ah

something from ah grocery”. I think it is tuna and something and the Member got on TV, “they thieving in Tobago, ting so bad, the boat didn’t come, and dey eh have no food”. When you have people, Mr. Deputy Speaker, especially in high office, going out there trying to ill-speak the destination, how do you expect people to want to come?

Miss Ramdial: That is the reality of the situation.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: That is not the reality of the situation. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence. Silence.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Where in Tobago you live? [*Continuous crosstalk*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to ask some of these people where in Tobago do they live. I live in Tobago. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] I travel back and forth at least three, four times a week to serve. [*Crosstalk*] I live there. Where in Tobago you live?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, Members. Again, individuals, and Members would have their time in order to enter the debate on the particular Motion. All right? We have been going fine, please minimize on the number of outbursts and the loudness of the outburst please. Proceed, Member for Tobago West.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Mr. Deputy Speaker, as somebody who was born and grew up in Tobago, who lives there, who serves the people there, who travels back and forth and is well aware of what is taking place in Tobago, I would say this inter-island transportation has been challenging for us. But you see the horror stories that Members opposite and their supporters and friends are trying to have out there in the public domain, it is not true, and it is killing the destination.

5.30 p.m.

Deputy Speaker, I go to the grocery in Tobago. From eggs, cheese, almond milk, yogurt, you name it, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So to try to give people the impression that nothing is happening there, and there is no food in the grocery and so on, it is totally untrue. And anybody who cares about Trinidad and Tobago, anybody who cares about Tobago in any kind of way, would not encourage that kind of talk.

I want to speak to the Tobagonians through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because there are people who claim to be concerned about the Tobagonians going out

there and ill-speaking the destination. Tourism is our business. There are people who claim to care about Tobago, who are saying “de boat ain coming, so we cyah bring Kiss bread from Trinidad?” We cannot bring Kiss bread from Trinidad to Tobago? Anybody, I want to speak to the Tobagonians, through you. The Chamber of Commerce in Tobago, and all their friends are supposed to be encouraging private sector development and commerce in Tobago, are supposed to be encouraging the Tobagonian to plant, to manufacture, to bake bread to sell to Tobagonians, not to bring Kiss bread from Trinidad. [*Desk thumping*] So these fake businessmen who really are distributors bringing goods from Trinidad and killing the entrepreneurial spirit in Tobago, those people do not care about Tobago.

And I want to talk to the Tobagonians, through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I would not be distracted by the Member for Couva North or South. I am here to talk to my people, the people that I represent, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] So anybody who speaks to the Tobagonians to tell them to depend on a boat to bring food for them, that is not your friend. [*Desk thumping*] We need to get back to planting, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We have to get back to developing our own products, to sell to our own people and get to the point of exporting those products.

I am not saying it is perfect. We have much work to do, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that is what the Tobago House of Assembly and the Central Government are working on to help Tobagonians, to become developing or even better Tobagonians in Tobago for Tobago. “Doh let nobody from outside, [*Desk thumping*] Tobagonian by boat, come to tell you: oh, things bad in Tobago because we did not get to bring our goods from Trinidad.” That is not the spirit of the Tobagonian. That is not who we are as a people.

Last year we had double digits in crime. Crime is a problem throughout Trinidad and Tobago, and we got hit hard last year, because I am not accustomed to seeing double figures. We got to about 10, or about 12 murders, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and there were Members opposite screaming: “Murders in Tobago gone up by 700 per cent”, trying to scare away people from coming to Tobago. Crime is a problem everywhere in Trinidad and Tobago.

I heard the Member from Oropouche East speak about how bad gang violence is, and so on. If you care about Trinidad and Tobago, and love Trinidad and Tobago, would you not support the Anti-gang Act [*Desk thumping*] and any work that the Government is doing in order to alleviate these problems and to resolve these problems? So, it is all well and good for you to come here and scream:

“things bad, things bad,” but you are not helping to resolve the problem. “And you patriotic and you want to lead somebody?” You would not be leading Tobago. You would not be leading Tobago for sure. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to speak to Tobagonians through you, beware. Beware. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to tell Tobagonians beware, “mind yuh business” and let us get back to work and get Tobago to where it needs to be.

This Government is serious about diversifying the economy. We have seen the work that is taking place in Tobago. We look forward to the expanded CrownPoint Airport. We look forward to the electrical programme being completed at Cove. We look forward to the waste water treatment programme being completed. We look forward to all this Government is giving to Tobago.

We thank God and thank the people of Tobago and Trinidad who voted the People’s National Movement, because if we were still in their hands, Mr. Deputy Speaker, God alone knows. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to thank you for this opportunity to speak. [*Desk thumping*]

Miss Ramona Ramdial (*Couva North*): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to contribute to this Motion here this afternoon and, unlike my colleague, and Member for Tobago West, I will try to make my contribution in a dignified manner [*Desk thumping*] very much fitted for this august House. Oh, and she has left, so better yet.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me just make reference to first and foremost, the Member for Tobago West in her diatribe, very emotional diatribe, here this evening. I must say that the Member stood for 45 minutes and really did not say anything of substance—[*Desk thumping*—]—anything that would instil hope in the people of Trinidad and Tobago, especially Tobagonians here this evening, to allow for them to believe that a brighter day is coming for them.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member made a number of statements about Tobago tourism, and I just want to remind her, and this is not me speaking. Because, if it is that the Member is accusing us on this side for peddling fake news and bad news and being unpatriotic, I just want to identify, for the record purposes, that in the Guardian of 10th May, 2017:

“Shops running out of stocks”

That was the title of the article. “Shops running out of stocks”—in Tobago

And it was, of course, a testimonial from someone from a supermarket called the Jesus Christ Supermarket in Tobago. And then May 11, 2017, Bill Brown, the

biggest supermarket in Tobago, spoke also to the *Express* newspaper, an article talking about empty shelves in Tobago. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is not us here or the Member for Couva North or the Member for Couva South peddling fake news. It is the media that has been reporting accurate news to the population. We have not created this type of news. No one would want to create news like that, coming out of Tobago. But it is the media reporting. And if we do not have any sort of faith and trust in our media, the third estate of this country—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Fourth.

Miss R. Ramdial:—the fourth estate, sorry, of this country—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Garcia: Fifth.

Miss R. Ramdial:—then I do not know what to say about the other side. And you know, the Member for San Fernando East is laughing loudly with my reference to media, but everybody knows that he loves the media more than anyone else.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me also state that the Member for Tobago West made reference about when we got into power in 2010, cutting 10,000 jobs in Tobago. But I want to remind her that during our tenure, unlike their Government, what they are doing now, which is, of course, firing people left, right and centre, we created 58,000 jobs in our five-year tenure, [*Desk thumping*] 58,000 jobs, sustainable jobs. Call it what you want, 58,000 jobs. We never had that high rate of unemployment that we now experience here in Trinidad and Tobago. Levels of investment were high, foreign direct investment was high and yes the economy was much better back then. But, at the end of the day, you have to wonder that in times of challenges, you really would want to see your government step up to the plate to encourage and to work harder and to encourage foreign direct investment in our country and this is what they have failed to do. They have failed in two and a half years to encourage any sort or to implement any sort of revenue-generating project for the people of Trinidad and Tobago and that is why they have no choice but to implement the harsh measures that, at the end of the day affect the mass of the people the most.

Harsh measures, what am I talking about, Mr. Deputy Speaker? I am talking about since budget 2015, there have been harsh measures in terms of introducing and implementing and creating new taxes; new taxes extension and increases in existing taxes. Why is that such a necessary tool for this Government to generate revenue at this point in time, especially when the economy is going through such

hardships, especially when you have that poverty class that is growing daily? Therefore, there is no hope around really for the people of this country to rely on getting any jobs and now we have this new slew of taxes that keep coming at us at every budget that this Government implements.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member spoke about the Sandals project and about how they are so very happy to have been speaking with Sandals since before their incarnation as this Government and previous governments. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, two and a half years later into their tenure they are still talking. I remember right here in this House, the Minister of Finance came in 2015 and spoke about the construction of the Sandals Hotel, the creation of 500 jobs and \$500 million in revenue that would come out of the construction of the Sandals Hotel, and up to this day, the Tobago “people still waiting” for that project. And you cannot tell me two and a half years after, you are still negotiating? Why? Why are you still negotiating? Is it that Sandals is driving a hard bargain and our hon. Prime Minister and other Ministers across on the other side are trying to do what is best for the people? Is it just that? Is it just as simple as that? Or is it that somebody is trying to broker deals?

They talk about our side brokering deals with contractors when we were in Government and all of that. What is really going on on the other side? The excuses, nobody sees it anymore. Nobody is believing the excuses anymore.

Last night I would have had the unfortunate experience of listening to the Prime Minister, hearing him in his again, diatribe about—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Mitchell: You tuned in. [*Desk thumping*]

Miss R. Ramdial: Mr. Deputy Speaker, he is my Prime Minister and I would like to hear him, as much as I am disappointed in him. [*Crosstalk*] Exactly. Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, Member, amidst everything, address the Chair.

Miss R. Ramdial: Sure, thank you.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I was saying, I listened to him, to what he has to say. He is the Prime Minister for all. He likes to claim that. And, therefore, I was looking out for some hope for our country, because as you know, we are at our lowest at this point in time.

And what is happening here is that he is talking about and trying to justify the projects under the Ministry of Works and Transport, with respect to the

Cumuto/Manzanilla Highway; trying to justify it. I sat there and I listened and I said to myself: "Oh, my God. Really?" The population has gone past beyond the excuses of the Prime Minister and the justification of the Prime Minister. People are seeing right through their facade and they are continuing to try, or in their attempt to try to fool the people of Trinidad and Tobago, they are thinking that we are still uneducated. What is more unpatriotic than that? Taking us for fools in this country, leading us down a path that would want us to believe that they are working in our best interest, when we know that it is quite the other way around.

Crime, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is the number one issue, the burning issue, at the forefront of our country at this point in time, high crime, all across Trinidad and Tobago. We talk about wanting to diversify the economy and to encourage tourism. But all of the best laid plans that the Minister of Tourism spoke about and not yet implemented, all of those best laid plans would be for naught if people do not feel safe and secure coming to your country.

If it is that I know as a tourist, I want to go to a particular country to have a vacation for a week or two weeks and I read on a travel advisory from one of the international embassies, UK, US, whatever it is, that it is not safe to come to Trinidad and Tobago, would I not take heed of that? So how can we attempt to diversify the economy, talking about tourism, which is, of course, 100 per cent reliant on the number of visitors that come to your country, and you have a much unsecured environment? So it is all for naught. And at this point in time the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, again, continues to blame the Opposition for its failures.

You cannot control crime. You cannot deal with crime and you are using the petty excuse of a piece of legislation that we are about to debate in Parliament as the reason why the crime rate is out of control. It cannot be that cut and dry, at all.

I was reading in one of the newspapers this morning about intelligence and health that they as a Government and we as a country are receiving from other countries. That is all well and good, but the same way that you are able to gather intelligence and act on it, it is the same way you can do so domestically within our own country, working with the TTPS, working with the Defence Force, working with the SIA, because they boasted a lot last night about their security apparatus, working with all of these agencies to gather intelligence and to act on these criminals.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the population again, as I said, they are not fooled anymore and they will not digest and they will not accept the fact that this Government has done nothing to alleviate the crime situation in Trinidad and Tobago and continue to blame the Opposition for it. They will not accept it and they have not been accepting it for a while and I think that the Government is very disillusioned when it comes to their strategy and how they work on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

They think that they are doing something good, but when you go out there in the streets and you speak to the individual and you speak to the normal man—the Member for Tobago West made reference to getting Tobago back to normalcy. What does that mean? This Government, this PNM-led Government has sat over the bloodiest month in the history of our country, that of January 2018, the highest number of murders ever. Ever, ever. Check it. And they are coming to tell us, and they are telling the population, that they are coming and they are blaming the Opposition for not working with them to stem the crime situation. No, no, no, no, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We will not accept it and the population does not accept it. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in addition to that, and I want to make reference to again Tobago West and what the Member said earlier, I realize that she is waging a war against her own people also by insulting the Tobago Chamber of Business here this afternoon, telling the businessmen of Tobago—[Interruption]

Mr. Deyalsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(6). [Crosstalk]

Dr. Tewarie: She is making an interpretation.

Hon. Member: Making what?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members. Member, could you just rephrase? Use a better statement.

Miss R. Ramdial: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I said and I would rephrase. Let me just refer to the Member for Tobago West when she made the comment that Tobago businessmen, alluding to them being not 100 per cent for their country by having to bring in goods and services from Trinidad and talking about Kiss bakery and bringing bread from Trinidad to Tobago. Mr. Deputy Speaker, what is wrong with that? For many years before any of us here entered this Parliament, that has been the business operations between Trinidad and Tobago.

How can you stand there and insult the Tobago businessmen and the business sector of Tobago for wanting to import goods and services to Tobago and having a failed air and sea bridge? Having a failed air and sea bridge. [*Desk thumping*] Tobago is not 100 per cent self-sufficient. We would love Tobago to be 100 per cent self-sufficient but they are not. They rely heavily on Trinidad goods and services. And nothing is wrong with that. That has been an arrangement since our days of Independence, since becoming an Independent country. So, at the end of the day, while Tobago tries to struggle with its challenges you have the Member of Parliament for Tobago West waging war on her own people. That is what it is.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 48(6), waging war on her own people.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Miss R. Ramdial: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We have to be realistic about situations in Trinidad and Tobago. We can no longer sit and say, you know, this is not happening and that is not happening. We would have seen the UK diplomat yesterday frontline news saying that we need to be realistic about terror threats in Trinidad and Tobago. And that is what we need. We need to wake up and smell the coffee.

Under this Government, everything has gotten worse. It really is a bad situation, when you look at the crime situation. When you look at the education sector, a number of schools, as Members of Parliament on both sides, we are experiencing a number of schools being shut down, non-functioning, and problems arising every Monday morning. No management system is in place under the Ministry of Education to effectively deal with situations like these.

And I would make reference to the Carapichaima East Secondary in my constituency, Mr. Deputy Speaker. For a month—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Mitchell: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise on 48(1), please.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled.

Miss R. Ramdial: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You know, in our attempt to diversify the economy, we need to be good managers and CEOs. We need to really have that part of training developed within our state agencies. As Members of Parliament who manage constituencies, manage these schools sometimes, in terms of assisting principals and staff and all of that with efficiently running schools, it is really a shame that in this day and age we still have to be running and calling and writing letters to the Ministry of Education to come and deal with these little fires that pop up here and there and everywhere.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is just a side line, but I want to go back to Tobago. The Member of Parliament for Tobago West spoke about these activities that they were trying to improve, in terms of revenue generation and the Member spoke about an app that was introduced to showcase the tourism aspect of Trinidad and Tobago. That is all well and good, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because we need to measure the impact and the result of those projects and programmes that are being implemented and we would not know how effective it is until it has been true and tried. So we wait to see how impactful these programmes and these apps and all of that the Member spoke about, as it is implemented.

But I want to refer—and I always stand here and I speak about it—to a number of tourism-oriented festivals that the Tobago House of Assembly always have on an annual basis, and I make reference to the Tobago Jazz Festival, the Tobago Heritage Festival, the Blue Food Festival. These festivals that have been ongoing on an annual basis for the past 12 years or so have been proven to be a loss for Tobago, in terms of revenue generation, and we would have had a JSC on it. We would have had recommendations coming out of that JSC, a report laid in Parliament, that is open for the public to access, stating that these festivals need to be properly managed, and that these festivals need to be generating revenues, otherwise the Government of the day, central government, needs to stop funding it.

In years gone before, we would have seen every year central government, of course, expending millions of dollars on these festivals, with no sort of return coming back to the THA. Just recently, the Member for Tobago West spoke about two additional airlines flying to Tobago. But what about the \$10 million that went missing? Have we heard anything about that, [*Desk thumping*] that \$10 million that went missing? Has there been an update on that investigation? Has anyone been held for that? [*Crosstalk*] Exactly, and those monies, I understand were supposed to be going to pay for one of the airlines that fly into Tobago. So we need to know.

So you cannot come here hypocritical, self-righteous and be talking about what you are doing and what you are not doing and what we did and keep blaming us, and you have all of these things taking place under your watch and there is no clarification to the public or anyone about it.

So I would like to ask the question whoever may have a couple minutes after me, to please let us know where the \$10 million gone. Has anybody been held, the investigative, the police? Any Member of Parliament is willing to step up and say something about this? Because people need to know.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in addition to that, in the media, prior to carnival, and even during we would have seen media reports coming from various sectors within the tourism community. We had the Tobago Hoteliers Association speaking about the lowest ever, with respect to visitors to Tobago and again that is because of the failed air and sea-bridge that this Government continues to neglect time and time again—failed.

Last night I heard the Minister of Works speaking about hold on Tobago, hold on it is coming, a solution is coming. After two and a half years “it ain reach yet. When it going tuh come, in 2020?” And this is what we are speaking about. Things are not being done in a timely manner to alleviate the simple challenges that the people of Tobago and Trinidad face.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was making reference to media reports from different sectors within the tourism economy saying that it has been the lowest number of arrivals. The hotels are empty. We need to do more with respect to our marketing strategies and all of these little things. Recommendations are being given. Whilst criticisms are being given, recommendations are also being given, and I need to understand why it is that it is so hard for this Government to implement some of these simple recommendations that are being made by the said people who are working and trying to exist within that sector. That is what I am trying hard to understand.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as the Minister of Tourism would like to allude and again blame us here on this side for Tobago's declining tourism sector, for the Tobago crime. We are responsible for that. Everything going wrong in Trinidad and Tobago, the Opposition and the UNC is to blame for that, Member for Tabaquite. The population is not going to believe that or swallow that. So time to get a new rhetoric. Time to get a new strategy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in addition to that, the Member for Tobago West made reference to WASA and T&TEC and the basic amenities of water and electricity and all these projects that are so-called now happening in Tobago and I want to refute that 100 per cent. Let the Member know that these projects were ongoing even before our time in 2010, and when we came into power we never cut funding for these projects. The Cove Project, under the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission, that Cove Project stared before our tenure and it continued under our tenure. And, therefore, to say that we are responsible for not doing anything in Tobago. We did a lot of work in Tobago, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We were responsible, under former Minister of Tourism, Minister Stephen Cadiz, for the reopening and the refurbishment of the Magdalena hotel. That Magdalena hotel, I cannot say the exact cost at this point in time, but that happened under our tenure and now it is being marketed by the THA and by the Ministry of Tourism as a destination point and vacation hotel for persons coming into Tobago. So you cannot stand there and say we did nothing for Tobago. That is totally untrue.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to also move on a little bit to talk about diversification, with respect to agriculture. And in the past couple of days we would have seen a heated debate going on, with respect to the conversion of agricultural lands to housing, with respect to the St. Augustine Nurseries, lands of the St. Augustine Nurseries. And Mr. Deputy Speaker, I personally, and I think all of my colleagues here will agree with me, that housing should not be placed on viable agricultural lands, [*Desk thumping*] should not be placed. And whilst they will counteract and say: “Well you know, when you all were in government you all bulldozed a whole set of farmlands and whatever it is,” housing did not go up there.

Mr. Mitchell: Yes, it did.

Miss R. Ramdial: It did not.

Mr. Mitchell: In Egypt.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence.

Miss R. Ramdial: So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we believe that these—and it is the most fertile lands eh. It is grade one agricultural lands around the St. Augustine Nurseries.

Today I made contact with the President of the Agricultural Society, Miss Dhano Sookoo, and I was asking her about the citrus greening that our Prime Minister spoke about last night. Our Prime Minister spoke about that, the citrus greening disease started at the St. Augustine Nurseries. He was totally wrong. He has been misinformed again. I do not know who is informing our Prime Minister, but he has been sorely misinformed. The citrus greening disease came into this country or started 15 years ago, according to the President of the Agricultural Society, by farmers. It has existed there. It did not start there. It existed throughout the country, 15 years ago. So, for the Prime Minister to say and to justify that those trees need to be cut down and the agricultural land needs to be put for housing because the citrus greening started there, that is totally untrue, according to the President of the Agricultural Society. There is no

evidence to show that the citrus greening disease started there. So it is a means to justify an end, which is voter padding in the constituency of St. Joseph. [*Desk thumping*] This is what is happening, and whether you want to say it is wrong or it is right, the Member for St. Joseph—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 48(4).

Miss R. Ramdial: "Yuh doh know wat de meaning ah dat is?"

Mr. Deyalsingh: Sorry 48(6).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, again reword accordingly, reword.

Miss R. Ramdial: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will reword by saying that they want to put housing on viable agricultural lands to increase the number of votes to benefit their party for the 2020 general election. [*Desk thumping*] That is my rewording, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 48(6), to win more votes. That is an improper motive. It is not true.

6.00 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, Member. Members, Members you have asked me to rule on a Standing Order. Member for Couva North, again, in terms of your—you need to clear it up and you need to reword and ensure that we do not have any conflict in terms of the information—

Miss R. Ramdial: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, again they are constructing, or they want to attempt to construct houses on fertile grade-one agricultural soil and lands, hoping that those new houses and persons that they populate them with, will vote for the PNM. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(4), 48(6) and 48(1). [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Couva North—

Miss R. Ramdial: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Right, this is the third time, so I do not want to reach the stage, in order to ensure that you have to retract your statement. But I want you to reword it and ensure for the *Hansard* that it is properly in place, please.

And at this time, it is now 6.01, right in terms of the Motion we are supposed to end at 6.00, but in terms of agreement with regard to Standing Order 126; agreement between the Leader of the House, and also the Chief Whip where you will finish your initial 30 minutes at 6.04. So therefore, again, based on the

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Standing Order, make your correction, and then you will have until 6.04 to conclude your initial 30 minutes.

Miss R. Ramdial: Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me just say that the intention to construct houses on these viable agricultural lands says something quite differently to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and they would hope that this sort of housing initiative would benefit them. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I crave your indulgence. 48(1), 48(6). I must insist at this point in time, those remarks be retracted and taken off of the records. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, Member, at this time, being the fourth occasion, I will ask you to retract, move on to a different point.

Miss R. Ramdial: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I retract. I will move on because I have two minutes. Yes, I have two more minutes left Mr. Deputy Speaker, so we are speaking about agriculture, we are talking about diversifying the economy, and our Prime Minister last night alluded to him having a farmer's badge and being a farmer and all of that. He also made reference to the issue with the buffalypso in our country and the importation of the buffalypso that were brought down with diseases, so he claimed—yes, brucellosis and therefore breeding—it hinders breeding and multiplication of the species here and therefore he is saying that they need to be put down. But the livestock specialists in the country are asking so what replaces the buffalypso if you kill them off. What are we going to bring in? Or how are we going to bring them in? What are we going to replace them with? Because, it is a disease that is quite easily spread amongst the buffalypso. And therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the farmers of this country and the livestock farmers today are asking for evidence to show that this disease is having a negative impact on the population of buffalypso and hindering the breeding of such.

So again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will allude to our Prime Minister being sorely misinformed by whoever is advising him on farming and at this point in time, I want to conclude, because of time.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday 2nd March at 1.30 p.m. when we will start debate on a Bill to amend the Valuation of Land Act, Chap. 58:03 and a Bill to amend the Property Tax Act, Chap.76:04. We ask that they both be taken together as one package.

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Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, there is one matter that qualifies to be raised on the Motion before the Adjournment of the House. I will now call on the Member for Tabaquite.

**Brothers Road Packinghouse
(Failure to Utilize)**

Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan (Tabaquite): Mr. Deputy Speaker, last week in the Parliament I also raised a matter on the adjournment, and I hope this week the Government will be more attentive to the plight of the persons on behalf of whom I am going to raise this matter, rather than attempt to ridicule the contribution that I was making last week.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Motion before the House is the failure of the Minister of Agriculture, Lands and Fisheries to bring into production the use of the Brothers Road Packinghouse, located in my constituency, the constituency of Tabaquite.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Motion is very timely in that we are discussing also this afternoon diversification, and one of the things about diversification is that you have to have certain kinds of infrastructure, and I think that some strategic thinking on the part of the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries could result in using this particular packing facility, together with the natural resources that are available in the area by way of vegetables and fruits and what have you, to create a platform for diversification and employment opportunities on a more sustainable basis than exists in that particular area at this point in time.

A little bit of history about this packinghouse, it was built under the tenure of the People's Partnership, Mr. Devant Maharaj was then the Minister of Food Production, and it was opened in 2015. I know the Minister is going to argue that all the equipment and so on, was not there, but part of the whole process of getting it going, would have been equipping it in such a way that the facility would have been made useful. Because everything about the Government, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West is an excuse and you know one of the things as a Government you got to really begin to defeat, in terms of your psyche is the excuse management practices that you have. [*Desk thumping*] You will soon come to realize that excuse management can only take you so far, but what matters at the end, is your ability to deliver in terms of what people want. [*Desk thumping*]

The site chosen for this particular packinghouse was an abandoned sawmill that belonged to Tanteak Limited. And you know, what is very interesting even if

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you say, “Okay look you know this packing facility, I do not want to use it,”. some good thinking Mr. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries would suggest to you that in light of the fact that you have now stopped the export of teak—which is a good thing, in my view—but you have done nothing since you stopped the export of teak, to take those very teak fields surrounding that area and to bring the technology to the particular dozens of furniture manufacturers in that particular region and give them the capacity to begin to build for export furniture in the same way that millions of dollars of foreign exchange are now being used by Unicomer to bring beds that are just packed up—made into pieces, packed up for furniture from Malaysia, from Brazil, from Mexico and from China. When you could be doing that with teak and other hard wood that is available in that particular area or it can be sourced also from Guyana. So, the possibilities for that packinghouse in terms of diversification and in terms of moving that area into greater economic activity is there sitting on your lap, but you have done nothing with it.

So, the building, you may argue was not out fitted for use, I am saying you do not only look at what it was built for, you could have looked at other areas in terms of transforming economic activity. So, literally the building is now in a state of abandonment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this packinghouse was a major project that involved many farmers in the area. And it was not just a project that came about willy-nilly, it started with the major consultation with the Tabaquite Vegetable Farmers’ Association, which is one of the most active group of farmers, not only in the Tabaquite area but in Trinidad. And the project was one which could have been of great use and benefit to the farmers also of surrounding areas. Now, the Tabaquite Vegetables Farmers’ Association consists approximately of 100 farmers, and other farmers’ associations in the area, as the Minister would be aware, like Brickfield, Brothers Road, San Pedro, Lightborne, Tortuga and they were also included in this project because of the location of the packinghouse. It would have been able to service therefore a wide geographic area.

NAMDEVCO, which is a statutory board, under the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries was also heavily involved in this project. So it was not just a fanciful idea of the People’s Partnership government. It was a project that was done in consultation with the stakeholders, and a project aimed at bringing benefit to the stake holding community. And the main purpose of the packinghouse was not just to package and process produce for sale in local and export markets, but more significantly to be used also as a storage facility for farmers, especially

when there was a glut in production. Or if you have over-production, they could have stored there, because right now what is happening is that when there is an over-production you know prices fall, or people just dump and one of the things, Mr. Minister, I have always argued and I truly believe in my heart is that there is no shortage of green vegetables in this country. I do not think that we should be importing green vegetables.

Incidentally, I am going to bring to you—next week, I intend to bring it, but I just forgot it. Because I did not have the permission of the Speaker as yet to display it. But, plastic cabbage that is being sold in the market, plastic cabbage being sold in the market. I have it in my office, plastic cabbage, someone bought it and brought it to my office, and you believe it is the real thing, plastic cabbage. So this matter of plastic cabbage and plastic rice and so on is a real issue in the country, Mr. Minister that needs to be investigated. I will bring it to you and you will see it.

So, farmers could then get a reasonable price, a stable price over time for the produce when there is a surplus and even the consumers would benefit from the fixed price when there is a shortage during heavy rains or floods. And you know what, farmers had agreed to pay rent based on what they saw at the facility. So it is not something that the farmers are looking for a free ride, the farmers had agreed that they will pay the cost of storing their produce. That is a low, low employment area, low, low employment means heavy unemployment in that area and people need employment and unless you develop industries in rural areas you are not going to resuscitate rural economies.

One of the mistakes we are making in is country is that we are continuing to concentrate on the urban and town areas, and we are forgetting that there is a whole rural community to be developed and this is why everything is becoming centralized and crowded and so on. And we are forgetting about developing the small towns. We have to change our philosophy and to change the approach to develop the small towns, so they too can become sustainable larger towns and people can find employment there and there can be growth and expansion and if you do that—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, you have two minutes.

Dr. S. Rambachan: Yes, you may very well find that people will make a greater contribution to the economy as a whole.

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Now, the farmers were also interested in having a market day where people could visit and purchase items at wholesale and retail prices, like you are doing in Chaguanas and these farmers, therefore had great vision, great vision and the packinghouse was part of the implementation or making real that vision that the farmers had.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you go to Tabaquite you will be surprised to see the kind of produce people are growing, the quality of produce. In fact, you know many students from the University of the West Indies go down there to the farms in order to see how agriculture is really practised and they actually teach people, the students from there, about what goes on in agriculture.

So, this afternoon, I am pleading with the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, just like I have pleaded with him to deal with the red sand crisis which nothing has happened about, affecting the construction industry. Mr. Minister, it seems that there are so many things that you are not dealing with. I wonder why? You are supposed to be a very efficient Minister, you are supposed to be a strategic thinker. A platform for the Government in the last election. What has happened? Have you lost your zest for this kind of activity? It is a good question.

So the packinghouse can add value to the country and add value to the lives of the farmers. I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

6.15 p.m.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat): Mr. Deputy Speaker, thank you very much for the opportunity to respond to this Motion. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me place on the record right away, the Member for Tabaquite is not only my friend, my former lecturer and my fellow lecturer at the University of the West Indies. [*Desk thumping*] In fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have always said that I mark him as one of the most outstanding lecturers I have dealt with. [*Desk thumping*] And, unfortunately, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he taught me well. Unfortunately. And I must say, sitting next to him is the gentleman who provided me with the books that I used when he taught me so well, MP Karim. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I cannot believe—I was shocked when I saw this Motion, I was shocked—[*Crosstalk*]—and I gave my friend—and I thought he would withdraw it, but in true Trini style he took in front, because let me start off with this, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When I was appointed in September and I went to

the office, I found waiting for me a publication called the Green Vine dated July 2015, and gracing the cover—it is an NAMDEVCO publication—of that publication was my friend, the MP for Tabaquite, and the Minister at the time, Devant Maharaj, Minister of Food Production, and Mr. Deputy Speaker, they were unveiling the plaque to commission the packinghouse in Brickfield. So something must be fundamentally wrong with this Motion. If my friend goes in 2015 and unveils a plaque to commission the facility and then says to me, “I have a Motion upon the failure to get this facility going”, are there two facilities in Brickfield?

Because I also listened to my friend, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also listened to him talking about Brickfield and teak and this facility, and I want to get my bearings right, because you know, I am a Minister. I do not go around the place in white oxford shirts and leathered shoes. I go around this country, and I have been to Brickfield and I am not sure if there are two facilities, one that my friend wishes me to use for teak, and one that my friend and Mr. Devant Maharaj commissioned in 2015 that I have not seen as yet.

I have a problem because let me read and place on the record, Mr. Deputy Speaker, from that publication, the Green Vine, Monthly Bulletin. Volume 13 No. 7. July 2015 and I quote:

“... (NAMDEVCO) has officially launched the Brickfield Packinghouse at Tabaquite. This new state-of-the-art facility will assist farmers by providing storage and processing facilities for their produce.

The Packinghouse provides a one-stop destination for the proper post-harvest handling and processing of fresh and minimally processed produce to meet local and international market standards.”

It must be two facilities.

“In keeping with the...Food Production’s...”—blah, blah, blah, blah.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, my friend must not mislead the country. My friend must not play so sacrosanct. My friend must not spread fake news because in 2015 this was fake news.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this plaque was unveiled at a facility that was merely a facade. How could you be talking about state-of-the-art in Tabaquite and you do not have power? Are we going to run it off hydroelectricity? I am shocked. There was not one piece of equipment, when I came in—and he is right. He is right. He taught me a very strategic approach to doing these things—and faced

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with what I was faced with—and I have placed it on the record in this Parliament over and over. I have said to the country, faced with the resources NAMDEVCO, in particular, that I had, I had to prioritize.

I was shocked, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I went down to the Debe Wholesale Market and saw—and I have said that for the Member of Parliament—I was shocked that as a Minister, with so much resources from 2010 to 2015, Dr. Moonilal failed to spend a cent in Debe. So the resources I had, we put it first to the farmers market, one of the most celebrated thing. We all agree on that. It is doing well, bringing production from farm straight to the consumer.

We then looked at the infrastructure. Debe was a most horrible place, and last year I was able to turn the sod for an \$8.5 million upgrade of the Debe Wholesale Market which has been finished. [*Desk thumping*] I also, at the same time last year, recognizing the need to prioritize, decided once and for all to deal with the traffic situation, the congestion and the cabals at the wholesale market by commissioning an upgrade of the Norris Deonarine Wholesale Market in Macoya. It is finished. When you passed there—Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am so busy, I do not have the time to go and cut ribbons, but it is finished, it is being used.

The MP for Couva North will tell you, I listened to her and we prioritized the project down in her area dealing with the improvement, a project, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that my predecessor had spent millions on, and she would tell you, that she could not see a sign of the money spent, but she can see the sign of the money spent by us.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Member.

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: The Member, sorry. The Member.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have said to the country in relation to the packinghouses, very first, Piarco was underutilized. I am so happy to see that a local company has been able to find markets in Florida for local produce. That company is now accounting for 60 per cent of the activity in Piarco and Piarco is now 100 per cent utilized. [*Desk thumping*] At the same time, I have taken a deliberate decision that any other packinghouse commissioned in this country must be with private/sector participation, and the reason I have taken so long with that, just like the quarries which were operating without licence without anything in place, is because I have had to go through a process, and my friend, as my lecturer, taught me about those things.

So that where we are with these packing houses, UDeCOTT has developed the PPP, the Government is proceeding in that direction. The next one, Brickfield, being one of the most important and not as big as Brechin Castle, is going to be a packing house that is targeted for private/sector participation, meaning, Mr. Deputy Speaker, any private interest, including the farmers, and that is the direction we want to go, because I have answered questions on the packinghouses. I have said that it is not in the interest of the taxpayers to enter into any arrangement where the taxpayers must continue to carry the operating cost of these facilities when we have private sector interest willing to get into that and that is where we are. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] I am at the point where we— [*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence, Members.

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat:—have moved from fake news, from ribbon cutting with nothing behind it, to putting things in place that will help our farmers [*Desk thumping*] in the long run and making the right decision, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, you have two more minutes.

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: Making the right decisions and doing the right thing is not always the fastest way to go. I would love to put the red sand on the market. I have a responsibility as a Minister to do that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but how can I face this country and say, in 2008 a man was given a one-page letter and from 2008 to 2017 was able to extract \$248 million in material belonging to the State and paid only 10 per cent or less than that for the use of that with no mining licence, no quarry licence, no lease for the land? I will not, and my friend as my former lecturer will never countenance a situation in which his former student allows something to happen without the appropriate process. I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 6.24 p.m.

WRITTEN ANSWER TO QUESTION

The following question was asked by Dr. Fuad Khan (Barataria/San Juan) earlier in the proceedings:

**Wrecking Service in Regional Corporations
(Details of)**

84. Could the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government indicate:

- a) the total quantum of money made by the wrecking service in each regional corporation over the past two years;
- b) the total quantum paid to the wrecking service provider(s) in each regional corporation over the past two years; and
- c) the total quantum retained by each regional corporation over the past two years?

The following reply was circulated to Members of the House:

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Kazim Hosein): The quantum of money made by the wrecking service in regional corporations for the period January 01, 2016 to December 31, 2017

	Port of Spain Corporation	Total \$
(a)	Total Quantum of money made by wrecking service in the corporation	10,763,025
(b)	Total quantum of money paid by the corporation to the wrecking service provider	9,065,170
(c)	Total quantum of money retained by the corporation	1,697,855
	San Fernando City Corporation	
(a)	Total quantum of money made by wrecking service in the corporation	1,737,300

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(b)	Total quantum of money paid by the corporation to the wrecking service provider	1,055,043.75
(c)	Total quantum of money retained by the corporation	682,256.25
	Point Fortin Borough Corporation	
(a)	Total quantum of money made by wrecking service in the corporation	2,500
(b)	Total quantum of money paid by the corporation to the wrecking service provider	Nil
(c)	Total quantum of money retained by the corporation	2,500