



REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

# Debates of the House of Representatives

---

2nd Session – 11th Parliament (Rep.) – Volume 5 – Number 39

---

## OFFICIAL REPORT (HANSARD)

THE HONOURABLE BRIDGID ANNISSETTE-GEORGE  
SPEAKER

THE HONOURABLE ESMOND FORDE  
DEPUTY SPEAKER

**Thursday 11th May, 2017**

**CLERK OF THE HOUSE: JACQUI SAMPSON-MEIGUEL**

**EDITOR: LILA RODRIGUEZ-ROBERTS**  
Telephone: 623-4494

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



## CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
LEAVE OF ABSENCE ... ..	785
VISITOR	
Dr. Denise Tsoiafatt-Angus	
(Presiding Officer THA) ... ..	785
PAPERS LAID ... ..	785
URGENT QUESTIONS	
Property Tax	
(Consultation with Chambers) ... ..	785
Tobago Food Shortage	
(Measures Implemented) ... ..	786
Brian Lara Stadium	
(Approval for) ... ..	787
EFCL Contractor	
(Preferential Treatment to) ... ..	789
DEFINITE URGENT MATTER	
(LEAVE)	
New Sea-Bridge Arrangements	
(Implication on Tobago's Food Supply ... ..	790
STANDING FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT	
(ADOPTION)	
[Second Day] ... ..	791
FINANCE (VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION) (FINANCIAL YEAR 2017) BILL, 2017	
Second Reading	
[ <i>Hon. C. Imbert</i> ] ... ..	957
Third Reading ... ..	966
ADJOURNMENT	
[ <i>Hon. C. Robinson-Regis</i> ] ... ..	966



*Leave of Absence*

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

The House met at 2.30 p.m.

**PRAYERS**

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Members, Mr. Fazal Karim, MP, Member for Chaguanas East; Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie, MP, Member for Caroni Central; Hon. Stuart Young, MP, Member for Port of Spain North/ St. Ann's West have asked to be excused from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

**VISITOR**

**DR. DENISE TSOIAFATT-ANGUS**  
**(Presiding Officer THA)**

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Members, I just wish to inform you all, and to also welcome on your behalf, the presence of the Presiding Officer of the Tobago House of Assembly, Dr. Denise Tsoiafatt-Angus, [*Desk thumping*] and also to mention the presence of the students of the Penal Secondary School.

**PAPERS LAID**

1. Annual Report and Audited Financial Statements of the First Citizens Asset Management Limited for the year 2016. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]

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

2. Annual Administrative Report of the National Maintenance Training and Security Company Limited for the year ended December 31, 2015. [*The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis)*]

**URGENT QUESTIONS**

**Property Tax**  
**(Consultation with Chambers)**

**Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh** (*Oropouche West*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of Finance: In light of calls by the eight business chambers to defer the property tax date, has the Minister of Finance considered consulting with these chambers?

**The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert):** Thank you, Madam Speaker—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Moonilal:** No.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** We are always ready and willing to speak to any interest group in the country. [*Desk thumping*] That is a manifesto promise of the People's National Movement. But in terms of the implementation of the property tax system and the date for submission of forms, as I indicated in my presentation yesterday, we do not intend at this time to postpone that date.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Well then, between now and that date, would you consider meeting with some or all of them between now and that date. Is that in your thinking?

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I do not understand this thing about “in my thinking”. I am responding to a question. The question had two parts. One had to do with a delay in the implementation of the system, and the other was a discussion with the entities—the organizations. And, as I indicated, I would be happy to meet with the organizations at any appropriate time, but that will not delay the implementation of the property tax.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. In light of the response of the hon. Minister, could the Minister indicate if any one person, or more than one out of the 248 persons to be recruited to assist with this project, have indeed been recruited and trained?

**Madam Speaker:** I will not allow that as a supplemental question. Member for Couva North.

### **Tobago Food Shortage (Measures Implemented)**

**Miss Ramona Ramdial (Couva North):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given media reports of growing food supply shortages as evidenced by empty grocery shelves in Tobago as a result of transportation problems with the sea-bridge between Trinidad & Tobago, could the Minister of Works and Transport please indicate what specific measures will be implemented to immediately address this apparent problem?

**The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, tomorrow, Friday, the Port Authority Board will be meeting with all the truckers to address all the issues related to the transportation of cargo to Tobago. The management of the port, as

we speak, are evaluating all the proposals that have been put to them for the replacement of the cargo vessels, and by Monday they would make a recommendation to the board, which will then make a recommendation to the Ministry.

However, going forward, the Port Authority will ensure that stringent management methods are put in place to ensure that all food stuff that has to go to Tobago will get priority at this time. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Miss Ramdial:** Minister, in the interim are there any plans to rent or lease a third vessel to alleviate these problems?

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Thank you. Madam Speaker, as we speak, the port is evaluating all the options which does include the replacement of the barge and there are options on the table and I expect a recommendation by Monday.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you, Madam Speaker, to the Minister. Was the Port Authority Board of Trinidad and Tobago fully aware of the capacity of the *Trinity Provider* when compared to the capacity of the *Super Fast Galicia* in terms of transporting trucks between Trinidad and Tobago?

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Thank you. Madam Speaker, the *Trinity Provider* is not the only vessel that is transporting vehicles for Tobago. We also have the *Atlantic Provider*. However, if you add both vessels it will not equate to the capacity as the *Super Fast Galicia*. However, we must recognize the *Super Fast Galicia* was pulled from service and what you had to do is to see what is immediately available and engage them. Thank you.

### **Brian Lara Stadium (Approval for)**

**Mr. Barry Padarath** (*Princes Town*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, through you to the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs: In light of tomorrow's opening of the Brian Lara Stadium at Tarouba, could the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs indicate whether there has been approval from the International Cricket Council for the facility?

**The Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs (Hon. Darryl Smith):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. The country is very pleased, first of all, to see that those on the other side from the UNC Government are so interested all of a sudden in the Brian Lara Academy after they left it there for five years to rot. It was 95 per cent completed at the time and they left it, millions of taxpayers' money being stolen for the facility to go down to 75 per cent. [*Crosstalk*] But we are very pleased and happy that they are interested—[*Interruption*]

**Madam Speaker:** Order!

**Hon. D. Smith:**—in the facility and we thank you for that. But I mean, it is a simple question and I thought the Member for Princes Town would understand sport, hearing that he was a sportsman in his day. But ICC approval is only required for international games. It is international players, yes; it is not an international registered game. So I think that was pretty easy to answer.

However, we have started the process, Madam Speaker. The West Indies Cricket Board—as you know we just hosted the T20 which you would have seen in the newspaper, got rave reviews. It was passed with flying colours and the members of the West Indies Cricket Board, including Jimmy Adams was here and he was very pleased and that process should be completed by July. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Padarath:** Madam Speaker, the hon. Minister pretty much admitted that there is no accreditation for the Brian Lara Stadium.

**Madam Speaker:** Question quickly.

**Mr. Padarath:** The question then follows, Madam Speaker, is the hon. Minister aware that the stadium is in contravention of ICC law 191? [*Laughter*] He probably does not even know.

**Hon. D. Smith:** Madam Speaker, as I said—[*Interruption*]

**Madam Speaker:** I would just remind all Members, we have a very great opportunity based on some of the persons present in the House today to show this sort of decorum that is required of the House and that we are quite capable of. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs.

**Hon. D. Smith:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. We have been in consultation with the Cricket Board who we are guided by. It is the ICC regulations that we have already started the process on. We are working with the WIBC and that whole process will be completed in July. As you know, we are also talking to CPL to host the finals and the international tournament here as well. So we are well on our way to get that approval, Madam Speaker.

**Mr. Padarath:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Hon. Minister: Hon. Minister seeing that you are in contravention of ICC law 191, would you then admit that further work will be required if international matches have to be played there to conform to ICC laws? [*Desk thumping*] And at what cost?

**Hon. D. Smith:** Madam Speaker—[*Interruption*]



**Madam Speaker:** Member for Princes Town, we all understand with respect to shouting, Members sit in silence if they are not speaking. You had your opportunity, you asked your question, please desist from such behaviour. The Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs.

**Hon. D. Smith:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Recently, Madam Speaker, we opened a number of international high quality facilities and we all have to go through tests. Everything has to be tested. This is also considered part of the test. We did it with the T20s. We have to see in terms of the lighting, the plumbing, the facility, security, ticketing and so on, so it is all part of the process. This opening is part of that process which in July, I will invite him again because I know he will be there tomorrow, when we get the ICC certification, to enjoy a proper game when it is fully accredited. [*Desk thumping*]

**EFCL Contractor  
(Preferential Treatment To)**

**Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (Caroni East):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of Education: Given media reports concerning preferential treatment being meted to a specific EFCL contractor involving an advisor to the Minister of Education, could the Minister of Education please clarify these allegations in light of the use of public funds and the possible aspirations that such allegations cast on a Cabinet Minister?

**The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am indeed very happy to be given the opportunity to respond to this question and to lay bare the facts. As a result of a front page article appearing in the *Sunday Express* of the 7<sup>th</sup> of April, 2017, stating, and I quote:

“Garcia’s adviser delivers \$2 million cheque to contractor”

And a subsequent article in the same newspaper on page 3, on Tuesday, 9<sup>th</sup> of May, 2017, which stated and I quote:

“The decision by Education Minister Anthony Garcia to make a specific payment to a single contractor breaches the...Performance Monitoring Manual, according to former education minister, Dr. Tim Gopeesingh.”

As a result of investigations conducted by myself and the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Education, the following are the facts:

1. The sum involved as payment to the contractor was \$510,000, not \$2 million.

2. My advisor was given the cheque by the Director of Finance and Accounts of the Ministry of Education to take to EFCL in order to facilitate timely payment to the contractor as had been promised by both the Ministry of Education and EFCL.
3. The contractor was the first to have completed his assignment at the Malick Secondary School and was entitled to payment for this job done.
4. This project falls under the Laventille/Morvant initiative for which there is a separate fund to facilitate timely payment when work has been completed.
5. Contractors engaged in this project are small contractors residing in the Laventille/Morvant district as far as possible. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Based on the media reports, hon. Minister, through you, Madam Speaker, that you gave instructions to your advisor to assist the contractor, how do you view the appropriateness of this?

**Hon. A. Garcia:** Madam Speaker, I am not responding to any media reports. I am responding to the facts of the matter as was adduced as a result of the investigations that were conducted by myself and my Permanent Secretary.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, to the very kind Minister. Minister, could you say it is the practice at your Ministry for your advisor to be handling moneys on behalf of the Ministry? [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. A. Garcia:** Madam Speaker, I think I already answered that question adequately. I stated, in order to facilitate timely payment, my advisor was given the cheque by the Director of Finance and Accounts of the Ministry of Education to take to EFCL.

**DEFINITE URGENT MATTER**

**(LEAVE)**

**New Sea-Bridge Arrangements  
(Implication on Tobago's Food Supply)**

**Miss Ramona Ramdial** (*Couva North*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I hereby seek leave to move the Adjournment of the House today under Standing Order 17 for the purpose of discussing a definite matter of urgent public importance, which is the implication of the new sea-bridge arrangements on Tobago's food supply.

The matter is definite because there is a shortage of food stocks available in Tobago. As human beings, food is a basic need that serves as a fundamental requirement for our survival.

*Definite Urgent Matter*

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

The matter is urgent because the shelves and warehouses in Tobago are being depleted faster than the supermarket owners can replenish them and basic food items such as eggs, cheese and flour are in short supply.

The matter is of public importance because it affects the livelihood of all Tobago's citizens. The inadequate cargo arrangement creates a great deal of uncertainty in Tobago's food supply. There is a general public outcry for the Government to bring an immediate resolution to the problems with the shipment of supplies to the island. I so move. [Crosstalk]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Couva South. Member for Couva South, I am being disturbed. I hope I would not have to remind you. Hon. Members, I am not satisfied that this matter qualifies under Standing Order 17. I advise that the Member pursue this matter under Standing Order 16.

**STANDING FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT  
(ADOPTION)**

[Second Day]

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [May 10, 2017]:*

*Be it resolved* that this House adopt the Second Report of the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives for the Second Session (2016/2017), Eleventh Parliament on the consideration of proposals for the Variation of Appropriation for the fiscal year 2017.

*Question again proposed.*

**Madam Speaker:** The Minister of Health has 15 minutes of extended speaking time. The Minister of Health.

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. [Desk thumping] Madam Speaker, I would like to dedicate the last 15 minutes of my contribution on the drug supplies situation, pharmaceuticals supply to Trinidad and Tobago. I would have alerted the national community last night some figures which have stung the national community based on the calls I have been getting from both members of the media and the public who were quite unaware that in four major hospitals we treat over one million persons coming through our doors. And in treating those one million interactions, we also commit to providing over 7.2 million supportive tests.

In those four major hospitals, in just those four alone, we dispensed 644,000 prescriptions in 2016. That does not include prescriptions written at over 100 health centres; it does not include prescriptions at the Mount Hope Women's Hospital, St. James Hospital, Point Fortin Hospital, or Princes Town. So when you aggregate that, it is in the vicinity of a million prescriptions plus.

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[HON. T. DEYALSINGH]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

In Trinidad and Tobago, the issue of drug shortages has been chronic for years. So what are we doing as an administration to fix this problem? Let me say off hand that the part of the budget dedicated for both pharmaceuticals and non-pharmaceuticals and NIPDEC fees is currently TT \$760 million. Three quarter of a billion dollars for the procurement of pharmaceuticals, non-pharmaceuticals and management fees. By contrast, the OECS countries, their bill for pharmaceuticals alone is US \$10 million. Even if you multiply that by four to include non-pharmaceuticals and go up to US \$40 million, when people say health is a bottomless pit for money, it is illustrated in drug procurement. The solution to solving the drug shortages is not more money but more management of the supply chain. And that is what this administration is seeking to do.

As I said in the committee stage, which is recorded on page 129 of the report, we are not going to be pumping more money into a bottomless pit of pharmaceuticals and non-pharmaceuticals. We are going to be rationalizing how we purchase, what we purchase and why we purchase. And I mentioned making use of the PAHO strategic fund. Madam Speaker, we have calculated that if we shift our purchasing for HIV drugs alone, just one category of drugs to the PAHO strategic fund, we will be saving TT \$50 million. That is a phenomenal saving. So that is some of the measures we are putting in place.

We are trimming the formulary and for the first time our national formulary is going to be patient-centered so that we could guarantee our patients and the taxpayers who are being short-changed, and let me admit that, our taxpayers are being short-changed year after year, administration after administration when you cannot get certain drugs. But it is not only about taking drugs off the formulary. Let me alert the national community through you, Madam Speaker, that in managing the formulary we are also putting drugs onto the formulary that have real reason to be there.

The Hon. Member for Caroni East wants me to do something about perinatal mortality—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** And neonatal.

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** And neonatal. And one of the drugs that we need which was never on the formulary to deal with this is caffeine citrate solution. For the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, this simple drug is now officially on the formulary so our premature babies whose respiratory systems have to be kick-started, can get the safe, cheap, reliable drug instead of having to depend on the xanthines.

So we are not only taking off, we are also putting on drugs for which there is a real patient-centered need. We are also putting in five drugs for oncology. One for brain cancer; one for hematology; one for leukemia, one for aplastic anaemia. And a serious drug that we are putting on for the first time is tranexamic acid which the obstetricians will love to hear this news. This is a drug that is used to prevent postpartum hemorrhage and even hemorrhage for patients in the A&E. So when we talk about rationalizing the formulary, it is not just a cutting out. It is cutting out drugs which are duplicated, triplicated, and which are only there to serve economic purposes, but we are also putting on drugs in a patient-centred approach.

The issue of shortage of oncology drugs is a very emotive one and important one. And the Member for Naparima raised yesterday that in the clinic close by him he could not get an oncology drug for his patient. The issue about drug shortages has to be based on fact. Fact and former Minister of Health, former Chairman of South West, former Chairman of North West will tell the Member for Naparima that not every drug that is on the national formulary is dispensed in a health centre setting, especially oncology drugs. These drugs are dispensed in a more formal setting at the Oncology Centres and the major hospitals.

But as I have this conversation with the national community about drug shortages, if anyone should simply go on to the Internet and do a research on the shortages of drugs and oncology drugs, you will find this article from the Journal of the Advanced Practitioner in Oncology. And it is called, "The continuing impact of oncology drug shortages". There is a global shortage of many major classes of drugs, both in the private sector and in the public sector. And unfortunately, oncology drugs is one of those.

Let me give you an example, Madam Speaker, of why there are certain drug shortages and we have two eminently qualified obstetricians here. When these gentlemen have to treat their pregnant patients for pre-eclampsia, a simple safe, cheap drug that costs cents is phenobarb. Do you know in Trinidad there is a shortage of phenobarb in both the public and the private sector? And do you know why? Because it is not cost effective for the importers to bring in phenobarb, which is a penny for one and have to go through all the regulatory hoops because it is a controlled drug. So phenobarb, which is cents for one, is not available in both the public sector and the private sector. And our two eminently qualified obstetricians will agree. So the discussion about drug shortages has to be based on fact. However, I am telling this country that with the changes we are making, we want to guarantee our patients a safe, cost effective, reliable supply of drugs and we are changing the way we procure drugs from this procurement cycle. And that is what we are doing.

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[HON. T. DEYALSINGH]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

So, under the guidance of the Chief Medical Officer who is chairman of NDAC, certain changes are going to be made. And let me also tell the national community through you, Madam Speaker, since becoming Minister of Health and I am sure my predecessor and I am sure the other two doctors who are here, will have been getting complaints that CDAP drugs are not working, for diabetes, high blood pressure.

On becoming Minister of Health, I have been bombarded with this anecdotal evidence, but you cannot make a decision until you have some sort of basis to move on. We have engaged PAHO to do an analysis and what I will tell the national community now and give them comfort, I am satisfied that that anecdotal evidence can now be supported by fact. And we will be coming and taking off those drugs that have proven to be ineffective and from this cycle we are going to change the procurement pattern. Because our patients on CDAP need to be assured that the drugs they are taking to treat their chronic conditions are safe and effective. And I give the national community that undertaking, especially for our chronic patients like diabetes and hypertension. The anecdotal evidence is overwhelming but it is now backed by some sort of factual basis for us to act.

**3.00 p.m.**

**Dr. Rambachan:** What country those drugs come from?

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** Do not ask that. You really want me to say?

**Dr. Rambachan:** Yes.

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** India.

**Hon. Member:** Why do you not want to say that?

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** What is happening is that—[*Interruption*] Hold on. India has very good generic companies but they also have some, like anywhere else, that are not so good. And what is happening is that some of the drugs that have found its way into our supply chain are not even authorized to be sold nationwide in India. They are authorized to be sold in a state. So we are re-doing the regulatory—we are looking at that issue. [*Crosstalk*]

So I want to give the national community that commitment. I also want to explain, Madam Speaker, why there are certain other drug shortages from time to time. The pharmaceutical industry is like any other business. It is about making money. One of reasons you have drug shortages, globally, and exacerbated in the Caribbean and Trinidad, is because of our small size and they do not want to sell to us. That is a fact. So you wake up one morning, company A buys out company

B and they shut down the Caribbean operations and there is a drug shortage. In the past 20 years, the industry has consolidated from 60 pharmaceutical firms. Therefore, you have competition, you have innovation, from 60 to just 20 in 20 years. That breeds drug shortages. Globally, you also have manufacturing problems, with no competition, lack of R&D focus.

So I want to guarantee this country that we are changing the way we procure drugs from this cycle. It is not a matter of funding, it is a matter of using the money we have in a patient-centred approach where the only persons to benefit from drug procurement are patients.

**Hon. Member:** And the taxpayers.

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** And the taxpayer. I want to give our community that commitment. The only persons to benefit from now in drug procurement is the taxpayer and the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, I want to thank you for the opportunity that you have given me. We have spoken about our hospital building plan, drug procurement, and I want to thank you for the opportunity. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** The Member for Barataria/San Juan. [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Fuad Khan:** (*Barataria/San Juan*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to thank the Minister of Health for that wonderful discourse, but a bit of housekeeping. In the finance committee, the former Minister of Education was kind enough to—what we term in an Indian word—“sohari” the Minister of Health, the Member for St. Joseph. [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. Member:** What that means?

**Dr. F. Khan:** “Sohari” means to “love up”.

As the former Minister of Health, I want to take this opportunity to “sohari” the Minister of Education. [*Laughter*] He is not here. I want to thank the Minister of Education publicly for working on the San Juan Boys and Girls Primary School after one phone call. [*Desk thumping*] He responded quite nicely and I think things are in place now for a forward movement, and for that I am thankful. So I always believe, Madam Speaker, that when good things happen, you have to say it. And so my friend from Caroni East understood that good things happened to the Member for St. Joseph, so he said it at the finance committee.

Now, Madam Speaker, I want to say that I agree with everything that the Minister of Health has said—Member for St. Joseph—but I would like to say also that that is how Government, I believe—and I practised it—should be. When a Government goes in, you put certain building blocks in place for the benefit of the population, and

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[DR. KHAN]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

when another Government comes in, they are supposed to build on those building blocks. So the foundation has to be built and then you build, as a house, a building, and eventually you should get a wonderful skyscraper. However, how things were in the past, one Government came in, one Government destroyed, the next Government came in, the next Government destroyed for basic, as they say, political interest.

So I am very glad, and I applaud the Minister of Health for building on the foundation that the People's Partnership left behind. [*Desk thumping*] And I mean no disrespect, because the Minister started off yesterday speaking about the non-communicable diseases and the complications of non-communicable diseases. He went so far as to speak about sugar, salt, fats, and I want to include oils. You see, Madam Speaker, when I was Minister of Health I went in there as a surgeon who, as a surgeon, what you do, you just jump in, you fix and you walk out. Never was I inclined to be, what they call the medical part of the doctor, where you sit down, you analyse and you look on; worse again, policy-making decisions.

I was taught in the Ministry of Health that the policy of the whole is important, rather than the attraction of a small area, which I am a niche neurologist. And then I went back into it and I realized that this has gone—this NCD problem has gone back as far as when the deceased hon. Patrick Manning, he was in office and we had our—I think our Caricom meeting in Trinidad, and he started off—he was the one who signed off on the NCD programme and to look into the NCD programmes because of the World Health Organization. And the Hon. Minister of Health, really and truly, has gone on the foundation that we built. I took the mantle, and I think I was the first person to start speaking that sugar is the new poison, not fats. People were speaking about fats, and I started talking about sugar—sugar being the new poison, and it did not take root until, I think recently, when people believe that low fat substances—and they were usually high sugar substances causing the problem of obesity. And as a result of that teaching of sugar causing what we call—I do not want to get too technical—sugar which comes from white rice, any processed flour, any real sugar materials, and in every single thing that you look at, if you read your labels, high fructose corn syrup and maltodextrin, and you keep looking at your labels.

And, Minister, I would like to ask you to push the “read your labels and understand your label”, because that is very important. Because sometimes one looks at a bottle of soft drink and you see 15 grams of sugar, but then you have three servings in it, which makes it 45. You divide that by four, and in that small soft drink you have 10 teaspoons of sugar and you end up with calories, which are



what they call empty calories. And as a result of that, you end up with fat; you end up with children being completely obese, high cholesterol, high sugar, type 2 diabetes, and it goes on. Our children have become too fat, and he would agree. So reading your labels, cutting down the sugar and moving in that direction is the correct approach.

I spoke to the IDB, I think Michelle Fenty. She was, at the time, in charge, as well as Ian Ho-A-Shu, and we came to the decision that we need to do something with the NCD problem in Trinidad and Tobago, and we came about with looking at the loans, looking at how we can use an IDB loan and project so we could decrease the NCD problem in Trinidad, because the complications of NCD result in all the hospitals spaces; all the drugs we are speaking about. And he said billions, and he is correct. Billions worldwide is utilized because of the simple fact of poor NCD management. And we started off with the—and I think Dr. Bhoë Tewarié, then Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development, worked with the IDB and we were able to put a system in place, and I see it has taken fruit and it is starting to move as the Minister mentioned it.

So it is a foundation that was built by the, as they say, People's Partnership, and we take ownership for that, and the Minister could take ownership for moving it forward. And we hope—I hope, Madam Speaker, that in this day and age, people will understand that we are not trying to force our ideology on them. You see, in the United States of America when Bloomberg, the Mayor of New York, tried to decrease the volume of soft drinks, rather than “supersize me” and the sugar content, he was pushed back by the sugar companies, in the same way the tobacco companies pushed back and created this tobacco problem, and in the same way the alcohol companies in this country are pushing it forward.

We have a national alcohol policy, and I think the Minister should look at it because part of that was to decrease advertising to young people, in the same way they decreased advertising of tobacco and also different addictive substances. And that caused a pushback and Mayor Bloomberg had a referendum and he lost because the powers that be were able to manipulate, as they say, public confidence and they voted against it.

I remember when I first went to the PAHO meeting. I think it was in Washington—Caricom members. We were speaking about NCDs. At that time we did not even have CARPHA. In fact, that is when I learnt about CARPHA in those days. I think it was 2011. They were attacking NCDs. But guess what? By attacking NCDs they were using Pepsi and a couple of soft drink companies to provide the equipment for weight loss, and I told them that we would have none

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[DR. KHAN]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

of that in Trinidad because that would not hold. In fact, I think I was the first Minister to tell McDonald's, leave the ward—and I got stick for that—because of the manipulation of children. [*Desk thumping*] And I feel very strongly about it, Madam Speaker, because our obesity problem and our health problem is a result of the complication of non-communicable diseases which I say is not treated well. So all the drugs that we are having here in this country, and everything that the Minister is saying, is a result of that one point. And if you could harness that—and we have to harness it well—we will be able to deal with that problem as we go on.

Now, Madam Speaker, the Minister has spoken about procurement of drugs and the different drugs and the different negativity of the CDAP drugs. I was faced with the same problem, but I was told by the Chemistry/Food and Drugs department that they test all drugs, as they say, for the minimum inhibitory and whatever, the maximum drug availability. And everything is good. Nothing comes out until that has occurred. Now it is news to me that that was not occurring, because we heard anecdotal studies about CDAP drugs not working and CDAP drugs short and whatever, but I am very glad that now we could see where the sheep and the goats lie. But it is going to take a lot of resource from you, Minister, because you being a pharmacist in the drugs, you would have to pushback against that. You will get it. But at the end of the day, we have always done on our side—and I hope it is happening and I think it is—patient-centred medicine. When you put the patient in front, you will end up with the correct approach and the correct movement towards the correct goals.

Now, I feel very perturbed—and it is not on your head—when I saw today, after the Minister stood up here and indicated that the cancer drugs were being mixed in St. James and sent down to San Fernando, and had assured the Minister that that was occurring, today's newspaper slammed back and said it was not so. Because at the end of the day, the Minister has to take the blame for whatever the bureaucrats do. And I would indicate to the Minister, find out who was not telling you the truth.

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Thank you.

**Dr. F. Khan:** Because at the end of the day you take it for whatever the others do. And cancer drugs have to be mixed properly, with the proper equipment—physical equipment—in the proper manner because they have to be injected into your system, and pharmacists are supposed to be trained to do that.

Now, I am going to tell the Minister, he has carried that to Cabinet, as I did, and what happens in Cabinet there is a place called PMCD which I hated. PMCD is what I called the black hole of Cabinet. You see, you have a good mind and a good policy and you carry something that is urgent to Cabinet. Cabinet says “Yes, we

need to do that, human resource-wise”, and it goes to PMCD and you never see it again. You call PMCD, you cannot find. It is like a whole different ball game inside of there. And then PMCD eventually sends it out. And when it comes out, Madam Speaker, it is not finished there. It goes to CPO who tells you that you cannot do it.

So our system is dead set against who wants to make positive changes. So Minister, I wish you well.

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. F. Khan:** And I hope PMCD is nice to you, not how they were nice to us. You see, that is the system. And that is the system that needs to be changed. In the same way that I heard the Hon. Prime Minister make a hue and cry about how nothing is happening; you cannot get this; you cannot get that, it is because of the same system.

And when you talk about CPO, I go across, Madam Speaker, to the RHAs. RHAs in this country were designed in 1994, I think it was. And we were telling them that the RHA is not going to be as effective as they think it would be. Because the Ministry of Health has, what they call, line areas—line systems, blood banking, this, that, whatever they call it—drug procurement. But the RHAs are supposed to be corporate bodies and they have to do what they have to do to develop the patient care, and the Minister said that he thinks the RHAs should have the same salaries because Tobago is poaching the RHAs of the South so that is why he lost a pharmacist. That is furthest from the truth. The RHAs are supposed to be doing everything for the RHA to work, and if the RHA is supposed to get a pharmacist, the RHAs have to poach it from another place. And if somebody has to poach it from another RHA, you have to poach, and the only way you could poach is by giving a high salary.

But guess what? Once you offer a high salary for a service that is needed—let us say, neurosurgery, pharmacy—up comes the CPO and says, “You cyar do dat”. So you are now stuck between a rock and a hard place where you need a—

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Would you give way, please? Thank you. I just want to confirm that what I said yesterday about the chemotherapy being mixed in St. James yesterday afternoon and being delivered to San Fernando this morning, I could confirm it has been done. So the folks in San Fernando will be receiving their chemotherapy in San Fernando as promised as of today. And I want to thank you for giving way.

**Dr. F. Khan:** Okay, Minister. So, Madam Speaker, I am telling the Minister, too, that in order for the RHAs to work—that was the law. We always tend to quote—the Attorney General, my good friend from San Fernando West, always quotes the law of the land. And AG, is the law—I mean, you could answer me if

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[DR. KHAN]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

you do talk some time. The law of the land says the RHAs are supposed to be corporate entities. They are a unique one structure and they are not, really and truly, under major control of the Ministry of Health except for certain regulations. However, they have now become five Ministries of Health, five public service, five systems that do not work. That is the RHAs.

So when I hear the Minister speaking—he has good, lofty ideas as I did—you have to break through that system because the RHAs are not working. The RHAs need to be broken up and redone and create one RHA in South, one RHA in north, or one RHA in Trinidad and one for Tobago. So you could move people around the system. Because sometimes you have an anaesthetist—you have 13 anaesthetists in Mount Hope, two in San Fernando, but you cannot get an anaesthetist from Mount Hope to go to San Fernando, because guess why? Their contract said North-Central Regional Health Authority. You cannot get a neurosurgeon to move from one RHA to Sangre Grande. Right now there are no neurologists in Sangre Grande, and you cannot get to go back and forth. You know why? RHA. But if you have one RHA you could move them around accordingly, based on one RHA with one board. But, Minister, we had a discussion before on that.

So I am saying to you, Madam Speaker, health needs to be sent in a different direction. What we were doing when we were there—as the Minister, and the People's Partnership was in place—we were starting the stand-alone specialty clinics. You need a stand-alone specialty clinic for cardiac surgery, for ophthalmology, for ENT, for neurosurgery, housed in one area. And I always say the biggest mistake that—and I mean no disrespect, because it was deemed to be necessary—was to create Mount Hope, which is Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex—away from a tertiary level centre into a general hospital. It was built as a tertiary level hospital where everything at a high level would go to. And seeing that the area of Eric Williams—Mount Hope—was created into that general hospital situation, we needed to have a system where you would have specialty training centres. And that was some of the bases behind the Couva Children Hospital, an area of specialization to start.

We also started off, Madam Speaker, in trying to do a specialty area in San Fernando for eyes—a national eye centre—and then you go forward. In our country we have—and it has been knocked around—beta thalassemia major, beta thalassemia minor, and what they call the abnormal haemoglobin upper Ts. In the Couva Children Hospital there was an area dedicated for a ward to deal with that problem. Not done. So we have to go abroad for mostly everything. Paediatric

Cardiology surgery, we were trying to establish that in Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. That has crashed. What I am saying is that a lot of the problems that have occurred in the RHAs is a result of the inability of the RHA to be corporate entities, to give the salaries that are needed to attract the best people.

Now, I have seen the Prime Minister yesterday, or day before yesterday, speak about Port of Spain, the central block in Port of Spain is problematic based on earthquake problems. We had studies done, and I think the Minister has seen it. We had studies done from UWI—geophysical studies—that show that it was not as bad as people think it is. However, it needed to be changed, and we developed in the Ministry of Health, master plans for the Port of Spain Hospital through the IDB and the sustainable cities: San Fernando master plan and Eric Williams master plan. These were master plans of hospitals that were developed to go into the next 50/60 years. I think there were consultants from the IDB to do that.

So, Madam Speaker, when I speak about continuation of governance, this is what I speak about, and it is sometimes good to see the continuation of the governance and the methods of approach. [*Desk thumping*] Now, the Minister before me was Jerry Narace. He was the PNM Minister. Before him was Rahael, and before him was the Minister of Finance, who is the Member for Diego Martin North/East. And together with everyone, the Minister of Finance, Minister Rahael, Minister Narace, myself, we were able to develop Tobago Scarborough Hospital. That is what we all did. I am not saying that we did it. We all did it and I was able to open it.

And the reason behind that—I am saying this because you have to look at the parallel between Scarborough Hospital and Couva Hospital. It is the same type of approach, where we need to get these hospitals going for a simple reason. Tobago did not have MRI. Tobago did not have a Cath lab, which is for heart surgeries, et cetera, and they needed a linear accelerator and a nuclear area. We were able to put up the Cath lab and the MRI. Tobago has that. It works quite nicely. The nuclear linear accelerator is still on the drawing board.

Now, why were we doing this? In Trinidad, we have all of that. In Couva Hospital they have all of that, except the linear accelerator which is going to be in the oncology centre. We were hoping to produce what we called, educational tourism, because people talk about medical tourism, they talk about all kind of tourism, but you see educational tourism is a tourism that will bring a lot of foreign exchange into this country by teaching—people coming to learn. And offshore medical schools are big business. [*Desk thumping*] Grenada, St. Lucia, Dominica, all these countries who have no good clinical services as we do, have

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[DR. KHAN]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

all offshore medical schools. And we were hoping to attract offshore medical schools to Tobago so they would not have to depend on the normal run-of-the-mill tourist. You would have educational tourism also in Trinidad and Tobago—offshore medical schools to bring in foreign exchange. That is the path that we were taking.

And I would ask the Minister of Health and the Minister of Finance to look at that because it is a good foreign exchange earner. And from there we attract specialty services as then we would have attracted the cream of the crop and bring in medical tourism as a result of that. So when you are waiting for PPPs to open a Couva Children Hospital, you are really denying the country the ability to make foreign exchange.

Now, Madam Speaker, I would like to also speak a little bit about the specialty services, making of a specialist in the country, and I want the Minister of Health to take note. Two things: The Medical Board of Trinidad and Tobago is denying full registration to young doctors who have finished internship and they have no positions in the Ministry or in the hospitals. There are close to 200 of those doctors sitting outside right now, approximately, and more will come out in the next cycle. The Medical Board only gives full registration to those who are coming out of UWI—whatever UWI. Those coming from Grenada, which were doctors that we sent to Grenada, have to do three years before they get their full registration. Now, what I have asked the Medical Board to do, and as well I see the Minister who is in charge of the Medical Board could have discussions and indicate to the Medical Board that full registration can be given to these post-internship doctors, because it is the same level as those coming out of UWI. They have the same training and the same action in doing internship and the same sign-off, but under the guidance. And they could be absorbed, Minister, in the private sector, and the private sector can train these doctors as well as allow them to get their full registration.

Now, Madam Speaker, tying into the system of the RHAs and the specialty services, the University of the West Indies has specialty training and as a result of that, what they do, their specialty training is only for a confined few, whereas opening up the whole system would be ideal for bringing specialist training sessions into this country. So I ask the Minister to do it.

You see, the Minister of Finance did not give us any idea about income generation. The income generation the Minister of Finance spoke about was tax generation, tax movement, property tax, et cetera, which is law. But I would like to ask him if he could look at the whole thing once more and property tax, if there

is some way that he could do the property tax, even if it is a level, different levels of property tax for different levels of income, and people who cannot afford it with means testing will not have to pay property tax. So if you cannot afford it and certain means testing take place, you would not have to pay a property tax, whereas those with higher incomes can pay more property tax. And you could look at it in that manner. He is laughing as usual.

Now, Madam Speaker, I just want to touch one thing. I want to touch a little bit about—to the Minister of Finance. Minister of Finance, I have asked you and I am asking you publicly again, two things: One, income generation. Madam Speaker, you know there is a virtual world outside there that you cannot see? Internet world? On that Internet world you have what they call apps. You have Uber app; you have ABNB app. You have every app you could think about. People buy and trade. In fact, what is coming now—the Minister of Finance will tell you—is bitcoins, which is crypto currencies. And they will move away with currencies eventually. And he always laughs at me. I remember in 2000 when the Minister was in Government, I asked why does he not think about teaching Hindi and Mandarin? And you know what the Minister of Finance told me on that day? I forget what Minister he was. He laughed and he said, “Look, you have a Chinese on your side”, which was Mr. Yetming. Nowadays, China has taken over the world and so has Mandarin.

So I am cautioning him that bitcoins and crypto currencies will take over this world. The internet is a place that you could make billions of dollars. Amazon is a billion-dollar company, chewing up all the brick and mortar companies. So I am saying to him, we need to get merchant accounts in this country rather than our young people sending all their money from their apps to PayPal and the United States.

**3.30 p.m.**

So I am telling the Minister of Finance to look into the development of merchant accounts for us to earn proper foreign exchange.

Now, there is going to be a serious run eventually, Madam Speaker, on crypto currencies, bitcoin and blockchain. And the Minister of Finance—one more thing, Minister of Finance, “doh” laugh again. Dis is—you bring dis Bill”. [Laughter] The Minister of Finance—[Interruption]

**Madam Speaker:** Member, please.

**Dr. F. Khan:** Madam Speaker, he has that habit. He has that habit. He has that effect on us.

**Madam Speaker:** Member, please direct to me.

**Dr. F. Khan:** And he is not even sitting on the sycamore tree.

**Madam Speaker:** The hon. Member. Please, direct your statements to me.

**Dr. F. Khan:** Okay. Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance, I have asked him, and he has laughed, if he could consider, for the forex problems in this country, to look and see if we could make the US dollar the official currency of this country. By doing that—at least have discussions. Certain countries have done it and they have paralleled it with their currency and they have no forex problems. But, I think the previous Minister—one of the Ministers of Finance, Mariano Brown, who, pooh-poohed what he said about foreign exchange today—*[Interruption]*

**Madam Speaker:** What the hon. Member said.

**Dr. F. Khan:** Yes, what the hon. Member said, yes. The hon. Member. So, I am asking if the hon. Member could act like a Minister of Finance and not a taxman and indicate that there are novelty ways and innovative ways of making money. And to use those innovative ways—because, Madam Speaker, you cannot take the same old system, go into a new problem and it works. It is like having “ah ole boat, ah ole ship and you going into new water and you using de same technique that you used before, you going to crash.” So I am asking the Minister of Finance, and he smart, eh. He is one of the most brilliant Members that we have. *[Desk thumping]* He is, he is! He helped us a lot when we were in Government and he was in Opposition, so I know that. The Hon. Member, he is very smart. But the only thing about the Minister of Finance *[Interruption]* I would like to ask him to look at those two things.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Playing smart with foolishness.

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Dr. F. Khan:** Now, Madam Speaker, I just want to say that—I have gotten that over, also medical school, boost the economy, official currency. We had—when we were in Government, there was a problem with nurses in this country. We did not have enough nurses in the country, because most were migrating, and as a result of that, Madam Speaker—*[Interruption]*

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Barataria/San Juan, your original speaking time is now spent. You are entitled to 15 more minutes if you intend to. Please proceed.



**Dr. F. Khan:** Madam Speaker, thanks a lot. Thanks to the House for granting me that. Madam Speaker, when we were in office we found out that the nursing pool was decreasing and those students who were in the nursing pool were migrating and, there was a 50 per cent failure rate occurring. We came to Cabinet and we were able to pass the Nursing Personnel Act, and as a result of that we were able to have the nurse intern.

Where I want to go, Madam Speaker, long ago when somebody had to go into nursing, they would go to England with no O Levels, no any, whatever it was in those days, and they would become nurses based on writing exams and working in the system and writing exams, and they became full nurses, RNs.

We put a system in place when we were in Government. It was called the Aides to Nursing Programme, where we took 1,000 young people with not much qualifications, but what they had was a passion for caring, and put them in the system as aides to nursing year I, II and III, and then they were supposed to graduate to PCAs. What has happened, quite a lot of those young people are coming to my constituency office and indicating that they have been thrown out. They no longer have jobs. They are no longer in the system. And I know, Madam Speaker, that the Nursing Council and the TTRA were against me doing that. They thought I was watering down the brandy, no advancing, no nothing.

And I will tell you something, Madam Speaker. The last British Government, under Theresa May, when she had the Secretary for Health, he took that same system in place. One thousand young people putting it into—I thought it was a mirror image of what we were doing. He started off the system where they would be able to work up to RNs. So I am asking the Minister of Health to look at that, because what these young people were doing, they were working the system and people on the wards had people to see about them. We also had a system in place where they would transfer to PCAs, Patient Care Assistants afterwards, and hopefully ENAs and then RNs. That system has collapsed and I ask the Minister to look at it.

Now, Madam Speaker, there is a serious problem with diabetes in this country, and we talked about NCDs. The diabetic population, there is a high level of what we call diabetic retinopathy, damage to the back of the eyes, as a result of diabetes. But if caught early, people who are blind now, if it was caught early, would be able to see, based on one, investigation, awareness, as well as management.

We had started and we passed in Cabinet something called the National Eye Centre. It was also going to be in Couva Hospital, where you would have screening for eye problems, as well as management with digital photography and you did not need an ophthalmologist to do it, rather than just do the treatment. I would like the Minister to look at that, the National Eye Centre.

*SFC Report (Adoption)*

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

Because in Mauritius, where the screening programme took place, they were able to drop the diabetic retinopathy incidents from 100 per cent to 10 per cent; 90 per cent drop, and many people were able to maintain their sight from diabetic problems, because we have a high diabetic problem in this country as a result of our diet and our genetics.

So, Madam Speaker, I would like to just indicate that I am very glad to see the Minister building on the foundation that we left. We saw a vision of health for this country, and I would ask the Minister of National Security, my good friend, Minister Dillon, to think about selective immigration. You need selective immigration because there are many doctors and specialists from Venezuela, from Cuba and different parts of the world who would like to come to Trinidad and train. But as a result of the non-selective immigration process that we have, we family-oriented, et cetera, it makes it difficult for them to come to get registration and work permits.

We need cardiologists. We need haematologists. We need specialty paediatric cardiologists and they are all there in Venezuelan, everyone, and they are willing to come across. We need specialty nurses and they are there.

The nursing practitioner that we were supposed to have in Trinidad and Tobago, that has to come to Parliament to be passed, based on qualifications. That is going to take a while. So you have a pool of specialty medical people ready to come in, Minister. So when I say selective immigration, I mean you select. There is no harm in that. United States does it. Canada does it. Everyone does it. They select, based on points, about what they need. There are pharmacists that are necessary in this country, that we need here. There are lab technicians. There are biomedical technicians. The whole health sector needs to be taken care of, and you have it. It is just that you have to change the thinking process.

So, Madam Speaker, I just want to go on one point. Blood banking in this country is a mess and I am very glad Dr. Charles has taken the mantle to see what she could do. But the problem with blood banking in this country, and I am telling the hon. Minister, is that—*[Interruption]*

**Hon. Member:** The chit system.

**Dr. F. Khan:** No, the chit system is one part of it, but what happens when people leave their jobs to go and give blood in the blood bank, there is only Port of Spain and San Fernando or Mount Hope, they have to sit there and wait and wait and after like two o'clock, the nurses indicate they are not taking anybody else. So the blood banking time needs to be increased. We had put a system in place and it started to work, with the Friends of the Blood Bank Association, for 24 hours and

also seven days a week, Saturdays and Sundays. And I urge the Minister to look at that. The Friends of the Blood Bank Association, coupled together with the blood banking system and the nurses and the phlebotomists, because when you need blood in any part of this county, it is a problem. It is a real problem, and the only time you understand it, is if your family needs it.

And as a result of that, Madam Speaker, we are supposed to have something like Cuba, where people donate blood on a regular basis. But you have to have a place for them to donate the blood to. If you have to go and donate blood, you have to go and take a chit, stand up in line. If you reach eight o'clock, you are too late. Because they have people going on until two. This has to be a 24-hour system rolling over so anybody could leave their blood or stay on the job and go and give blood when you are not working. You do not have to spend the whole day waiting.

The other thing we were doing, we were looking at the public/private partnership and privatizing some health offices where they could have stand-alone areas with tele-health and telemedicine so people could go to these health centres and speak to doctors that are in remote areas. That is what they do in a remote system. So, that was our vision for health, Madam Speaker.

Now, the Minister has indicated that the maternal mortality has dropped—rant. But I will tell you this, Madam Speaker, this book, the *Report of the Maternal Services Review* put in place in 2011, and this report is May 10, 2013, it indicated in the Executive Summary that: the Ministry of Health should take a lead role in the following: and I say one, creation of a director of women's health, including maternal and child health and the Ministry of Health could provide leadership on policy formation; creation of a post of clinical risk coordinator, where—and it goes on.

We put 90 per cent of these systems in place. [*Desk thumping*] And I am very glad the Minister of Health could stand up here today and indicate that the maternal system and the maternal mortality rate/infant mortality has decreased, and we are thankful for that. Because this was—it is just a matter of continuum. It is continuum. I am not taking the kudos for it. I am just indicating this was put in place and other new ideas have been put in place because as I understand, Dr. Sirjusingh is the Director of Women's Health and he was on this review committee. So, at the end of the day, Madam Speaker, continuance of Governments, the only people would benefit is the population. Non-continuance of Governments, the only person that will suffer is the population.

So, Madam Speaker, with those few words, I just want to say thank you for allowing me to contribute and it was a pleasure. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly):** Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to this debate, as we discuss the Adoption of the Report of the Standing Finance Committee. Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan for his contribution. And I note that in his contribution there were quite a number of initiatives that he indicated have been continued from his time, and so on. His manner of contribution is much different from, maybe, the mood that was happening yesterday as we had the other Members contributing. He seemed to give quite a different spin on how things are happening. Because yesterday we heard from the Member for Caroni Central and from the Member from Cumuto/Manzanilla. After those contributions, Madam Speaker, it was as though the whole country is going down with doom and gloom. We heard that the Government has lost the confidence of the country and its investors and we were hearing that the poor were giving up, working people losing hope, middle-class in disbelief. These are some of the things that we heard. And so, it was very good to hear the contribution from the Member for Barataria/San Juan.

But, as we consider those other contributions, Madam Speaker, I want to put it on the record that the Prime Minister stood in this very honourable House and indicated that bp, in April 2017, agreed to invest \$5 billion to \$6 billion in Trinidad and Tobago over the next five years. All right, committing to drilling, and so on, in this country and also there were very fruitful discussions with Shell and with EOG and Exxon.

And so, contrary to what we heard yesterday about the Government losing the confidence of investors, it seems, Madam Speaker, to me that it is the exact opposite where the Government is being recognized for its contribution and so we are getting the support of our overseas investors in the area of oil and gas, which is very important to the revenue of this country. And so, you know, as we went along hearing from the other contributions, we heard about schools not finished and other schools not completed.

Madam Speaker, we are here discussing the report of the Standing Finance Committee, where the Minister of Finance is on record, as stating our challenges with revenue, and so on. And I want to just indicate that as Members of Parliament, we all have things in our constituencies that we would like done. Even with all the money that we could believe that we should have, there will always be things that can be done, and need to be done.

For example, I was in my constituency yesterday, and we were discussing two early childhood centres; one in Maracas Valley, one in Maracas Bay, that also have not been completed just yet. But it is clear, and the Minister of Education also elucidated, the importance for placing priority on certain projects because of our situation

with reduced revenue. And so each one of us has to, of course, understand this, and convey this to our constituents. And we know that the Minister of Education and every other Minister is doing their very best to deliver to each area of this country, the infrastructure, the projects that are needed as we serve the entire country.

So I want to give the Member for Caroni Central, in his absence, and the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, the assurance, that each one of us is working for the good of this country, and though everything cannot be done exactly at the time we would want it done, that does not mean that priority is not being placed on ensuring delivery to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, as we consider this report, the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts has been allocated \$493,565,700 in the Budget of 2017, which represents a 32 per cent decrease in the allocation from 2016. And we understand that in the context of the fact, that this country has lost \$20 billion in revenue between 2014 and 2017. So we understand and accept that our circumstances have been reduced, our circumstances have changed and, therefore, the allocations would have a concomitant decrease. But yet still, Madam Speaker, the Ministry, with the support of the public officers, has been working throughout this six months that have passed since the last budget has been read, to ensure that the decrease in allocation does not result in a decrease in the impact of the services that we offer to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

So, Madam Speaker, allow me to just look just a bit at what has been happening in the Ministry over the past months, since the Budget for 2017 has been read. At the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, we think about our function basically in two different areas: developing communities and developing the area of culture and the arts.

As we look at Vision 2030, Madam Speaker, it speaks to the foundation of Trinidad and Tobago being strong, sustainable communities and we understand that communities are the basis of our country. From communities come constituencies. From constituencies come the entire nation of Trinidad and Tobago. And so as we consider national development, it is impossible to ignore the area of community development. Because, Madam Speaker, our greatest resource is and continues and will always be our people. All of the economic activity that takes place in our country, takes place against the backdrop of making life better for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

So it is important for us to consider how we get revenue, how we spend that revenue. But it all redounds to the benefit and that is what it is. The focus would be our citizenry; how our people benefit from the economic activity of the country.

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[HON. DR. N. GADSBY-DOLLY]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

And as we consider the development in culture and the arts, Madam Speaker, we think about Vision 2030, which speaks to the promotion of cultural heritage and development. So this whole area of developing communities and developing culture and the arts, they are separate concepts but yet interconnected, and as I develop into what is happening in the Ministry, we will see how these two concepts come together.

So we are focusing, in the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, on enhancing the quality of life. And in the face of decreasing revenue, Madam Speaker, and the necessity of decreasing expenditure, as a result of that, we want to focus on what has been happening to enhance the quality of life, to ensure that even though we have to take some medicine, we have a sweetener.

Madam Speaker, I remember when I was a smaller person, younger child, my mother would give me medication, tonic. All of us probably used to take some tonic. Buckley's is one of them. It never tasted good, Madam Speaker, but it worked. And so, in these circumstances, there are some things which we are going to have to take that may not be as palatable as anything else, but what made it all better when I was a young child, is that you would get something to sweeten behind it and that does not only apply to young children. It applies to adults as well. And so, I would like to put into this discussion what is happening in this country to enhance quality of life, to ensure that even though we have decreased revenue, we cushion the effect of that on the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, permit me to speak a little bit about some of the programmes that come under community development and what has been happening over the past six months in the Ministry, with respect to some of these areas.

One of the main and most important areas would be the Community Centres Refurbishment and Construction Programme. Madam Speaker, there is no Member of Parliament representing a constituency who does not understand the importance of a community centre and there is no community that does not want a community centre to be constructed in their area. The community centres serve as the hub of community activity. This is where the community comes together and they do things to increase the community bond.

Madam Speaker, we have embarked on a very aggressive community centre construction and refurbishment programme and we have been addressing some of the community centres that have laid neglected over quite a number of years and I want to mention some of them because they exist in some of the most densely populated areas of our country and they really have affected the lives of the citizens in those areas by not being completed.

For example, Madam Speaker, allow me to mention the South Diego Martin Community Centre, which in 2010 was left to just lie fallow, nothing happening there in one of the most densely populated areas of our country.

Madam Speaker, the centre in Bagatelle, similar issue, five years, left unattended, maybe more than that, left unattended. There is a centre in Morvant, central, Madam Speaker, 20 years that centre has been left unattended. Madam Speaker, we have been looking at some of these centres and we, I am glad to report that work has begun on these centres to ensure that they are completed and delivered to the people of these communities.

Madam Speaker, in 2015 to '16, we completed and commissioned nine community centres. We have continued into this fiscal by opening two more. So 11 centres have been opened for the use of the communities in these areas. Work is under way presently on nine centres and we have every expectation that before the end of 2017, work will begin on nine more centres, so that we would have these centres worked on and delivered to the communities. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, let me just mention that it is unfortunate that as we came in 2015, we noticed that there were quite a number of buildings called activity centres, that we constructed. I want to mention this, because I want the national community to understand that these centres were built without any approvals. And so, therefore, having been built, they were not assigned to anyone to take care of. They were handed over to Members of Parliament and it grieves me to say that out of the 12 that we could have found built, 11 were built in UNC-controlled areas. Madam Speaker, this speaks to the equity with which the country was dealt with in this area.

However, the Ministry is doing its best at this point one, to do and get the approvals that are usually required before buildings are done and handed over so that the Ministry can take responsibility for maintaining these centres in a way that all the communities, regardless of where they were built, can access them and use them to the best of their ability. [*Desk thumping*] So, San Fernando north, coming soon. Cantaro/Santa Cruz, we coming soon. San Juan/Barataria, "you get yours already". Cumuto/Manzanilla, you also got yours.

**Hon. Member:** We not getting any.

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** No, that is not true. We are dealing with the population on a whole. Gasparillo, opened. Aggressive programme serving the needs of the communities and we have to ensure as well that those who were not receiving what they needed to receive, that we deal with that and we ensure that every community is treated equitably.

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[HON. DR. N. GADSBY-DOLLY]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

Madam Speaker, allow me to mention the work of the Community Mediation Division also operating in communities. And this division, Madam Speaker, is very important. This is the division that offers to the community, free of charge, workshops on anger management, workshops dealing with parental guidance, peer counselling in schools, mediation services, with respect to conflict resolution. This department has been doing yeoman service to this country in all of the communities, also in the schools. It is involved in St. Michael's School for Boys, St. Jude's Home for Girls, doing excellent work, helping people to resolve conflict, deal with their anger and to be able to have a sense of peace in their communities.

Madam Speaker, the US State Department, in 2017, identified 100 gangs in Trinidad and Tobago and we know what comes along with gangs: increases in community crime, increases in community fear, increases in the acceptance of crime in an area, and, of course, a decrease in economic activity, because no one wants to be or operate a business in an area that is crime-struck. It cripples a community when you have a gang operating in a community to that extent. And mediation has been identified as one way, community mediation, that can assist young people and older ones as well, to deal with their anger in different ways, deal with their issues through counselling services, and so on. So that they do not resort to having to use violent activity to be able to resolve those issues.

What we have done in this area, Madam Speaker, we have just embarked on a community mediation sensitization series. Because even though the mediation department sees thousands of persons during a year, and deals with thousands of incidents, we realize that in some of the areas where it is needed most we do not have the people coming forward for the services. So what we have done is that we have written to all 41 Members of Parliament and we have indicated to them that the Community Mediation Division wants to come into the constituency to have a session where we can sensitize members of the community as to the services that are available to them.

And so we are rolling this programme out constituency by constituency. We have already begun in one constituency. I think the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara contacted us and got a date and has had a session and we are rolling this out to educate communities about the services available so that we can have members of the community knowing what they can access for free, of course, and that can redound to the community's benefit, as we can see a reduction in community violence where neighbours against neighbours, violence within families. We can see a reduction in that, if we can get persons to access the



services of the Community Mediation Division. And so we look forward to that series going out throughout the country, and I want to encourage all MPs who have not yet contacted us to be able to get this service. We will be reaching out to you to be able to bring this service to your constituency and your constituents. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, allow me to speak briefly on the Community Education Programme that have been a staple of our environment for many years. These programmes are where skills training are carried to the communities. So they are happening in community centres, and so on. And the skills that are offered vary. There are many different skills: dressmaking, drapery, tiling, small engine repair, bartending and it depends on what the community expresses a need for, that that service is offered. Skill training is offered in the community, so it is geared towards the development of the particular and specific community.

Madam Speaker, each of these courses do a display, and last year there was Community Development Day where the region, all the classes in the region came and people were able to display their wares, what they learnt, ceramics, tiling, and so on.

And I can tell you for a fact that the level of training offered to these community members, free of charge, is really amazing. A lot of the tutors give more than they are paid for and they really turn out a high level of work once the person who has been taking the course is interested, the service offered to them is really a sterling service.

#### **4.00 p.m.**

And what we have done is put in an entrepreneurship module to many of them so it allows the persons to go from the artisan straight up now to the entrepreneurship level because we are trying to encourage cottage industries, we are trying to encourage the community members to learn how to fish rather than to just give them something so that they can walk away as a micro-entrepreneur going toward. Again, Madam Speaker, we are speaking about how we are using our allocation over the past six months to enhance the quality of life in communities, how we are mitigating against the reduction in our revenues but still offering quality to those in the community.

Madam Speaker, allow me to speak about the Best Village Programme. [*Interruption*] Many, many constituencies. And I want us to think about how many countries in this region, and I dare say the world, have a free arts training programme for young people brought to communities that has been running for 54

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[HON. DR. N. GADSBY-DOLLY]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

years. [*Desk thumping*] I do not know how many other countries can boast of having this as a programme. [*Crosstalk*] And yes, we do have to mention, at this time, the service offered by the late Joyce Wong Sang to the Best Village community. [*Desk thumping*] This is an avenue where thousands of young people every year immerse themselves in training in the arts, in community life, regardless of race or creed. And over the years, this programme has developed to include areas that were not traditionally there. However, in response to society's needs, it has developed. And I want to mention that this year, for the first time, the Spoken Word category has been featured in the Best Village Programme. That is a response to the development of this genre of art in Trinidad and Tobago, especially among the young people.

Madam Speaker, I am a parent and I am sure many of us here are, and we would know that any parent likes to involve their children in extra-curricular activities and if you are doing it privately, it can cost you a pretty penny, especially when you have multiple children involved at the same time. And so, the allocation being used by the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts in the area of Best Village, redounds to the benefit of every parent because they can involve their children free of charge in extracurricular, positive activities that have a patriotic underpinning because they involve the indigenous arts of Trinidad and Tobago, and this is something that is really a fillip to the residents of every community and the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

So I look forward, Madam Speaker, and I want to say that the programme is ongoing. Again, delivered to every Member of Parliament, has been a schedule, it is available on the website and so on. Many Members of Parliament have their groups participating and we encourage the community to come out and support your groups and support the Best Village Programme as one of the best programmes that allows for our young people's development and allows our young people, again, to be grounded in the culture of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, let me mention the Mentorship Programme. The Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts has recognized that there are NGOs in this country doing significant work with young people and we see this as an important opportunity for partnership. I am happy to report to this honourable House that the Ministry has engaged in partnerships with two NGOs: AFETT, the Association of Female Executives of Trinidad and Tobago, as well as the Esimaje Foundation. What we have done is to join with their existing programmes and partner with them so that they can offer the services to more young people. And

what they do is they deal with young people under the age of 18, girls and boys, and they pair them with people who can assist them along life's path, with people who have developed the skills of dealing with life, dealing with problems, overcoming hurdles. And they pair these young ladies and young men with them so that they can interact in an intimate way, and get that knowledge transfer happening.

And what we have seen over the past year with respect to how these young people have responded to this programme only gives us the impetus to continue to partner with these NGOs to ensure that that service of mentorship is given back to more communities. And in many cases the mentors do this free of charge and they do this to ensure that the skills they have learnt and their benefits from this country are passed on to young people who can benefit in similar ways. And what is interesting is that even after the programme has ended, the contact between the young people and the older ones are maintained, so there is this constant link to allow for more knowledge transfer, to allow for more young people to be able to benefit from the experience of the older ones, and so we are happy to have those partnerships ongoing. Again, Madam Speaker, even though we have reduced resources, it does not mean that the impact of the Ministry has to be reduced, it does not mean that we cannot cushion the effect of this on our citizens in communities.

Madam Speaker, allow me to turn now to what we have been doing in the area of culture and the arts to develop the areas of culture and the arts. Madam Speaker, it is well known that the cultural sector has important potential. The potential to create jobs, to attract tourists in the whole area of cultural tourism, and to be able to contribute to the domestic economy. And if I can just draw the example of the UK where, in 2016, the culture and arts industry would have contributed £8 billion to the domestic economy of the UK, and this is information coming through from the UK Arts Council. And even here, in Trinidad and Tobago, a modest estimate of the spend by tourists in 2016, according to the CSO data, for Carnival, was in excess of \$403 million, and a study is undergoing, at this point, it is being done, to estimate for 2017 what that spend was. [*Cell phone rings*]

**Madam Speaker:** Could the Member whose device has just gone on, please leave the Chamber and put the device on silent. They can return after that. Please continue, Member for St. Ann's East.

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. So the area of cultural development has potential for serious contribution towards domestic economy. So within this area, we have been focusing on enhancing the artistic experience and

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[HON. DR. N. GADSBY-DOLLY]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

that not only speaks to the experience of the performers or the artists, it also speaks to the experience of the audiences. So we have been looking at enhancing the artistic experience.

Madam Speaker, one of the main ways of doing this, as I go to the first point dealing with how we have been developing culture and the arts, it deals with the whole issue of performance spaces. This has been one of the issues that is usually raised by the artist because an artist lives to perform and every artist wants to perform in a space that is conducive to the level they believe they are performing at. I would like to mention, at this time, Madam Speaker, the issue and the pride that we have felt as a Ministry and I want to congratulate all the workers of the Ministry on the opening of the National Academy for the Performing Arts—the reopening of this facility.

Let me just remind this honourable House that that facility cost us \$500 million, in excess of that, and it was opened in 2009. When I would have assumed office in 2015, Madam Speaker, that facility had been closed. It had been closed since 2014 and that really was a very unfortunate thing because here we have this very expensive and well-turned out facility, unavailable to the public, unavailable to the performers and even more, unavailable to the UTT students who utilize the academy that is also located within this facility.

Madam Speaker, in 2015, though the facility had been closed, we could find no records of a maintenance plan being put in place for NAPA. So there was not a maintenance plan that was not being adhered to, there simply was no maintenance plan. This facility opened in 2009. In 2010, the Government changed and between 2010 to 2015, nothing was put in place for regular maintenance of NAPA. It is no wonder, therefore, that in 2014, things progressed to the point that the facility had to be closed and even at this time, nothing still was put in place. So here we have the facility underutilized—well not utilized at all, then we have the whole issue of the UTT students who had no home, students from Port of Spain, having to travel down to San Fernando every day to get to classes, when there was a facility tailor-made, so that students of the arts can have a place to study and learn and professionalize the arts.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to report that on November the 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2016, NAPA was reopened and the students of UTT are now put back in the facility [*Desk thumping*] that they were supposed to be in. I am also happy to report that UDeCOTT has been contracted and we are at the final stages now for the maintenance plan for both NAPA and SAPA to ensure that these facilities are

maintained in the ways that they should be so that they are available to the public, for the use of the general public and of course, for the artistes. Again, we are enhancing artistic experience in Trinidad and Tobago.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for St. Ann's East, your original 30 minutes speaking time have now expired. You are entitled to 15 more minutes. If you intend to avail yourself of it, you may, please, continue.

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will take it. Let me also mention that work is also ongoing, maintenance work and upgrade work, at Queen's Hall and Naparima Bowl which have given yeoman service to the country and continue to do so, and also our community centres that are being built, the newer community centres really are community performance spaces outfitted with stages, lights, air-conditioned for comfort and so, we are encouraging the use, again, of these community centres for programmes in the communities because they are outfitted and can be used for this purpose. *[Interruption]* No, not the activity centres but we will look at that at a later time.

Madam Speaker, allow me to also mention the cultural training that is happening as we seek to professionalize the arts, as we seek to ensure that we have more artistes and more professional artistes, a higher quality of artistes, in Trinidad and Tobago. There are three programmes—four that are especially important in that regard. There is the Mentoring by the Masters Programme where budding artistes are able to train with professional artistes. We have mentors such as the Sharon Pitt, the late Stephen Derek, Raviji Kenwyn Crichlow, Krishna Persad, Paul Keens-Douglas. These are some of the mentors who have been partnered with budding artistes, and this is the calibre of mentor we have to allow for that knowledge transfer as we allow the learnings from the experienced artistes to flow to the ones who are coming up.

The Ministry also assists with the cost for cultural and technical camps. These camps are geared along the area of culture, in the area of allowing young people to learn skills, crafts and things like this which affect our culture and with respect to the technical camps, they also target areas that are underserved. Some of the production areas, some of the back-end areas for cultural production, these are targeted. So, for example, stage makeup, that is an area that is usually underserved and these are the kinds of things that are looked for in the technical camps so that we can boost, not only the artiste but also the back-end production staff. So that when we talk about professionalizing the sector, it deals with the wide ranges of professions within the sector.

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[HON. DR. N. GADSBY-DOLLY]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

Madam Speaker, I would also like to mention the music schools in the Community Programme. That is a programme that has been taking place in the communities in pan yards. Many of the venues are pan yards and so on where learning the pan is twinned with learning a wind instrument. There is also learning some of the East Indian traditional instruments paired with learning the pan. So the intention is to ensure that there are quite a number of young people, again, who can benefit from extracurricular activities that focus on our indigenous culture. The steel pan of course, being one of the prime examples of this and so we focus on the pan along with some of the other traditional instruments that are learnt.

And this year, what we have done, Madam Speaker, we have increased the time for that programme so that now they have six months of this programme. Also, what we have done is allow for students who show exceptional promise to be examined in the Royal School of Music examinations. So that we not only teach them how to use the instruments but for those that have promise, we carry them to another level so that more development is taking place with respect to the quality of the artistes we are producing.

Madam Speaker, I know my time is drawing to an end so let me just summarize and wrap up quickly. The effect of all of these programmes and the work of the Ministry over the past six months and within the year preceding that as well, is to enhance the artiste's experience; to give us more professional artistes; to increase the experience of the audience and also to ensure that the quality of life is increased. We want to emphasize to this population and to the citizens who are listening that there is no reason to lose hope. [*Desk thumping*] Reduced circumstances and reduced revenue is not something that we should lose hope over because the Government that you have elected is cognizant of the fact that we have to do things differently in order to ensure that our country continues in the way it should. However, we also know that our citizens deserve service and we intend to do just that.

The Minister of Finance has elucidated the plan, this elusive plan that we are always hearing about, that the PNM has no plan, and I have heard it so many times that, Madam Speaker, there is none so deaf as those who will not hear. And it does not matter how many times the wrong thing is said, each Member on this side is going to ensure that we elucidate the truth to the population at all times and we have said that we are ensuring that we are dealing with our situation in a way that allows our country to go forward. We have spoken about the tax reform that is necessary, we have spoken about the expenditure repression that is necessary at

this time and we have spoken about how we have gone about ensuring that we have gas and oil production increases, as well as we have gone about securing our gas futures, so that we have a stream of revenue that we know will come into our country. We have said time and time again.

And even though we have been suffering from extreme reduction in our revenue streams, Madam Speaker, each Ministry has been going about doing the work of ensuring that we deliver what we are mandated to deliver to this country, and the hon. Prime Minister ensures that each of us is doing what we have to do, because we know that this country is depending on this PNM Government to lead us out of this situation and to ensure that we do so in a way that keeps our country on an even keel. [*Desk thumping*]

So, from the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, we have been utilizing our allocation to ensure that we enhance the quality of life for all citizens in all communities and we will continue to do so and as we do so, I would like to thank the public servants in the Ministry for their hard work and dedication, and we look forward, as we go forward to second half of fiscal 2016/2017, to delivering even more so that the citizens of this country can feel the impact of the increased quality of life being offered to them by their PNM Government.

Madam Speaker, with these few words, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Barry Padarath** (*Princes Town*): Madam Speaker, let me first take the opportunity to thank you and Members of this House, for the opportunity to contribute to the report from the Standing Finance Committee. The speaker before me, the Member for St. Ann's East, raised several issues with respect to the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts. A few weeks ago, Members of this House were provided with documents from the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts with respect to mediation services that the Ministry will be providing. And I was very hopeful that today, when the Hon. Member stood in this House, that the Hon. Member would have indicated how she was using the mediation services of the Ministry to deal with a situation that has made headlines throughout this country with respect to the situation with the National Carnival Bands Association. And while I know that that matter is a sub judice matter and it is before the courts, it really is an indictment on the failure of the Member for St. Ann's East [*Desk thumping*] in her capacity of Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts.

You see, Madam Speaker, the Hon. Minister spoke about the Carnival industry and that we must listen and that we must consult and that we must put the Carnival industry as one of those areas that will be able to help us to generate revenue. She

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[MR. PADARATH]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

also said that none was so deaf as those who do not hear. May I remind the Hon. Minister that she may wish to share this piece of advice with her own colleagues, seeing that the Prime Minister continues to say one thing from other Ministers on several policy matters. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the Hon. Member for St. Ann's East—[*Interruption*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member, may I just caution you? I can hear, watch your levels.

**Mr. B. Padarath:** My apologies, Madam Speaker. The Hon. Member for St. Ann's East spoke a great length about the status of community centres in this country and she was quick to point out—the Hon. Member. She spoke about Laventille, Bagatelle, Diego Martin and several others. And the hon. Member indicated that over the past 20 years, none of these facilities were addressed in terms of repair and construction. May I remind the hon. Minister that in the past 20 years, the PNM Government was in there for 11 of those 20 years and what did you do? These were your own constituencies. You speak about Laventille, you speak about Diego Martin, but you kept your own people in bondage for those 11 years, yet you want to come here today and cry wolf in this honourable House.

Madam Speaker, let us deal with the issue—and I am just rebutting a few points with respect to issues that the Hon. Minister raised. The Hon. Minister spoke about NAPA and the problems that were associated with NAPA that forced the closure of NAPA. But she was also quick to point out, the hon. Member, the cost that was associated with NAPA—half a billion dollars and yet more work needed to be done. Then you have the same situation if you look at the Brian Lara Stadium, where \$1.3 billion has been spent and today, when you ask the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central whether or not we have met international standards, they cannot produce one accreditation for that facility. And do you know what that means? It is \$1.3 billion and counting because additional work will now have to be done to comply with International Cricket Council standards.

Madam Speaker, I turn to the issue of the matters raised by the Hon. Minister of Finance, Member for Diego Martin North/East, in the context of the Standing Finance Committee. The Leader of the Opposition, yesterday, raised several issues that are contained in the Auditor General's report and she was able to clearly clear up some of the anomalies that were presented by the Member for Diego Martin North/East. The Member for Diego Martin North/East, while presenting certain figures in this honourable House, when we looked at the Auditor General's report, this is what it said. That the People's Partnership



Government would have left US \$11 billion in reserves, US \$6 billion in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund and US \$700 million in sinking funds with respect to paying debts. The hon. Member was quick to point out that the withdrawal from the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund quickly recovered due to the interest that was accumulated over a period of time after the withdrawal.

But, Madam Speaker, by his own admission, what the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East and Minister of Finance has said to this country is that this country is surviving and this country is hanging on by a thread because of the interest of the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. That is what he is saying. He is saying that there are no new revenue generating areas and that the country is really surviving and hanging on by a thread, based on the interest accumulated with the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. That is what he said in effect.

Madam Speaker, just a few—just a week ago actually, the hon. Prime Minister held a public meeting in Diego Martin entitled: The Road Ahead. The hon. Prime Minister was at pains to drive the country forward while still looking in the rear-view mirror. Twenty months into this administration and we are still focused on the same issues that confronted the population on September 8th, 2015. We are saddled with promises of job creation and the hon. Minister of Finance spent 90 minutes and, Madam Speaker, the only job creation he spoke about was creating over 200 jobs as evaluators for the dreaded property tax or “poverty tax” as we have dubbed it. Madam Speaker, while we are saddled with promises of job creation, we were saddled with promises of diversifying the economy. We were saddled with reduced crime and murder rates. We were saddled with better delivery of public utilities and we were saddled with promises of economic growth and higher productivity rates.

Despite all the challenges that faced the world in terms of economic activity, many countries can still talk about job creation. They can still speak about the issue of what they have done with respect to diversifying their economy to generate new income streams. What do we hear about when we talk about diversifying our economy? Today, we heard about Las Cuevas and Maracas is closed. Why? Because there is no water in the toilet facilities. Many countries can speak about arresting the crime situation in their nation. Yet, in Trinidad and Tobago, sometimes it feels that it is a norm to hear about five and six murders in one day. I think yesterday, it was four. And daily, we do not look at one anymore, it is in “grappes” and that is the reality that confronts Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, while many countries, despite their challenges, have been focused on human development, through improved access to basic things like water, the Government says what? There is no water shortage. Yet, protest erupts throughout

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[MR. PADARATH]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

the country because of dried taps. Madam Speaker, it is important to note that under a previous PNM Government, the exact thing happened and for many, this is déjà vu all over again. But it is important to look at how we see ourselves and how others see us.

Madam Speaker, if you permit me, I would like to quote from a BMI Research Report by a company called Fitch. And the Member for Siparia, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, spoke yesterday about crediting agencies and she spoke about Moody's and the hon. Member also spoke about Standard and Poor's. And the Hon. Member raised that the Member for Diego Martin North/East, the Minister of Finance, had indicated that he was not totally comfortable with the findings of these agencies and therefore, what? He was looking to another agency, this same Fitch. And Madam Speaker, allow me a few moments to read an article on that Fitch website of what they had to say in relation to the Trinidad and Tobago's economy of 2017. Madam Speaker, and I quote:

*"BMI View:"*

—Fitch.

"Trinidad and Tobago's fiscal deficit will narrow in 2017 as revenues are supported by rising energy prices and new taxes. Domestic borrowing and withdrawals from the country's fiscal buffers will finance operations but place considerable strain on the domestic financial system.

Trinidad and Tobago's wide fiscal deficit will narrow modestly in the coming quarters."

**4.30 p.m.**

"Revenues will benefit from rising energy prices"—if they do come—"and the imposition of a property tax, while expenditures would be held steady. Local debt issuances and withdrawals from the country's fiscal buffers will cover the shortfall but will weigh on financing of private sector activity, while the relatively limited adjustment of expenditures will leave the country's sovereign credit ratings at risk."

It went on to say:

"We maintain our forecast of a shortfall of"—Trinidad and Tobago dollars—"6.2 billion, equal to 3.6% of GDP, in 20"—17.

It went on to say:

"That...a lack of data transparency complicates forecasting the size of"—Trinidad and Tobago's—"fiscal shortfalls. Monthly finance data has not been provided

since August 2016 and a balance sheet summaries provided in recent official publications differ...from public statements made by Finance Minister Colm Imbert.”

This is what Fitch has to say and I read it again:

“Monthly finance data has not been provided since August 2016 and a balance sheet summaries provided in recent official publications differ...from public statements made by Finance Minister Colm Imbert.”

And this is the same Fitch that the Hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East is dependent on telling him something different from Moody’s and Standard & Poor’s.

Hon. Minister, if you look at this BMI Research report—I do not need anyone to write speeches for me, you know, hon. Minister. You see, what it requires is proper research and the intellectual capacity that you all do not have on that side. [*Desk thumping*] We have it on this side. We have it on this side. You see, we do not go out there and make public statements, and thereafter when you have agencies—[*Interruption*]

**Madam Speaker:** Members! Members, I would like to hear the Member for Princes Town, and while he has a very full voice the background noise is rising, and therefore, it causes him to have to strain his vocal cords. Please maintain silence.

**Mr. B. Padarath:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I was making the point that you cannot refute what is in black and white because Standard & Poor’s has said one thing, Moody’s has supported what they have said, and now the same company that the Minister of Finance—[*Interruption*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member, remember my rule with respect to display.

**Mr. B. Padarath:** My apologies, Ma’am. Madam Speaker, the same agency that the Member depends on to offer a different advice and put the Trinidad and Tobago’s economy in a different context in the hope that they will have something positive to say about his actions and that of the Government with respect to generating revenue in this country, they have said the very same thing that Standard & Poor’s and Moody’s had said, and supported by the Member of Siparia, Leader of the Opposition in her own contribution.

Madam Speaker, reviewing the economy of Trinidad and Tobago in April 2017, anticipating a review of the economic strategy of the Government, this is what that same report had to say again, and I quote:

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[MR. PADARATH]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

“The medium term challenges relate to managing the falling international energy prices. The country will need to tackle additional measures for much needed fiscal consolidation with a view to mitigate the effects of imbalances that have started to occur. Against this background, one of the risks for the country would be to find itself with a swollen debt at the time when external financial cushions may have been eroded”.

Madam Speaker, do you know what that report goes on to say when they speak about the erosion of the fiscal cushioning? It deals again with the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. And again, as I made the point in the very beginning, the Minister of Finance, Member for Diego Martin North East, essentially has said to this country that while we put in place the property tax, and while we have shortfalls in revenues with regard to the VAT and the online taxes and so on, and while we grapple to come up with a plan in terms of diversification, what we are dependent on? We are dependent on the interest from withdrawals of the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund for this country to survive.

Let us turn to also, separate and apart from Fitch’s report, what Moody’s had to say with respect to the condition of our economy and the way forward in 2017 and beyond. Madam Speaker, if you would permit me, a *Guardian* article on Wednesday, April 26, 2017, this is what Moody’s had to say.

“Yet another international financial institution has downgraded Trinidad and Tobago.

Moody’s announced on Wednesday that it had downgraded”—Trinidad and Tobago—“to Ba1 from Baa3, just days after Friday’s announcement by Standard and Poor’s...that it had lowered the long-term sovereign credit rating in this country from ‘A-’ to ‘BBB+’.”

Madam Speaker, you will agree that several speakers before me have raised this issue about that particular Moody’s report. On determining the way forward with respect to this Moody’s report, the Moody’s report also spoke about Government’s expenditure in their energy sector. It also spoke about Government’s investment in the energy sector. While we have encountered a period of declining oil and gas prices, the Hon. Minister announced that there will be a further injection of \$16 billion to bailout Petrotrin. This Moody’s report spoke about how Trinidad and Tobago should proceed with regard to Petrotrin and the oil and gas sector in this country.

“In its assessment of”—Trinidad and Tobago—“Moody’s said the key driver of its decision was because of the authorities’ policy response has been

‘insufficient to effectively offset the impact of low energy prices on Government revenues, as fiscal consolidation efforts have mostly relied on one-off revenue measures’.”

Weighing in on the property tax now, another area of revenue that has been identified that was dealt with at some point in the Standing Finance Committee—and I know, Madam Speaker, there was a lot of speculation, a lot of the media houses were calling around Members on both sides of the House, and I know the hon. Minister, Member for Diego Martin North/East was at great pains to clarify some of these issues with respect to the property tax, today we are faced with more questions than answers.

The Member for Oropouche East in discussions with him, he raised the issue of agriculture rates with industrial rates. The Member for Barataria/ San Juan today as well spoke about whether or not we can look at pegging the rates of property tax against people’s incomes. While I have dealt with the issue of job creation ad nauseam in this honourable House, the hon. Minister has not indicated at any point whether or not Government has considered establishing something called an unemployment commission, and I raise this again in this House and I will tell you how I will relate it with respect to this property tax.

The Hon. Member for Arouca/Maloney had indicated some time ago about the Central Statistical Office and what was happening there, and in terms of the transition with respect to the statistical institute, and I had indicated that it was my view that that office should be working in tandem with the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, and the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, and it will inform many of the decisions being made by the Ministry of Finance with respect to the social sector of the country that affects so many people in this country. When the hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan raised that particular issue about pegging rates against people’s income, he raised a very serious issue in that he understands what is happening in our country with respect to job losses and people not being able to provide food on their own tables, far less for paying this dreaded property tax.

Madam Speaker, I also want to focus a bit on some of the measures that have been put in place by this Government since coming into power. We have seen our national debt expanded and, again, the Member for Siparia, the hon. Leader of the Opposition, has spoken about the untruths that were told in this House with respect to how many debts the People’s Partnership left. You saw in the space of just 19 months, those Members opposite have increased the national debt of this country significantly. Let us see some of the strategies that they have employed to

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[MR. PADARATH]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

stimulate growth in the economy, and tell me, Madam Speaker, and those who are viewing us and those who are listening to us, whether or not they find comfort in some of these strategies.

To stimulate growth we were told that Sandals still up to this time, no concrete plans, no concrete proposals, 20 months and counting. Today, Reuters tell us that Sandals is being sold. What is going to happen with those negotiations? What is going to happen with those plans? Another one of the issues in terms of stimulating economic growth in this country was the talk of—every time I say it, I find it so comical. They talked about a ply wood factory in this country. What have we heard about this plywood—that was the grand plan for the Member for Diego Martin West, when he spoke about what we will do to stimulate growth in La Brea and in Point Fortin. It has become a national joke.

Let us turn to another issue that they identified with respect to stimulating growth in the economy. They spoke about the Venezuelan gas deal. Up to this time no further action, memorandum of understanding being signed, we are now seeing the economic and political turmoil that Venezuela finds itself in. You saw the shutting down of the National Assembly, where the same deal will be required to have the approval. So it has no National Assembly and do you know what that translates into, Madam Speaker? It translates into that this will not happen, and therefore, they are very dependent on the revenues to be derived from that gas deal but it will not happen.

They spoke about a new tax regime, VAT, where they hoaxed the population, they said we will reduce VAT to 12.5 per cent. The Member for Siparia, Leader of the Opposition, when in Government, as the Prime Minister, removed the VAT from over 7,000 food items in this country, yet they come today to talk about, according to the Member for St. Ann's East, how they care for poor people in this country, but their actions and their words are completely different. What about the revenues they promised us that would come from online shopping? Today, you have seen a massive shortfall in that particular area, and the Member for St. Ann's East raised an important point eh. She spoke about the confidence people have in the Government. Well, Madam Speaker, through you to the Hon. Minister, that lawsuit against you today is an indictment that people have lost confidence in your ability and in this Government. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, let us look at the ceiling limits for borrowing from every institution they can think about. Right here in this honourable House, on several occasions, we have been brought to allow Government to pass legislation to deal with the issue of borrowing limits and so on. We have seen over \$26 billion being

borrowed by this Government and nothing to show for it. We dealt with the issue of the raiding of the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund and, again, the Hon. Minister and Member for Diego Martin North/East spoke about separating both components, Heritage, and Stabilisation.

Madam Speaker, this again, is like déjà vu all over again. How many years under a PNM Government we have been told about that? Yet, there has been no support through legislation being brought to this Parliament to effect such. Those items that I have listed appears to be the plan of the Government, and today they are responding to the Member for Naparima and many others, where we say they have no plan. They are saying, yes, we have a plan, and I have identified to you, Madam Speaker, through the Standing Finance Committee and in other areas through the national budget and so on, what were some of these plans? Today, the question remains: What benefits have been derived from these plans; how much revenue has come out of these plans? Some of these plans are actually being forgotten by their own Members because it is so ridiculous, because they know very well it will not bear fruit.

Since December of 2015, when the Hon. Prime Minister addressed our nation, he—the Hon. Prime Minister, that is—identified also some of the strategies going forward. And really, Madam Speaker, you will agree that the Standing Finance Committee, the mid-year review, was supposed to provide some level of comfort in terms of revenue streams because I think that is the main issue on everyone's lips in this country. While they run up and down this country and they say we have no money, but yet you find money to spend on the Lara stadium and all these other frivolous projects that will not benefit the people of Trinidad and Tobago, that will not put bread and butter on the tables of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. They want to know what the plan is. These plans you have identified have failed, [*Desk thumping*] so therefore, what are the new plans?

The Hon. Prime Minister addressed the nation in December 2015, and I quote from the Hon. Prime Minister where he spoke about the prime ministerial responsibility, where he spoke about when he took office that energy prices were already so low, and that he had to put plans in place to cushion that blow and also in terms of how we would take Trinidad and Tobago forward outside of the energy sector. But, Madam Speaker, coming out of the address to the nation, the Leader of Opposition and Member for Siparia, sent out a release, and when I read that release just recently in my research, I thought that it was so appropriate a response to the findings and what we were told through the Standing Finance Committee and the mid-year review by the Hon. Minister of Finance, that I would like to repeat what was contained in that release. On December 16, 2015, the Leader of the Opposition had this to say:

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[MR. PADARATH]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

“The address to the nation by Dr Keith Rowley”—Prime Minister—“will exacerbate anxiety and instability created by”—this—“Government’s failure to meet economic challenges head on, because it is now clear that the PNM never had the economic plan they claimed.”

The Leader of the Opposition—“In a comprehensive statement following Dr Rowley’s address to the nation, Persad-Bissessar said”—this—“the statement is tantamount to putting the country in intensive care without prescribing any medicine to stimulate an economic”—growth.

And if I recall, the Hon. Member for Siparia used those exact words yesterday again.

So, Madam Speaker, let me again quote what was contained in that release. The hon. Member for Siparia said:

“...what we heard was over 30 minutes of a Prime Minister abdicating his responsibility, blaming others for challenges, taking credit for fixing damage they in fact created, and demonstrating he has no understanding or idea of how to manage the present economic challenges’.

In fact, a detailed analysis of Dr Rowley’s statement points to the very real possibilities of capital flight, a return of spiraling inflation...potential for devaluation.

When Dr. Rowley took office, energy prices were already low and measures were already put in place to reduce spending by the People’s Partnership. We were clear and specific”—the—“budget adjustments would focus on maintaining a healthy level of investment and protecting jobs, incomes and the vulnerable.”

Madam Speaker, I want to repeat that point because in the Standing Finance Committee we dealt with job loss, we dealt with lack of income by many in our society, but we also dealt with the vulnerable in terms of the cutting of the programmes in the social sector. The Hon. Member, and I repeat, had this to say.

“In fact, a detailed analysis of Dr Rowley’s statement point to the very real possibilities of capital flight, a return of spiraling inflation...potential for devaluation.”

She also said maintaining a high level of investment would protect jobs, incomes and the vulnerable. It is almost as though she was looking into a crystal ball, because this was December 2015 and the exact same thing is happening in our country today. [*Desk thumping*] She warned the population, Madam Speaker,



and you saw it in that Standing Finance Committee where the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air and others stood and they supported those cuts, knowing fully well that there were people in this country who could not put bread and butter on their tables.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Princes Town, your original 30 minutes have expired, you are entitled to 15 more minutes. Do you intend to proceed?

**Mr. B. Padarath:** Yes, Ma'am.

**Madam Speaker:** Please.

**Mr. B. Padarath:** Madam Speaker, I want to turn to another area that the Member for Arouca/Maloney raised in her capacity as Minister of Planning and Development. You see, let us come back to what is their plan, and, Madam Speaker, I will again show you that their words and their deeds are two completely different things. You see, on Sunday, March 12, 2017 in the *Trinidad Guardian*, the *Guardian* had this to say with a headline that spoke about:

“The Barbados-based Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), in partnership with the Trinidad and Tobago government, has formally launched a country strategy for the twin island republic, which proposes financial support of US\$436.7 million for the period”—when?—“2017 to 2021.

The strategy was launched last week in Scarborough, during which the CDB outlined the programme of support.

CDB recognizes Trinidad and Tobago’s potential for transformative economic and social development.”

Madam Speaker, let me get to the point of the article that I really want to raise with respect to the hon. Minister of Planning and Development’s plan for the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. The Hon. Minister had this to say:

The—“CDB recognises Trinidad and Tobago’s potential for transformative economic and social development. Today marks the beginning of a focus five-year programme that has been strategically designed to support improvement of the country’s competitiveness, promote good governance, and drive environmental sustainability...

The programme of assistance aims to achieve five primary development outcomes...”

And this is what the Hon. Minister of Planning and Development had to say with respect to the five primary development outcomes.

To—“improve the quality of”—life of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[MR. PADARATH]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

The Hon. Minister said access to education and training was one that was identified, yet they came, the hon. Members opposite, in the Standing Finance Committee to ask for additional sums for laptops, to ask for additional sums for the School Feeding Programme, yet they claim that they want access to education and training as one of their pillars for growth and development. The Hon. Minister of Planning and Development said her plan was to strengthen social protection. Well, Madam Speaker, if ever I did not believe the Hon. Minister, it was on this occasion because when I saw what was being promoted in the Standing Finance Committee, I said how could the hon. Member for Arouca/Maloney be talking about strengthening social protection when they have cut \$86 million in food support in this country?

The other one she spoke about, the Hon. Minister, increased productivity competitiveness and economic diversification. When you hear from the Hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries that the food import bill has been reduced by \$1 billion, not because of any doing on the part of the Government, but why? Because there is not enough forex for suppliers to make purchases. [*Desk thumping*] But yet they speak about economic diversification and competitiveness. Madam Speaker, they spoke about improved evidence-based development planning and institutional development. Again, a lot of hot air over the past 18 months, but not one word—and I am hoping my good friend, the Member for Arouca/Maloney, will tell us—she knows very well that the Member for Caroni Central did a lot of hard work while we were in Government to give you that gift of the Central Statistical Institute. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, through you to the hon. Minister, I hope that she would use her good office to not only make deposits, but also to make intellectual deposits that will see Trinidad and Tobago further developed that Central Statistical Office. [*Desk thumping*] These were their plans, none of which have materialized.

The Hon. Attorney General in this House—and again contained in the Standing Finance Committee—promised, he said you know what, Member for Princes Town, Member for Siparia, Member for Oropouche East, we will tell you. We will give you the information about the three courts that were identified for repair and refurbishment. I think the Member for Oropouche West as well. The Member for St. Augustine, very concerned as legal practitioners in this country, what was happening with these three courts. Then I said, “AG, based on your own arguments, you were looking at the amount of cases, the case load, to determine which three courts will be repaired.” And then the Hon. Attorney General gave us the impression that a similar approach was adopted for the Family and Children Division of the court. Then the Attorney General said, “Well, let us deal with the

while elephant in the room”, which is that the Chairman of People’s National Movement, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries owns the property that they, the Members opposite, will house the Family and Children Division of the court. The Hon. Attorney General promised us, he promised us that before yesterday’s debate that we would have gotten several things which we have not gotten up to now.

We were told that we would have gotten when the facility was rented; whether or not anything is currently housed in the facility; who is proprietor. Well he admitted that; but you know what, they have not told this country that while we have not occupied that Family and Children Division of court in that property, how much money the Chairman of the People’s National Movement has already collected in his pockets even though that there is no Family and Children Division of the High Court being housed there.

So, Madam Speaker, the hon. Member for Siparia raised several other issues in her contribution—*[Interruption]*

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Speaker, would the Member give way? Madam Speaker, just to correct the record again, that transaction started under the last—*[Interruption]*

**Mr. B. Padarath:** Absolutely untrue.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Speaker, if I may, that transaction—and the Member for Siparia, if she attended her Cabinet meetings would know that *[Desk thumping]* that transaction started under the last administration.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Not true.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** That is completely true. It started under the last administration—*[Interruption]*

**Madam Speaker:** Member, just now. Members! Members! Members, please observe the decorum of the House. The Member has given way and he will be able to respond. Let us stop the interjection and the talking across the floor.

**Mr. B. Padarath:** Madam Speaker, you know I will not take that basket from the Member for Arouca/Maloney because it was your own Member for San Fernando West who promised to provide the black and white, and up to now you cannot provide the black and white because it does not exist. It was under your Government that arrangement was signed off, and the Member for Arouca/Maloney knows that very well.

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[MR. PADARATH]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

Madam Speaker, I have raised time and time again the expenditure and I know the Members for Naparima and Siparia raised the issue about revenue being identified for a feasibility study, for a golf course in St. Madeleine, but let me also raise the issue that is grabbing a lot of attention in the public domain with respect to the Brian Lara Stadium. I continue to contend that today, as proven by the very answer from the Member for Diego Martin Central that that stadium has no requisite accreditation or approval, but it also has no clearance with respect to the welds on that stadium and continues to be a safety hazard to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, you will hear from many opposite different stories just as the one we have heard from the Member for Arouca/Maloney, and they continue to deceive this population just like the Member for Diego Martin Central. Likewise, as the Member for Siparia got something in her mail box, I too got something in mine last night and that is an email exchanged between the Member for Diego Martin Central and the CEO of the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago which identifies very clearly that they knew Sachin Tendulkar was never coming to Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] and they used his name to sanitize this Brian Lara Stadium, but you know Shakespeare says:

All thy worries and all thy woes cannot sweeten and wash off the blood from this little hand, and all the perfumes of Arabia dressed in fancy clothing will not wash off the blood off thy hands.

Madam Speaker, you see, the stench is so strong coming from that side—

**5.00 p.m.**

**Madam Speaker:** Member, could you please control your voice levels, please?

**Mr. B. Padarath:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, you see, they are concerned about all the perfumes of Arabia because they know the stench of deceit is coming from that side. [*Desk thumping*] The people of Trinidad and Tobago, through this Standing Finance Committee, saw that they have two things. They have two things, Madam Speaker: a lot of hot air and they know that they have moneys in the coffers as the Member for Siparia and others have deduced, but they would not even spend what they already have in the coffers to relieve the pain of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

So you know what is the plan, Madam Speaker? Pressure them, pressure them, pressure them; ride the backs of the poor people of this country, Madam Speaker; [*Desk thumping*] and keep them depressed and suppressed with the hope that by 2019 that the people of Trinidad and Tobago will forget when they start to release a little pittance.

So when they talk about, Madam Speaker, today all that they did not get in the 20 years, how many years was the PNM in office? You starved your own constituencies. [*Desk thumping*] So today, we are seeing a repeat. It is déjà vu all over again, a repeat of what has occurred in the past. We on this side are fully prepared to take over the reins of power. We promise the people of this country that we have a plan. They deceived you in 2015, but we know how to run an economy. You see, we do not have to depend on a Madamas River or a “mad” something else as the Member for Chaguanas West will say [*Laughter*] but I will not say that in this honourable House.

**Hon. Member:** What river is that?

**Mr. B. Padarath:** But, Madam Speaker, we have real tangible ideas to run this country as evidenced. You know, I see the Member for Diego Martin North/East asking the Member for Siparia, “Who wrote that speech for the Member for Princes Town?” I want to tell the Hon. Members opposite, we have the intellectual capacity to run a Government, and that is why we were able to deliver to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] But you know what? We will forgive them for that one mistake that they made on September 7<sup>th</sup> when we return to bring good governance to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of Public Administration and Communications (Hon. Maxie Cuffie):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I do not know whether the Member for Princes Town is a batsman or a bowler, but he seems to have a preoccupation with the Brian Lara Stadium. But, Madam Speaker, I intend to take his wicket today. [*Desk thumping*] It seems to me that the Member for Princes Town, he ended his contribution by talking about déjà vu all over again. For me it was déjà vu all over again, because the more I listened to him, the more I felt the Member for Siparia was speaking. In fact, he spent half of his contribution quoting the Member for Siparia from yesterday. [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Member:** Parrot! Parrot! Parrot! [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Speaker:** Order. Order.

**Hon. M. Cuffie:** Madam Speaker, in order to take his wicket, I will bowl to the Member for Siparia, because when the Member for Siparia spoke yesterday, she started with two things: the first was her obsession with the TSTT transaction with Neal & Massy and then the Member also mentioned the issue of the— [*Interruption and crosstalk*]

**Hon. Member:** “Why yuh doh shut up?” [*Crosstalk*]

*SFC Report (Adoption)*

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

**Madam Speaker:** I would like all Members to at least practise some tolerance, and again to please act in accordance with the decorum that is required. Member for La Horquetta/Talparo.

**Hon. M. Cuffie:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Member for Siparia mentioned the Procurement Regulator, and she took issue with the salary that was assigned to the Procurement Regulator. And you know that whole debate showed me the difference between those on this side and the philosophy on the other side. Because when you look at the order that was developed for the salary of the Procurement Regulator, the compensation was put in the realm of a high court judge and the Auditor General, and I would like to believe that is for a special reason. These are offices where people of integrity devote their lives to serve the country and not cognizant of material gain. You decide to serve your country for a reason [*Desk thumping*] and there is an element of sacrifice.

I recognize that Members on the other side do not appreciate that kind of sacrifice. That is not part of their being. And so, as far as they are concerned, the only way you can get somebody to fill a job is by offering money. A job like the Procurement Regulator you can never offer any kind of money that will satisfy anybody, but if you are consumed by material things then it will be an issue for you. Those on that side clearly show where their preoccupation is when it comes to national service.

The Member also mentioned the issue of Massy Communications. In fact, all the Members on that side spent a great deal of time treating with that. I listened to the Prime Minister when he spoke on the radio, Member for Siparia. [*Crosstalk*] I recall the Cabinet discussion we had and he made one point. He said the reason why we never got around to discussing the details of that transaction is because TSTT was stopped because the Cabinet was not the place to get into the company's business, and there is a good reason for that.

**Hon. Member:** What!

**Hon. M. Cuffie:** Let me finish. There is a good reason for that because—now, the Member for Siparia is a senior counsel and the Member for Siparia was also the Prime Minister of this country. The Member should be aware that in terms of telecommunication licences, the Cabinet makes the ultimate decision. So the Cabinet could not go before and be advising on a matter that eventually would have to come before the Cabinet. [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

**Madam Speaker:** Order. Order.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** “It is better you did stay quiet.” “Is better you did stay quiet.”

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Couva South, we will shortly be breaking for tea, but if it is that you cannot contain yourself then, you know, you are invited to take a little walk and come back in.

**Hon. M. Cuffie:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. You see, the whole issue shows the lack of appreciation for the issue of ICT, and this report of the Standing Finance Committee, the variations involving the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications have to do with the issue of ICT and its importance to this country. Now, the variations are for Microsoft licences, Symantec licences and Oracle licences. Now, those licences and the issue of ICT—I want to alert the Member for Princes Town—is key to our plan for diversification and the development of Trinidad and Tobago.

I have been telling various audiences that data is our new oil. It is something that is very prevalent in the international community that deals with ICT. In fact, in *The Economist* just this week the cover issue is dedicated to the issue of data being the new oil. I just want to read from the comments of May 06, 2017. It says:

“A NEW commodity spawns a lucrative, fast-growing industry, prompting antitrust regulators...to restrain those who control its flow. A century ago, the resource in question was oil. Now similar concerns are being raised by the giants that deal in data, the oil of the digital era. These titans—Alphabet (Google’s parent company), Amazon, Apple, Facebook and Microsoft—look unstoppable. They are the five most valuable listed firms in the world. Their profits are surging: they collectively racked up over \$25bn in net profit in the first quarter of 2017.”

So the way we treat with ICT is key to our ability to revive and grow as an economy. Somehow that thinking escaped the Members opposite. So that the issue that we are treating with today in terms of Microsoft, Oracle and Symantec are issues that they failed to address when they were in Government.

Let me first talk about the Microsoft issue. I mentioned before that we managed to save US \$14 million by properly negotiating a Microsoft agreement that had been around for some time. And, when I mentioned in the committee, I got several questions from the Member for Tabaquite who tried to show that the wastage was due to the public servants who took advantage of the facilities that were being offered, but there was one thing he missed. The wastage showed an absence of leadership across the Government under that administration, and the fact that we were able to save US \$14 million by going from Ministry to Ministry negotiating hard with Microsoft is because of the leadership of this administration that is committed to eliminating waste, corruption and mismanagement. [*Desk thumping*]

*SFC Report (Adoption)*

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

While we pursued that agreement with Microsoft, we also found other issues. One of the issues that we found was this issue with Oracle. We found that in terms of the Oracle licence, the contract was entered into in 2011 by the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications on behalf of the Ministry of Finance to deal with a pension issue, and that contract was for \$6 million. It was never used. So after signing a contract for \$6 million in 2011, that administration allowed time to pass. In fact, the record shows that although the contract was signed by the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications then, the Ministry of Finance had no intention of using that software for the pensions issue. So we committed to spending \$6 million and the House has to approve the expenditure for this money which brought us nothing. Another fire truck. The issue with Symantec also showed an obsession with waste.

Now, when we got wind of the Symantec contract, we were supposed to have an agreement that covered all of the public service—Symantec provided security for all the computers and the software that we have—we found only 65 per cent of the Ministries were using the Symantec software although it was supposed to be 100 per cent. Apart from that, 35 per cent of the Ministries took all kinds of software. People were buying stuff that had no relation to the work of the Ministry. At the end of the day, although the Government had software intended for the use by the entire public service, it was not being used. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker, the Member for Oropouche East is disturbing me. He wants excitement. [*Laughter*] I am not here to entertain the Member for Oropouche East. [*Crosstalk*] But we were able to get around that problem and now we have an agreement with Symantec. You know something, Madam Speaker, the agreement expired in February 2016. We negotiated for a six-month extension at no cost. After the six months ended, we negotiated for another two months at no cost. At the end of day we were allowed a facility that would have cost \$2.5 million and we were allowed to use it for free, and eventually we were able to sign an agreement where we got \$3.6 million worth of software after having gotten \$2.6 million free. That is because we took the time to do the hard work in terms of our negotiation. Madam Speaker, at the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications, we are determined to ensure that that type of wastage never occurs again. During this time, we have been focused on making data the new oil, and getting our country and our economy ready for the new era.

The Member for Princes Town talked about jobs, and I want to give an example of the kinds of jobs that we are now producing. Under this administration, in the Tamana InTech Park, we have gone into business process



outsourcing. There is a company there, iCore that has clients from the US, telecommunications clients. I think it is Metro, I forgot the name of the other US provider. The thing is, they provide business process outsourcing for these companies based in the Tamana InTech Park.

I had a virtual meeting with the executives of iCore—I think when we had the meeting one person was in Canada and the other one was in Australia—and they spoke about some of the challenges that they are having in Trinidad and Tobago. But the important thing was they pointed out to us that they had managed to bring Amazon, which is the largest Cloud provider in the world, they had managed to get Amazon to come to Trinidad and Tobago for iCore to do their business processing. So now, Amazon is the latest client. They will be setting up an office in Barataria and iCore will provide 1,000 jobs in business process outsourcing. [Desk thumping]

**Mr. Singh:** When?

**Hon. M. Cuffie:** They are already here, 1000 jobs. [Crosstalk] Well, they have some jobs in—they already have I think 300 or 400 in Wallerfield, which is the constituency of La Horquetta/Talparo. I think they will be bringing some others in Barataria. We will be ensuring that they continue to bring jobs here. [Crosstalk]

**Mr. Charles:** Minimum wage.

**Hon. M. Cuffie:** The Member for Naparima says that is minimum wage. He is a man who talks about—the Member frequently talks about Singapore, and which is a country that grew as a result of the same jobs you are calling minimum wage. From this I understand why you all do not get it.

Now, one of the leaders in the information technology sector is India. In 2009, the Indian Government offered to Trinidad and Tobago assistance in developing the IT sector. Now, the election came and those discussions were never completed. The Indian Government continued to press the Trinidad and Tobago Government to accept its assistance in developing the IT sector in Trinidad and Tobago. For five years, Madam Speaker, they got no response from the Trinidad and Tobago Government. Because they were not getting any response here, they set up technology centres in Grenada, in Dominica, in Barbados and I think even in Jamaica.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to announce that Cabinet, three weeks ago, accepted the offer of the Indian Government to sign a memorandum of understanding for the creation of an Indian Technology Centre at Tamana InTech Park. [Desk thumping]

*SFC Report (Adoption)*

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

**Mr. Singh:** Will the Member give way? Thank you very much. Is this located in the India Institute of Technology?

**Hon. M. Cuffie:** Yes.

**Mr. Singh:** There was a memorandum signed back in 2001.

**Hon. M. Cuffie:** And the Member is right, Madam Speaker. They did sign a memorandum in 2001 and they did nothing with it. We have come and we are determined to ensure that it happens. [*Desk thumping*] So we understand the necessity of getting information technology as a sector going; we understand the importance of the assistance of the Indian Technology Centre for us to get our country going and we understand why we could do well in ICT.

Madam Speaker, last year, I went to Chile to receive an award from the countries of Latin America because they recognized the work that Trinidad and Tobago is doing in terms of getting ICT to develop our country.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Will the Hon. Member give way? Hon. Minister, as a Member of the Cabinet you stated you did not discuss certain matters and thought it so prudent. Are you saying that the Cabinet approved a loan of \$1.9 billion by way of Deed of Debenture this year 2017—\$1.9 billion borrowed by TSTT from Republic Bank? Was that approved by the Cabinet? [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. M. Cuffie:** But the Prime Minister said that. The Prime Minister is on record. I heard it myself. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Not with the loan with the \$1.9 billion. [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member, could you please continue?

**Hon. M. Cuffie:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Crosstalk*] Let me move on to the work that we are doing in the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications to ensure that the Government is working efficiently to assist our development process. You know, Madam Speaker, I had asked that a special invitation be sent to the Member for Siparia to the opening of the Government Campus on Tuesday, because—[*Crosstalk*] We sent you an invitation. In fact, I was about to welcome her in the salutation and when I looked I realized the Member for Siparia was not there—the Government Campus is key to what we intend to do in terms of the development—[*Crosstalk*] Is because we have a plan. We had a plan.

**Madam Speaker:** Could you all please abide by the Standing Orders and stop the incessant crosstalk? Member for La Horquetta/Talparo.

**Hon. M. Cuffie:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to put on record, Madam Speaker, that just as for five years they refused to finish the building; for five years they refused to sign the agreement to get the assistance from India; and for five years they refused to finish the Brian Lara Stadium and now that it is finished and we are about to enter, the Member for Princes Town has some obsession with ensuring that it does not happen. But we know that we have a plan. We are clear that it is working.

Madam Speaker, let me get back to the fact that we are saving money with the opening of the Government campus. We have our public servants well secured, working in harmonious, productive environments that would lead to better productivity and a better economy eventually.

I also want to refer to the issue that was raised by the Member for Princes Town over the golf course in St. Madeline, I think it is. Now, the Member for Siparia also raised that issue. The fact of the matter is when we had the golf course in the estimates for the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications is because we do our work. Just as we saw that the golf course did not belong there; just as we saw that the Microsoft contracts were bloated and were not delivering value for money, we saw that there was no reason for a golf course to be in the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications. We thought that it was more fitting to be in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs and we went to Cabinet and we transferred the asset to the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs where it is well located and where they will do the proper thing. [Crosstalk] I have explained that no money has been spent, but if we spend \$250,000 it would be \$250,000 well spent. [Desk thumping]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for La Horquetta/Talparo. Members, by agreement, we will take the suspension now. We will return at six o'clock.

**5.30 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**6.00 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members, let us resume the sitting after tea. The Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, you have three minutes of your initial time, and do you care to avail yourself of the additional 15 one time?

**Hon. M. Cuffie:** Yes.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Right, so kindly proceed. [Desk thumping]

**Hon. M. Cuffie:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When we stopped I was speaking about the construction of the Government Plaza and the benefits that it has brought to the public service, because over the years neither the quality nor the quantity of the properties designated for the public service had improved. The end result of that was an astronomical bill for rental of privately owned properties on a monthly basis. Now, with the opening of the Government Plaza we stand to save approximately \$18.3 million annually in rental accommodation. The Plaza is an environment that is conducive to productivity and will, therefore, lead to improved customer service.

I spoke already about the use of ICT; the buildings will be configured for ICT uses to lead to better service. Let me just address the issue of the 9,000 public servant positions that are said to be vacant in the public service, and it was mentioned in the committee stage. Now, those 9,000 vacancies are not all vacancies that need to be filled. There are a number of positions that have become redundant, some of them are suppressed, some of them are no longer needed in a modern economy, but they still remain on the books of the public service, they still remain on the estimates. And because we are moving from a system of manual record-keeping to one that is based on ICT, it would take us some time to eliminate all those positions from the records, but we are committed to doing that. The Ministry of Public Administration and Communications would be working with the DPA and the Public Service Commission to ensure that we have a public service that is modern and well-oriented.

I want to speak, also, to the issue about the delays in appointing public officers, and I have heard it here several times about the problems in getting public servants employed and of getting positions filled, and we have made tremendous strides in that regard. I take pleasure in informing this House that the Public Service Commission has agreed to several positions being filled, not by the Commission, by Ministries themselves who can now advertise, and the Permanent Secretary fill positions in several Ministries. The Ministries that have been allowed so far—now these positions are peculiar positions to the Ministry. So, for example, in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries you have peculiar positions of geologists, geophysicists. In the Ministry of Health, you would have positions of doctors, those positions will no longer need to be recruited by the Service Commissions, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry has been delegated the authority to place advertisements.

It is not specialist positions so much, but positions that are peculiar to the Ministry. The Ministries that have already been delegated include the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications, the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government,

the Office of the Prime Minister, and Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts. So in these Ministries, the Permanent Secretary will have the authority to advertise, recruit staff, and this will lead to faster recruitment in the public service, and you will see a significant dent in terms of the number of vacant positions.

Now, there is an issue with the attraction to the public service, because there are several positions which are, when advertised, do not attract the kind of response that Ministries are looking for, and we are working on that. *[Interruption]*

**Dr. Khan:** Would the Member give way? Minister, I just want to ask a question, if you could look into it too. Why is it that the young people who are coming back from scholarships are not being matched to the positions or areas they are specialized in? You would find it is a total disconnect with these people coming back on scholarships.

**Hon. M. Cuffie:** Thank you, Member for Barataria/San Juan, and that is an important issue that the Cabinet has addressed. I think what has happened is that scholarship recipients are not tied to the country's developmental needs. So, when you get your A levels and you earn a scholarship, you can study pretty much whatever you choose, but in terms of the needs of the public service, there are special skills that are required.

So when a scholar returns you often find that you have a scholarship, you are indebted to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, and the Government has to find a job for you, but the field in which you studied and which you pursued may not be one that is needed or required at that time by the Government. So you have a lot of returning scholars who find themselves not being able to be placed. And, going forward, we are looking at tying the awards of scholarships to the country's developmental needs, and also working and placing all the returning scholars across the Government service. I think the Minister of Finance, in his presentation, mentioned plans to get young scholars employed across the service.

But the fact of the matter is, this is all part of our plan to develop Trinidad and Tobago. I am sorry the Member for Caroni Central is not here, because I am sure he would have been happy to note that AMCHAM, the American Chamber of Commerce of Trinidad and Tobago, issued a statement today basically agreeing with the mid-year review presented by the Minister of Finance. I will just read the first paragraph, it says:

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[HON. M. CUFFIE]

Thursday, May 11, 2017

AMCHAMTT has considered the Minister's statement in the report on the Finance Committee and acknowledges that the Government is on budget at this time. We also note that this will require deficit financing at the end of this period. The Minister articulated that within current circumstances we are on track to achieve fiscal balance by 2020.

So, although the—[*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Charles:** Who are they a party group for?

**Hon. M. Cuffie:** You know who heads AMCHAM?

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Bhoewar's son. [*Laughter*]

**Hon. M. Cuffie:** I think if you knew who the leader of AMCHAM was you would not say that.

So when the scales have been removed from their eyes they are able to see that we are operating with a plan, that we are moving this country forward, and that, unfortunately for them, once we keep to our plan it will take a long time before they ever get back into Government. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** I recognize the Member for Chaguanas West. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Ganga Singh (Chaguanas West):** Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleagues on this side who have spoken thus far, including the Member, our Leader of the Opposition, Member for Siparia, [*Desk thumping*] for giving a clinical analysis of what is required in the country. It is clear that the presentation by the Member for Diego Martin North/East, the Minister for Finance, was clear in diagnostic but short on prescription, [*Desk thumping*] and that, therefore, in his view he has reached the stage whereby he has consolidated their position but now looking for revenue through taxation in order to balance the books, and there are significant gaps emerging.

But what has happened in the contribution of the hon. Member for La Horquetta/Talparo? I tried to make sense of it and to a large extent, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he was very convoluted. I tried to follow. It is only he became comfortable when he started to speak about the portfolio under his control. He attempted to deal with the issue of the Massy—what I call “Massy-gate”. [*Desk thumping*] He attempted to deal with that, and, like a good choir boy, the Hon. Member sang the hymn according to the Prime Minister in his contribution in the

radio programme, TSTT acted with our consent. But I will demonstrate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that there is something rotten in the State of Denmark on this issue of the “Massy-gate”. I would demonstrate through reference to the board minutes at TSTT, to reference to articles in the newspapers, and to reference to a debenture providing a loan of \$1.9 billion, that all is not well in the State of Denmark.

Because you see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you look at what has transpired from the very inception you have the Minister of Public Utilities had no knowledge. The Minister in the Ministry of the Prime Minister with Cabinet rank, the Hon. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West had no knowledge. The Hon. Minister of Finance, the Member for Diego Martin North/East had no knowledge. So what you have is a situations, three Members of the Cabinet had no knowledge, senior Members of the Cabinet had no knowledge. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I make reference to the *Guardian Business* newspaper of Saturday, May 06, 2017: “Enill, Browne on TSTT/Massy Deal: Imbert should have approved”, and I quote very briefly, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

“Former Energy Minister Conrad Enill says majority, state-owned telecommunications provider TSTT should have received the approval of the Minister of Finance before making the \$255 million acquisition of Massy Communication, the broadband and HD TV subsidiary of local conglomerate, Massy Holdings.”

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member, could we get the date on the source?

**Mr. G. Singh:** It is dated Sunday, May 06, 2017, the *Business Guardian*, page A15. He said:

“Normally those decisions would be directives that Cabinet will give and the board will implement them. This is a policy position. Policy is made by the government and implemented by the agencies of the Government.”

Browne said the country needs to be given more information on the deal. ‘Elias said that TSTT borrowed \$1.9 billion dollars to upgrade TSTT and he will pay for the shares out of that. Is this an all-cash deal?’”

So why is the Hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East is making every effort to extract taxation, whether it is through the property tax, whether it is through the Revenue Authority, whether it is through the casino environment, you have, in a situation like this, an all-cash question marks as to whether an all-cash deal is taking place to the tune of a quarter billion dollars. [*Desk thumping*]

“Browne said...”

This is the former Minister of Cabinet, former Finance Minister.

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[MR. SINGH]

Thursday, May 11, 2017

**Mr. Imbert:** No, no, no, he was never a Minister.

**Mr. G. Singh:** Minister in the Ministry of Finance.

“Browne said: ‘The chairman ought to have had a conversation with the line Minister for the company, the Minister of Public Utilities Fitzgerald Hinds, and inform him of what they are doing, so there is no surprise.’

Efforts to contact Hinds proved futile.”

**Mr. G. Singh:** So, Mr. Deputy Speaker—[*Interrupted*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members, I would like to hear the discourse of the speaker.

**Mr. G. Singh:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, the hon. Minister of Public Utilities in this House indicated in response to a question as to whether he had knowledge of this acquisition by TSTT, he said, no. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Hinds:** Mr. Speaker, point of order—[*Crosstalk and Interruption*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members, Members, you all know the procedure, quote the Standing Order and let us proceed. Member.

**Mr. G. Singh:** When I asked, as a follow-up to that question, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as to whether he had knowledge of the valuation, as to who were the advisors and the consultants in the matter, he said the answer to that question was, no, and it is part of the *Hansard* record. [*Desk thumping*]

You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members, again, the constant little outbursts will not be tolerated. Proceed, Member, and Member for Chaguanas West, you are probably the fourth speaker, right, that is on this particular topic, and we know of the tedious repetition based on Standing Order 55(b). So, please, make the point and let us move on, please.

**Mr. G. Singh:** I agree with you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I want to tell you the information I am bringing nobody has raised in this House before. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Again, as I said, you are on a particular topic that has been constantly been highlighted by most of the speakers. Go ahead, Member for Chaguanas West.

**Mr. G. Singh:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Prime Minister, in response to what was emerging, as a dagger aimed at his Government, so to speak, by the nefarious nature of this deal, went and gave an interview to 95.5, and this is what the Prime Minister said, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Quote your source, please.



**Mr. G. Singh:** It is the *Guardian*, A15, Tuesday, May 09, 2017, an article written by Rosemarie Sant.

“Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley says ‘It is wrong to say that TSTT has been acting without Cabinet’s knowledge and consent,’ when it entered into a \$255 million dollar Share Purchase Agreement with Massy Communications, a subsidiary of the Massy holdings conglomerate.

Rowley said: ‘At the level of the Cabinet the strategic plan that we approved pretty much covers that kind of transaction.’

But he said: ‘Now that some people are trying to make it an issue the Cabinet will get into the details and make it available to the public as the Company would have done.’”

He goes on to say at the penultimate paragraph, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

“Dr. Rowley dismissed criticisms about the deal saying: ‘It is all hog-wash.’”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, so the Prime Minister said he will make things available. The former junior Minister in Finance spoke about the need for openness in the matter. I want to quote, Mr. Deputy Speaker, from the State Enterprises Performance Monitoring Manual which guides and monitors all state enterprises, from at page 22, guidelines number 3.1.14:

“APPROVAL OF NEW ASSETS/ INVESTMENTS, DEBT & CONTRACTS

#### Policy

State Enterprises or their subsidiaries are required to obtain prior approval of the Minister of Finance for the acquisition of significant assets, new investments in non-government securities, the incurrence of new/additional long-term debt and entering into significant contracts (relative to the Company).”

So this is what it is. This is where you need to get the approval of the Minister of Finance before you enter into any kind of merger [*Desk thumping*] or acquisition that will affect the company.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there was no such Cabinet approval, because if there is a Cabinet approval I call upon the Prime Minister to provide us with a copy of that Cabinet Minute [*Desk thumping*] giving approval. Because you see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the chairman of TSTT indicated that:

“Last year, in the week of July, TSTT presented its full five-year strategic plan to the entire Cabinet projecting the expenditure of \$3.8 billion over five years, which was partly funded by loan financing of \$1.9 billion.”

This is the article of Saturday, May 06, 2017, page A15 by Rosemarie Sant.

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[MR. SINGH]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

Because Minister Imbert was in North America conducting the roadshow for the US dollar bond, Cabinet suggested that a separate presentation of the five-year strategic plan should be made to Mr. Imbert. This was done. The five-year plan was approved and the Ministry of Finance issued a no objection letter to the \$1.9 billion loan, which was evidenced that it approved the plan. Mr. Deputy Speaker, in that strategic plan there was, in July of 2016, there was not an iota, a letter [*Desk thumping*] mentioned about Massy Technologies acquisition. I would demonstrate to you, in the board minutes of 2017, then that came up, so there is something rotten in the State of Demark. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will now proceed to the minutes of that meeting, of Wednesday 15 March, 2017, it is, and I received this in my mailbox—you see, I was in charge of TTPost at one time, like my colleague. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, like my colleague, the hon. Member for Laventille West—  
[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Identify clearly which meeting you are referring to.

**Mr. G. Singh:** It is the minutes of the board meeting of TSTT, held at TSTT House at 1 Edward Street, Port of Spain, on Wednesday 15 March, 2017, very recent. Present were the chairman, Mr. Emile Elias; Mr. Wendell Berkley, Director; Mr. Vishnu Danpaul, Director; Ms. Annalee Innis, Director; Ms. Ingrid Lashley, Director; Mr. Ian Narine, Director; Ms. Judith Sobion, Director; and Mr. Charles Carter, Corporate Secretary. In attendance, Dr. Ronald Walcott, CEO. Excused were Mr. Gerry Brooks, Director and Ms. Kimberly Erriah, Director.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, at page 30 of this Minutes, item 9, proposal to purchase communications company. The Chief Executive Officer presented and made reference to the board paper before members—  
[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members, please.

**Mr. G. Singh:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have been in this Parliament for quite a while, and unlike “emailgate” this is not a contrivance. [*Desk thumping*] The meeting was advised that TSTT and Massy Communications Limited had been working together on implementing an infrastructure sharing agreement which was ready for execution, infrastructure sharing agreement. Separate and apart from this, however, TSTT was also evaluating the purchase of Massy Communications and operating it as a wholly owned subsidiary for a period of time as a mechanism to further accelerate the fibre deployment connections. Pause right there, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so they are in the process of evaluation in 2017, but they presented the strategic plan in 2016. So this was not part of it. [*Desk thumping*]

It was noted—and I continue from the same document—it was noted that the evaluation process had already commenced and a due diligence team was in place. Cizmic Consulting, responsible for the commercial and technical evaluation. Ernst & Young, the ubiquitous Ernst & Young, the tax accounting evaluation and Fitzwilliam Stone, Furness-Smith and Morgan responsible for the legal evaluation with the final report to be completed by April 30, 2017. Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will recall when I asked that question of the Hon. Member for Laventille West, he had no knowledge. [*Desk thumping*] Today, he has that knowledge, it was Cizmic, it was Fitzwilliam, Stone and Morgan, and it was Ernst & Young.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it continues:

The Chief Executive Officer then proceeded to give an overview of the evaluation today. Massy Communications Limited (MCL) has been operating as an independent business unit with mostly autonomous organizations. MCL Financial represent a combination of historical enterprise business, and new FTTH, Fibre-to-the-Home business. The enterprise voice and data business is relatively mature, and provide data circuits and long distance termination for corporate clients. The Fibre-to-the-Home business, which was launched in February, 2016, has negative cash flow and revenues which are still growing rapidly. [*Desk thumping*] MCL is unprofitable largely due to the Fibre-to-the-Home business. To date 34 homes have been passed— [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members, Members, please, the constant little outbursts. The Member is on his legs.

**Mr. G. Singh:**

Members were then directed to the preliminary evaluation analysis undertaken for the MCL business. It was determined that the best way to value the company was to value the two businesses separately.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, and then they proceeded to talk about it, but what is of importance in the taxpayers' interest, in the public interest, and in this Parliament's interest, is this paragraph, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I quote:

It was further agreed that the negotiating team will include the Chairman, the Chief Executive Officer and the Corporate Secretary should negotiate a price up to a limit of \$225 million.

**6.30 p.m.**

“How much dey pay?” Mr. Deputy Speaker, \$255 million—\$255 million.

**Hon. Member:** Corruption.

**Mr. G. Singh:** But this is what—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member for Naparima, retract that please.

**Mr. Charles:** I retract it.

**Mr. G. Singh:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope you give me some injury time.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Again, the Chair will direct, but most of the time the outbursts are coming from your side. So let us be careful. Proceed.

**Mr. G. Singh:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, here you have a negotiating team and the negotiating team has a mandate from the board, “Do not go beyond the limit of \$225 million”.

**Hon. Member:** But how they arrived at that?

**Mr. G. Singh:** But they agreed and they signed off for \$255 million—over a quarter billion dollars. The question I have to ask for that \$30 million extra, even if we were to accept that 225 is a fair price, which I do not accept, having regard to what was stated previously, “Where de \$30 million gone?” It goes on to state:

Should there be a need to exceed the limit, the approval of members of the board will be required.

Now, this is what is happening. Mr. Deputy Speaker, there was no board approval for the increase. Yesterday, whilst we sat in this House, the board of TSTT had a board meeting, and when the issue of Article 3.1.14 was dealt with at page 22 of the performance manual, the Chairman indicated that that performance manual policy, which says that the prior approval of the Minister of Finance is required for the acquisition of any assets, new investments and non-government securities, he said that was merely a guideline. [*Laughter*] That was merely a guideline. You understand? So that it raises an issue of corporate governance under the People’s National Movement. It raises an issue of corporate governance under Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, but you know the TSTT board sought selectively, under that same paragraph at page 22 in the performance monitoring guidelines, the permission of the Minister of Finance to get the 1.9, but no Minister of Finance to spend \$255 million. [*Desk thumping*]

So you understand what is happening. Here it is: Three Cabinet Ministers weighing in on this side, very senior, and you have one contractor on this side, and what has happened is that what is the price that you pay for holding office? [*Desk*

*thumping*] What is the price you pay for holding on to office? I know many of my colleagues across there, we have been in the Parliament for quite a while, and one thing they do not suffer from is scrotal atrophy. [*Laughter and desk thumping*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Silence, please. Silence.

**Mr. G. Singh:** So that what you have when you weigh this issue, you have a situation where this “Massy-gate” is something that we want an enquiry—a proper independent enquiry of. [*Crosstalk*] So that here you have a situation, and we have to look at this contractor. This contractor has had a very close relationship at the highest echelon of the Government. There has been almost a relationship over the period of time, whether it is Landate, whether it is Cleaver Heights, whether it is—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Hinds:** You did not give evidence.

**Mr. G. Singh:** And now you have “Massy-gate”. You have a situation where the debenture—you utilized \$1.9 billion, but here it is you have governance gone mad. You have a rogue chairman in place. We call for the resignation of the Chairman and we call for an enquiry into this matter. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, then you have a situation where we are seeking to get value for money, and you have a Member of the Government, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries who says in the newspaper of May 9, 2017:

“Whistle-blower leads to 70 guns

Agriculture Minister Clarence Rambharat...disclosed a whistle-blower led the ministry to track down guns that were purchased for the Praedial Larceny Squad.

The Auditor General’s Report, tabled in the Parliament last Friday, stated that in 2014, the Ministry of Agriculture paid \$322,000 for 70 guns for the Praedial Larceny Squad.

The squad never got the guns and the matter was under investigation.”

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is the—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members, please, you all know the decorum of the House and there is a procedure. Member for Chaguanas West, proceed.

**Mr. G. Singh:** This is another example of where Ministers of Government impact upon their own personal credibility by providing fake news. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will read for you a letter from TT Security to the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Lands and Fisheries, re: purchase of firearms, dated June 9<sup>th</sup>:

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[MR. SINGH]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

Subject: re: purchase of firearms

We received purchase order—so and so—to supply the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries 70 Sig Sauer, model 250, 9-millimetre pistols and 20 Remington, model 870 shotguns, dated 22<sup>nd</sup> of the 9<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

Upon receiving the said order I informed Supt. King that the shotguns were available for an immediate delivery and we will have to import the pistols. The relevant application was made to the Commissioner of Police and approval was received some time in the third quarter of 2015. Upon receiving the relevant import permit, same was sent to the manufacturer and the US State Department for approvals. The pistols arrived in Trinidad in September 2015 and customs documents were prepared by our broker and sent to your Ministry for the necessary signature.

Same was signed by Mr. Mangray. Upon presenting the documents to Customs and Excise Department we were told that Mr. Mangray's name was not on the list of approved signatories. I am requesting your assistance in this matter so we can deliver these weapons to your Ministry.

June 9, 2016

But the Minister comes in 2017 and talks about a whistle-blower. You know where these guns are? These guns—and I want to tell Minister Clarence Rambharat, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, these guns are lodged at the police station in Piarco, because the Ministry of Agriculture, Lands and Fisheries has not provided the necessary documentation for their clearance. And he could take that in his whistle and blow it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know my colleague, the Hon. Minister of Public Utilities, has recently—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member, your 30 minutes have expired.

**Hon. Members:** Already!

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members. Your 30 minutes have expired. You have an additional 15. Do you care to avail yourself? Kindly proceed.

**Mr. G. Singh:** You see, my colleague—and I just want to give him a bit of advice, having served there—he came to this House—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Silence, please.

**Mr. G. Singh:** He came to this House and spoke about the River Madamas as a possible location. Madamas my colleague says on the other side—as a possible location for a reservoir for a catchment area. I have had considerable experience in this sector, and I would refer my good friend, the Hon. Member for Laventille

West, to a study entitled, “The Water Resources Management Strategy for Trinidad and Tobago”, done by DHV Consultants in 1999. In that study at page 68 of the main report, they dealt with the potential reservoirs along the North Coast. Madamas and Yarra. If you know where Madamas is located, it is located in the north-eastern coast. It is close between Matelot and Blanchisseuse and it flows into the ocean.

First, the demand in the area cannot justify any kind of investment. Secondly, the flow is not one that can justify investment, and I have the data here which I am willing to share with you, because you are suffering from newness. So that I want to advise the Member that you cannot bring that water, it is too expensive. The quantity does not justify it and you are better off looking at the Marianne or the Gran Riviere area. Therefore, do not be misled by anyone in that area. Therefore, I want to suggest to you that you deal with matters within the sector. Follow the lead of the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Look at the receivables of the Water and Sewerage Authority. Look at how much that they need to collect and the areas that they need to collect. You may find that it is, perhaps, within your own constituency there is significant collection required, as other areas in which you have hot spots in the country. Because I can tell you from my experience, whether it is T&TEC, whether it is the Water and Sewerage Authority, whether it is TTPost, that there are some areas in which you cannot enter. So those are the receivables in those areas, and look at how you can improve the collection.

The property tax will increase water rates, because the annual rateable value is what is utilized. So the property tax will increase water rates, but WASA needs to look at that in order to justify it down the road.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is clear that we have taken an approach where the Government is saying, okay, property tax, we are saying that you have not done the educational requirement to justify bringing that on, in the manner in which you have brought it. But the Government has gone pell-mell in its authoritarian approach to it and that is what is happening. [*Desk thumping*]

So, it is therefore necessary for us to look at this mid-year review in the context—all my colleagues talked about the Fitch rating, the ratings that demonstrate that we are junk bond status, but the Minister indicated that because of the macroeconomic fundamentals and the reserves we have, it ought not to be like that and he is engaging Fitch.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, whatever may be the situation, we are in this thing

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[MR. SINGH]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

together as a country and that, therefore, we want to ensure, whether it is collections from the casino area or otherwise, that we have a regulatory regime to allow for that. And I serve on the Select Committee so I have no more to say on that for the time being.

What is the important thing for us? Whilst we seek to extract money in a Shylockian way from the citizenry of this country, we have to take account of the expenditure of this Government in areas like “Massy-gate”. This is a fledgling organization. This is an organization in which we ought not to have invested, and there is no justification for that sum of \$255 million. So that there is a stench—a stench—emanating from the ship of State, and that stench is from the State rooms of the ship of State, and therefore we have to expose to the sunlight of this country, to the transparency which they promised in their manifesto, to morality in public affairs, and weigh three Ministers against one contractor.

I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**The Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Ayanna Webster-Roy):** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I thank you for the opportunity to contribute and to account for the stewardship of the Office of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to first of all start off by congratulating the Permanent Secretaries, the staff and all officers at the Office of the Prime Minister, for being able to execute our duties and being able to manage our finances quite prudently.

In 2015, the expenditure at the Office of the Prime Minister was \$376 million. In 2016, we were able to achieve a lot with \$174 million. The Office of the Prime Minister has demonstrated high priority, and it shows that this Government is concerned about improving the social fabric of Trinidad and Tobago.

With the portfolio of Gender and Child Affairs and HIV and Central Administrative Services placed under the Office of the Prime Minister, we have seen a number of improvements in the lives of our women, our children and, indeed, the people of Tobago. Before I move on, I just want to address something that occurred yesterday. The hon. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla would have noted that the people of Tobago are suffering, and that whenever people come across to Tobago they have to walk with food. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member for Princes Town, please. I spoke about those little outbursts. It would not be entertained, please. Go on, Member.

**Hon. A. Webster-Roy:** Thank you. One of the things I pride myself on and I pride Tobago for is our rich oral tradition. We tell stories, we pass down information to



our children. And one of the things that has always been said is that Tobago historically was the food basket of Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean. I remember people coming to Tobago, and as we say in Tobago, “They come with their two hands swinging”, and when they are going back home, they are going back home deep, laden, as we like to say in Tobago. “Is chicken, is provisions, is all kind of things”, so Tobagonians have never suffered and we will not suffer. We are a resilient people. [*Desk thumping*] We are a productive people, and most importantly we are people—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member for Tabaquite.

**Hon. A. Webster-Roy:**—who pride ourselves on being able to be self-reliant.

I live in Tobago, I visit the supermarkets, and I have not been able to go to a shop and not get essential items. I live in Tobago East, in the countryside—I am a country girl—and if things were really hard as they claimed, then the countryside would have felt it the most, because we have to come from the port and then up into the east. I could go by Pablo and get anything I want. I could go by Paulsen and get anything I want. Pablo is in Argyle, Paulsen is in Richmond. I could go by Bill Brown, that is the other extreme. Bill Brown is in Scarborough, a part of Tobago East, and get anything I want. So this whole idea of Tobagonians suffering, I want to dispel that myth one time. [*Desk thumping*]

You see, one of the things I do not like is for people to pass their mouth. We do not like that in Tobago. So, I do not want anybody to come in here and pass their mouth on the people of my island or my community or my society.

Let me go back to the gist of my contribution and what matters, and that is accounting for what we were able to achieve.

The Office of the Prime Minister acknowledges that we have more steps to take in realizing gender equality and the fulfilment of child rights and protection in all sectors of our society. We are clear on what needs to be done and confident that we have the projects and programmes to engender a more compassionate and sensitive society that respects the rights and freedoms of all citizens. We are not a government for some, we are a government for all.

The work of the Child Affairs Division is structured around Vision 2030 ideals, and the construction of a national child development and protection system, with strategies for child development which aim to provide each child with the opportunity to achieve his or her fullest potential. We have continued the child development framework by focusing on the critical areas. Those two critical

areas are the National Child Policy and the National Children's Registry.

In fiscal 2017, \$500,000 was allocated to complete the National Child Policy. At this juncture, the policy is 60 per cent complete and should be ready for submission to Cabinet as early as July 2017. This policy will provide long-term guidance and framework for adequate and suitable legislation, interventions and infrastructure that will ensure the rights of the child, enhanced the status of children and further improve the quality of life of all our nation's children.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the National Children's Registry in fiscal 2017 received an allocation of \$500,000. The design stage of this is 95 per cent complete. In terms of the overall project, it is at 45 per cent completion stage, and completion is due around the early part of fiscal 2018.

While others may say we have no plan and we work without a vision, we are working within a framework and we are working surely and steadily to improve the circumstances of all the children of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] I could give you the firm commitment that the drive to ensure we get it right comes, because we have at the helm the Hon. Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley who is providing excellent leadership in driving the Ministry.

I heard, I think it was last week, a question asked about the Children's Authority. In fiscal 2016, several projects were pursued by the Children's Authority, including the implementation of key research studies at a cost of \$175,525, and the expansion of a database management system at a cost of \$811,412. In fiscal 2017, the sum of \$300,000 was allocated to this project. I am happy to report that the project is progressing well. Legal modules have been tested. Foster care design is 70 per cent complete, while child and family design is 40 per cent complete.

I am also happy to report that the long-awaited Child Assessment Centre for Tobago will be up and running, hopefully, by June. I really want to commend the Secretary for the Division of Health, Wellness and Family Development, for embracing the collaboration and the opportunities to partner with the Office of the Prime Minister and the Children's Authority to get this project up and running.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we recognize that while we are pushing forward to have that done for the people of Tobago, that our safe house in the north is at full capacity. So we are working now to ensure that in the near future, before fiscal 2018, that we could establish a safe space in the south so that all those children in that area would be catered for. We are not just focusing on some parts of the island or some parts of the nation, we are trying to ensure that when we deliver,

we deliver for children throughout Trinidad and Tobago. We recognize that our children are our most valuable asset.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Sangre Grande Assessment Centre is currently being customized and outfitted at a cost of \$1,127,665. This facility would be up and ready and be able to be accessed by children and those in need by as early as a few months again. So I just want to let the Member for Sangre Grande and those from that region know that we are catering for their children as well.

The Government continues to engage in a programme aimed at improving the standards of all our 46 community residences. What we recognize is that even though we have NGOs and persons willing to take on the responsibility of establishing these facilities, that they need the training and the capacity building to ensure that the children who are placed into their care and protection receive the best care. In this regard, the Office of the Prime Minister would have established a training programme.

We had an ad in the papers asking for people interested in becoming caregivers to register. I would have reached out to Members on the other side as well. I remember I approached the Member for Princes Town asking, "Do you know anybody in your constituency who is willing to register to be trained as a caregiver?", and a number of persons. It was placed in the papers. The ad was distributed; yes, Member for Naparima it was distributed on both sides, encouraging people to let members of their constituencies come forward if they are interested and register to be caregivers.

I want to say that some parts of the training was completed already, and we have started to see some improvements. We would have focused on areas such as trauma, psychological disorders as well as how to manage children with behavioural issues. So that when they are in the various community residences and they start acting up, that the caregivers would know how to treat with them properly and not resort to any acts of violence.

We also provide guidance to community residences in matters of their human resources, in matters of industrial relations and also in matters of their finances, to ensure that the children receive the optimal care and protection.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in terms of the St. Michael's School for Boys, we would have partnered with the University of Trinidad and Tobago to develop a programme so that the boys at the institution would be fully engaged throughout the day, with academic programmes and other life skill programmes, so that when

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[HON. A. WEBSTER-ROY]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

they are exiting the institution, they are exiting at a better place than they would have entered. They would exit with better levels of education, et cetera.

I also want to note that in an effort to ensure that we cater for all our children in need of care and protection equally, we would have introduced the cost-per-child payment system, where every community residence will now receive a payment for each child in its care.

**7.00 p.m.**

Previously, only a few of the residences would have received a subvention and that was unfair, so all the 46 community residences, now they have a sum allocated for each child based on a scale according to the age of the child, according to if the child would have any psychological, special psychological needs or medical needs, so we are ensuring that all our children would receive the necessary financial support while they are in care to ensure their optimal development.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to quickly move to gender affairs. The Gender Affairs Division continues to mainstream gender across the public service while partnering with various stakeholders to build awareness and behaviour change regarding gender development. We partnered with the Office of the Attorney General, Equal Opportunity Commission and NGOs to train persons in Government Ministries who have been identified as gender focal points and other interest groups.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the reason we would have done this is because we would have done our reviews with CDOWL and a number of issues were highlighted and in an effort to ensure that when next we have to report to CDOWL, we will have a better rating and a better assessment, we are focusing on all of those areas that they identified as weaknesses to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago will have better showing.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we now have our gender focal points in place. We would have had the workshop training recently with the NGOs, as well as other stakeholders on the CDOWL, the convention. In addition to that, we are currently looking at rolling out training on gender-based budgeting, gender-responsive budgeting to ensure that when the next cycle comes that our public servants would be able to address those issues properly.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are hoping that by the next fiscal year that the budget

preparation would be able to take into consideration those factors around gender and would be indeed considered as gender-responsive budgeting. Mr. Deputy Speaker, for this particular project we have \$108,491.15 allocated.

I now want to turn my attention to an issue that has been quite troubling for me and for a number of people in Trinidad and Tobago and that is the whole issue of gender-based violence. Almost every time you open the papers or you go online you see something where partners are attacking each other. You hear instances of domestic abuse and all of that. In an effort for us to address that situation in a holistic manner, we would have launched our central registry on domestic violence. Now, what that does is it pulls data and information across agencies, and even from within some NGO-run organizations. So, we will have data coming in from our domestic violence hotlines, we would have information coming in from the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and all of that.

That would help us to be able to use the data, the statistics to inform policy formulation and also programming. So when we roll things out it would not be a matter of “voops and vams” and whims and fancies, but coming from a place that is centred around data and statistics.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, apart from the central registry on domestic violence, we also continue to provide the necessary support to our hotline, as well as other NGO-run organizations who work in the field.

I want to really at this point in time, commend those organizations who go out and they work in the vineyard and ensure the safety of not only our women, but our men who are, at times, victims of gender-based violence, and who provide sometimes when the State would fall short, who provide the necessary support service to ensure that victims, as well as perpetrators, are better able to cope and to move forward. So, I want to publically acknowledge the role and the support of those NGOs working out there in the vineyard.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, even though the central registry was launched and is up and running, we would have had some little challenges in terms of the rights to the software and all of that. We would have had a certain figure quoted for us before, however, due to some negotiations we are now able to have the software rights and all of that for around \$100,000. So, I want to commend the team at the Gender Affairs Division for, you know, being able to do the work and being able to do it within a reasonable sum and ensure that we are able to save money in these harsh economic times.

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[HON. A. WEBSTER-ROY]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

In terms of HIV, I want to just note that the NAC has been in operation for about five months. Even though they have been up for roughly around five months, the NAC has been doing a lot of work. They have been focusing the business on, one, the statistical bulleting on the trends of HIV/AIDS for the period of 2010 to 2015; drafting of an NGO funding policy; updating of national and monitoring and evaluation of a plan for HIV and AIDS; and drafting of a communication protocol.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, during the Carnival period, I met a gentleman who told me that he was not really aware of what is happening in terms of promoting responsible lifestyles and, you know, putting the prevention strategies out there. And I was able to tell him, I said, that before Carnival, during Carnival and after Carnival, there would have been a sustained campaign to sort of promote responsible behaviour.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, apart from that the NAC, the— [*Crosstalk*] Pardon me? Mr. Deputy Speaker, apart from that, the NAC would have also been focusing on drafting of legislation to establish a statutory body, or an appropriate autonomous body. They have been working on consultations and review on the finalisation of the HIV/AIDS policy; community-based sensitisation; HIV prevention and awareness in three rural areas; development of a national behavioural change strategy for adults, as well as youths; as well as taking into consideration the needs of those persons, those key population.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to now just focus a little bit on what is being done by the Central Administrative Services in Tobago. The Weights and Measures Inspectorate, this unit is moving toward implementation of the new Metrology Act in conjunction with the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards. Phase one involved data collected which started in November, 2016. Inspectors collected data on all weighing instruments in use on the island. The second phase will involve cataloguing instruments used in dispensing fuel at gas stations on the island.

And I want to specifically speak to that because I would have seen on social media more than once where persons in Tobago would have complained about going to particular petrol stations and not getting value for money in terms of what they are paying for is actually not what is being pumped.

So I just want to put all gas stations on alert in Tobago that we will be coming in to catalogue the fuel, the pumps and to ensure that they are calibrated properly and that people of Tobago receive value for money and they are not conned out their hard-earned dollars.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in terms of the Central Administrative Services or CAST,

we have engaged iGovTT to assist us in procuring asset management and inventory control systems, the terms of reference for the procurement has been drafted. This is important for us to be able to have proper services accountability at Central Administrative Services, Tobago.

In previous incarnation under a different dispensation with a different name almost anything happened. So now we are in the process of ensuring that we will be able, [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, now we are in the process to ensure that we will have proper accountability at the Central Administrative Services.

In terms of metrology services in Tobago, I am happy to announce that in January we would have commissioned formally the new met building. It is a state-of-the-art facility. I must acknowledge this is a project that would have spanned administrations. It started under a PNM administration, continued under a PP administration and was completed and delivered to the people of Tobago under a PNM administration. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was really proud when we had the launch of that facility because the feedback was that this was a state-of-art facility that could not only just provide a space for people to do the met services, but also provide a space where we could foster curiosity in the minds of Tobagonians so that more people will enter into the field of meteorology. And when we observed World Meteorological Day there were scores of school children in that facility learning about clouds, learning about, you know, weather systems and seeing the interest and to have seen the excitement as they walked along the catwalk and the observation deck, I felt really proud that the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago was able to deliver this facility not only for Tobagonians, but for the people of Trinidad and Tobago and, by extension, the wider world because this new facility will now ensure that whenever planes are landing in Tobago they get more accurate data.

Because, you see, what we intend to do is to put in certain equipment and systems in place to measure wind shear so that when pilots are landing you have more smooth landings. Also, they are looking at improving the technology so that we would be able to give real-time information to pilots. So when you are coming to Tobago and you might have maybe turbulence on our side of the island or anything, you would not have to turn back, but beforehand you would know, okay, we have certain weather systems building over Tobago because climate tends to change according to the location, so pilots would not have to take off in dangerous situations, et cetera, et cetera. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is what has been happening at CAST.

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[HON. A. WEBSTER-ROY]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

I just want to now, quickly speak to the restoration at the Office of the Prime Minister. The White Hall restoration project is well on its way. The State is working to ensure that this building becomes safe, secure and a functional office accommodation for the Prime Minister. The project is being executed in two phases. The planning stage has been completed and tender packages prepared to cover the cost of the completion of the main and auxiliary building including the roof, designs and landscaping and external works, furniture and fixtures including remedial works to joinery. It is expected that the work will commence shortly in fiscal 2017.

In terms of Red House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, works to restore the Red as the traditional seat of the Parliament of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago continue unabated. Such restoration will preserve the historical attributes of the Red House and facilitate and accommodate all the functions of a modern Parliament. It is projected that the final package which deals with the external works will be completed by October 2018.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of all the restoration projects, the Red House project is one that I am most excited about. I often tell people that even though I am a Member of Parliament and I am in a Chamber, I still do not feel as though I am in Parliament because it is not the Red House. So if it is one project I am really looking forward to the completion and for us to be able to occupy, it is the Red House. I am sure my colleagues on the other side [*Desk thumping*] share the same excitement. Mr. Deputy Speaker, in terms of Stollmeyer's Castle this restoration is completed and— [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members, Members, please. Go ahead, Member for Tobago East.

**Hon. A. Webster-Roy:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In terms of Stollmeyer's Castle, this restoration is completed and is due to be handed over by UDeCOTT by June of 2017. It is very important for us to preserve our built heritage. Too many times I see buildings left to decay, but our buildings help to tell a part of our story and they are rich legacy that we must pass on for generations to come. So, I really want to commend the Government, commend the Minister of Finance for ensuring that we have the funds in place to ensure that these buildings, our rich built legacy remains, so that future generations will be able to learn from them. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the restoration of the President's House continues. This is a building full of history and, once completed, it would be the official accommodation of the President and the first family with provisions made for official functions and entertainment of specially invited guests. Such a project will preserve the historical



attributes of the President's House and provide safe, secure and functional accommodation for President and staff. It is expected that works would be completed by October 2018. And just as I am excited about the Red House, I am also excited about the restoration of the President's House.

I remember being a child and coming to Trinidad on little holidays and going around the Savannah—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** You had to bring the chicken.

**Hon. A. Webster-Roy:**—and no, seriously, when “ah come Trinidad I had to walk de chickens”, seriously. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am really excited about this particular project because, you know, every time I saw the building I always felt a sense of wonderment, because I am a lover of history, I love reading history books, I love going through, you know, books about old buildings. I love learning about the past because knowing about the past helps to inform where we go as a people, as a nation, and President's House was always an idyllic building, one that I loved.

And when the building started to decay and when I had my own children, bringing them to Trinidad it was always for me a sore point not for them to be able to see the grandeur that I experienced as a child. So now that this building is well on its way to completion, I just want to say that I am excited, I am happy for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the last restoration project I will speak to is the Cabildo retrofit project. With the restoration of the Red House, the Cabildo retrofit project seeks to provide a companion building to the Parliament for administrative purposes. This building will house the offices of all parliamentary administrative staff. The plans are currently being prepared. And I am sure the parliamentary staff will be quite happy that once we move into the Red House that they would have their own space, they would not be in cramped quarters and they will be able to serve us as they do, continue to serve us as they do efficiently and effectively. And with those few words, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** I recognize the Member for Couva North. [*Desk thumping*]

**Miss Ramona Ramdial (Couva North):** [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. First of all, I would like to respond to the Minister of Finance and in particular his mid-term review. Now, this would have been a great opportunity for the Minister and his Government to lay some real

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[MISS. RAMDIAL]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

revenue-generating plans for the economy. However, we have seen a failure to launch by this Government when it comes to stimulating the economy.

The Minister spoke about reducing the national debt, \$89 billion; he spoke about saving of \$10 billion; he spoke about the implementation of the property tax and hints of further increases of the fuel by September. He also spoke about the

failed RPO where offerings did not meet the required target. Mr. Deputy Speaker, he spoke nothing about revenue generation. So, can we expect increased and new taxes until 2020 to generate revenue? Is this what the population of Trinidad and Tobago voted for?

They were very much—they elaborated a lot on a big stage during the 2015 general election. They spoke about stimulating the economy; they spoke about generating revenues; they were able to identify certain projects that they were going to go ahead with in terms of generating revenue for our country. In the end, we got after 19 months nothing, we have gotten nothing so far with respect to revenue generation. All we have been hearing is about the Dragon Field gas arrangement which will not be realized until 2019/2020.

**Hon. Member:** If at all.

**Miss R. Ramdial:** Exactly, if at all. So the population cannot look forward to this as a revenue stream even though they keep touting it in budgets. In addition, we have heard nothing since October 2016 on the Sandals project which was supposed to be their very much touted revenue-generating project. I know that the Minister mentioned in a previous budget in 2016 that this particular project was supposed to generate \$500 million annually in revenue for the country.

Now, just today Reuters reported on Sandals and we learnt that the Sandals Resorts International, a privately held Caribbean resort operator that caters to couples, is exploring strategic alternatives including a potential of the company according to people familiar with the matter. A sale would mark the first change in ownership for the company since it was founded 36 years ago by Mr. Stewart.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what does this say and I need to ask the Government a couple of questions particularly the Minister of Finance. Is it that this deal has fallen through between the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and Sandal Resorts International? We need clarification here. So this will be another failed attempt for a project in terms of generating revenue for Trinidad and Tobago, and we need some answers where this is concerned.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in addition, we have heard also this morning especially from

financial analysts, former finance Ministers and their thoughts and ideas and opinions on this mid-term review. And all of them without fear has said that this mid-term review brought nothing to the table, nothing to the table at all in terms of seeing the economy of Trinidad and Tobago progress.

So really and truly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Finance has failed in his duty. He has failed when it has come to doing his job in terms of a Minister of Finance in trying to have the economy back up and running. And therefore, I want to suggest to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and particularly the Minister of Finance, to sit down and do his homework properly and, please, as the Member for Caroni Central mentioned yesterday, to try to take some good advice from the experts who we have existing, [*Desk thumping*] try to take some good advice.

I just this morning, again, listening to the former Minister of Finance Mr. Mariano Browne, he also spoke about the solution that the Minister of Finance spoke about with forex issue that it was the worst thing that he has heard in the longest time. So this is something that is a serious matter that needs to be addressed as soon as possible.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to move on to Tobago issues, and my good friend, the Member for Tobago East, the Member of Parliament for Tobago East.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member, please, identify the Member.

**Miss R. Ramdial:** The Member for Tobago East.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Friend, friend, friend.

**Miss R. Ramdial:** Oh. Sorry. Sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Yes. So, the Member for Tobago East spoke about remarks made by the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla with respect to washing our mouths on Tobago and saying that Tobago is suffering. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is not us. It is the Tobago people [*Desk thumping*] who are complaining and I will just call a few names to remind her who these people are and they are all Tobagonians: Miss Diana Haddad; Mr. Cruickshank or the President of the Tobago Chamber; the President of the Truckers' Association, Inter-Island Trailers and Truckers' Association, Mr. Amede; and all of these people are constantly speaking on media talking about the problems that Tobago is facing right now with the transportation issue. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in tonight's news I am told that they also spoke about the food shortages in Tobago, same complaining of it.

Now, I want to go a little bit into detail and talk about the transportation woes

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[MISS RAMDIAL]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

that Tobago is facing at this point in time. Now, the Tobago Chamber boss in the *Guardian* newspaper, the 10<sup>th</sup> of May, “Tobago Chamber Boss seeks urgent cargo fix”.

“President of the Tobago Chamber Demi John Cruickshank yesterday warned that the island is one week away from a severe shortage of food. ‘Supplies are low as stocks in warehouses continue to dwindle and already we are getting reports that some supermarkets have started to increase prices...’”

He also stated that they did not want the barge and there is also a shortage of construction materials. Now, I want to also inform the Member for Tobago East, if she goes up on social media where she would see evidence of what these people are speaking about. There are empty grocery shelves in many of the establishments and businesses, empty grocery shelves. So, I really do not know which establishment she goes to, but the entire nation, island—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member, again, you pronounce, please, hon. Member.

**Miss R. Ramdial:** Sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Let us do it properly, please.

**Miss R. Ramdial:** My point is to instruct her and to suggest to her is just take a look at social media, the Member, to take a look at social media and you would see evidence of the empty shelves in the business places that sell food and other supplies to the people of Tobago. And it is they who are speaking, not us. All right?

The Tobago issues with respect to transportation woes, now this is a serious fiasco. As we know the story the *Galicia* was pulled out after being given a month-to-month contract and replaced by a barge and another vessel which has proven to be the worst arrangement ever to service the people of Tobago with goods and services.

Now, there are unnecessary delays, the barge takes much less cargo and we were told that 160 trucks less per trip and more traveling hours which is 15 hours that this barge is taking to go Tobago. Tobago is up in arms against this arrangement and the Tobago tourism stakeholders’ association is also screaming out to the Minister of Works and Transport to do something about this crisis situation that is taking place in Tobago. And I just want to quote what he said:

“Tobago is dying slowly and we need a resolution to this cargo problem. We have goods and supplies to last one more week in Tobago. Prices...”—will also increase and they would have to—“...start cutting staff.”

And then we have the President of the Inter-Island Trailer and Truckers' Association, Mr. Amede, who is saying that the Prime Minister and the Minister of Works and Transport are telling them to "hold strain", that a solution is close and neither of the vessels can carry passengers. So sometimes the trucks return to Trinidad without being off loaded because the drivers who hop on a plane or try to get the *T&T Spirit* to go down to Tobago cannot reach to Tobago and therefore, the trucks return still loaded with goods. So this is a serious, serious issue and I think that the Government is taking this lightly.

Now, I just understand that Bill Brown was on TV talking about this shortage in Tobago. So for the Member for Tobago East, I would like you to be well informed and, please, as a Member of Parliament for Tobago East represent your people, [*Desk thumping*] represent your people. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Padarath:** She said she can get anything any time.

**Miss R. Ramdial:** She can get, but what about the people? What about the people?

**Hon. Member:** The Member.

**Miss R. Ramdial:** The Member, sorry. Now, in addition to that, the Member for Laventille West cannot manage—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Silence.

**Miss R. Ramdial:**—water in Trinidad and Tobago, but he wants to say something about Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Silence.

**Miss R. Ramdial:** All right. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members, please, I would like to hear the discourse of the Member. So let us hear it in silence. Go ahead, Member for Couva North.

**Miss R. Ramdial:** Thank you. Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to turn my attention a little bit because I will get back to Tobago, but I want to turn my attention a little bit to the property tax and its impact on Tobago. And in a *Newsday* article on Sunday the 7<sup>th</sup> of May, Mrs. Deborah Moore-Miggins published an article explaining the issues with property tax in Tobago amongst other things. Now she went on to say that, and I just want to quote.

“...that I can tell you that the property tax will drive the last nail in the coffin of Tobago's existence.”

About what does she mean by this, Mr. Deputy Speaker? And this is what she has to say about the impact of property tax.

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[MISS RAMDIAL]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

“There is an endemic problem in Tobago with land titles. It is about 80 per cent of those to be taxed cannot use their lands as security to raise a loan to fund a project that they think will generate increased income.

They simply have no deed to their lands. This problem has been acknowledged by successive governments, yet none of them has solved it to date. It is unconscionable for a government that is fully aware of the problem and how it has paralysed the island for years, to simply ignore it and proceed to impose such an extreme property tax on us.”

**7.30 p.m.**

She also went on to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that:

“There is a foreign licence requirement for land purchase that applies to this island alone.

This in itself is discriminatory but it compounds the problem in that if a person wants to sell off a piece of his lands or house because the tax is too much, he can only sell to a national of this country without a licence. A person with lands in Trinidad does not have any legal restraint to selling his lands to whom he pleases.”

So, I would like to pose a question to the Attorney General and ask: What is happening with that land situation in Tobago? Are you moving ahead to give titles?

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** Would you give way?

**Miss R. Ramdial:** Yeah, I would give way.

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** Thank you, Hon. Member. It is a very important issue that you have raised. I am very pleased to say that the Order Paper reflects four bits of law on it right now for debate in this House, which will result in the compulsory registration of all lands beginning with Tobago. We have in fact secured the loan financing already for this as an IDB project, US \$8 million. The geostationary information, the satellite information has already been acquired, it has been plugged in. When the land registration begins, Tobago will start by way of order. It has been a time in the making, and we are very pleased to have done that which would be very shortly rolled out. [*Desk thumping*]

**Miss R. Ramdial:** Thank you, Member, for that clarity. My next question would be, whilst you do this: Is property tax still going to be implemented on the people of Tobago? You will answer me in your contribution.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to refer again to Ms. Deborah Moore-Miggins, and she spoke about, again, Tobago issues, and she went on to say that:

“Everything for our basic living and comfort comes from outside. Most goods and services have to be brought in to Tobago. Either that or residents here have to travel out of Tobago to access critical services such as health care and education.

The same applies to the courts...the Family Court, the Court of Appeal, the Environment Commission”—and so on. “Right now their survival is being seriously threatened by the fiasco that is the sea bridge and even the challenges we face with Caribbean Airlines.”

So again, I want to tell the Member for Tobago East, it is not us the UNC Members of Parliament washing our mouths in Tobago, or on Tobago, it is the Tobago people who are seeking out representatives to speak for them and on behalf of them. [*Desk thumping*] These are the real issues affecting the Tobago people.

She also mentioned the transportation woes, and this is what she mentioned about it:

“We in Tobago are now living under constant stress as we worry about the difficulty of securing travel to and from Tobago by sea and air. I do not need to recount the nightmare that has developed since the *Galicia* has been withdrawn. Let me just say that the revenue generated in Tobago for Easter was dismal. Talk to the Buccoo and Mount Pleasant Village Councils. The crowds fell way below the usual. All around people are losing money as a result of this situation.”

And here we are, and fortunately the Minister of Tourism is also a Member of Parliament, the Member of Parliament for Tobago West, and here it is we have a stakeholder in Tobago affairs talking about the drop in revenues with respect to tourist activities. And therefore, I would like to pose the question to the Minister of Tourism also, as to what the Member is doing to help in solving these issues and problems that Tobago is faced with at this point in time.

In addition to that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, she spoke about the Tobago economy, and she quoted the Minister of Tourism—Mrs. Moore-Miggins quoted the Minister of Tourism saying—I think she made a statement not too long ago. The Member made a statement not too long ago about arrivals declining from 80,000 to 20,000 in 2016.

“Can you imagine...”

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[MISS RAMDIAL]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

—and I quote:

“...how devastating that is to our island’s economy? To make matters worse we are not seeing what the Government is doing to boost tourism arrivals. Many of us are still bewildered about the dismantling of the TDC and we are waiting for something momentous to happen from it. So our businessmen are losing money, hotel operators are losing money, Tobagonians are all losing money. It is truly a dismal picture.”

Again, from a Tobago stakeholder.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in addition to that, the last issue that the Member raised, and the Attorney General addressed that, was of course with the land titles and he will of course respond in his windup to what is happening. So, Tobago is in a serious crisis at this point in time, and I want to urge the Minister of Finance, the two Tobago MPs in this House, to get together, to get together with the Minister of Works and Transport and, as I said, fortunately the Tobago MP for Tobago West is also the Minister of Tourism, sit down and get together and come up with solutions for Tobago, because Tobago people are really crying out, and of course if they cannot deal with the problem, well, of course demit office and make way for somebody who can deal with it. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, not too long ago I raised the issue about Tobago Jazz. Now, Tobago Jazz has been ongoing in Tobago every year; annually. It is an event held annually. The purpose of the Tobago Jazz Festival, of course, is to draw visitors to the island to generate revenue and all of that. Now, in a JSC—and I can speak about it because the report has already been laid and it has been made public—that examined the THA we spoke about the Tobago Jazz Festival. For 11 years this Tobago Jazz Festival has been taking place with no revenue being generated. So every year the THA, and by extension the Central Government of Trinidad and Tobago would spend 10 to \$20 million in hosting this event. I think this year it was \$12 million, last year it was \$16 million, and moneys have been spent like this over the past 11 years to host this festival with no profits at the end of the day. No profits. And it was recommended by the JSC that we should have probably the private sector be part of this initiative and take over the Tobago Jazz Festival and make it into a profit-making venture. One that would generate revenues, of course, for tourism and for the people of Tobago.

Now, the last Tobago Jazz Festival held—it was a couple weeks ago, and I am advised that this venture got sponsorship. There were private sponsors who would have given money to be part host of the venture. So, in addition to the \$12 million



given by the THA for Tobago Jazz, we also have sponsors who would have given substantial amounts of moneys to host this festival. So, it would be more than \$12 million being injected into this one event that brought no profits for Tobago, or generated no revenue for Tobago. I want to ask the Minister of Finance today, what is his intention in moving forward to even advise the THA, or to collaborate with the THA in dealing with the Tobago Jazz Festival, are we going to have this event next year? [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member at the lower end of the House, please, I am overhearing you. Member for Couva South. Go ahead, Hon. Member.

**Miss R. Ramdial:** So, are we going to have this event next year? Are we going to spend millions of dollars? Because here it is we have a Government who say, no, we are saving, we are cutting cost, we are trying to save. The Minister of Finance spoke about saving \$10 billion, but no money for toilet paper in the Treasury. What kind of savings you are talking about? What kind of priorities does the Minister of Finance have to be talking about cutting and saving \$10 billion and you have important departments and units of Government suffering for basic amenities? Basic amenities.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, these are some of the things that I want to highlight. Now, in addition to that, just not too long ago, I understand that the THA will be forming a task force to deal with the Tobago Jazz Experience. Just today that went out, and they are saying that a task force is to be formed to review the jazz experience. Now, I want to ask, who will be on this task force? I also want to suggest that we need independent stakeholders, independent persons apart from the THA to be part of this. And I also want to go further to recommend that we should have one member from the JSC of Parliament who is responsible for examining the THA sit on that task force also.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** They cannot investigate themselves.

**Miss R. Ramdial:** Correct. So, we are asking really for a task force that is made up of different persons representing the different parts of the Tobago population, of course the private sector, the tourism association, and of course as I said, I would go further to ask or to suggest that we have one member of the JSC. I know the Hon. Attorney General and the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West is also on this JSC. Probably one out of the two of them can sit on this task force so that we can see, and they can have the information to assist the THA with making a proper decision when it comes to this Tobago Jazz Festival.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in addition to that, I want to move on to tourism in

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[MISS RAMDIAL]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

Trinidad, and the TDC, of course, in the latest happenings at the Ministry of Tourism, the Minister announced the dismantling of TDC, and of course the new formation of two entities, one for Tobago, and one for Trinidad, that would be dealing with tourism and trying to promote tourism in Trinidad and Tobago. Now, the first thing is, of course we would have seen public outcry on the dismantling of TDC, because we are talking about over 100 workers being affected, going on the breadline. And I also want to ask the Minister of Tourism: Are there any plans to reabsorb these workers into the new entities that are being proposed? I also want to ask the Minister of Tourism whether or not they have communicated with the CWU, the union, in a proper manner as to the dismantling and the two entities coming about, and to the total disregard of CWU's proposals sent to the Minister to try to save TDC and the jobs of those 120-odd workers, if I am not mistaken. So, I have not heard CWU respond yet, because the Minister confirmed in Standing Finance Committee that they were going ahead with the two entities. So, I do not know if it was communicated to the CWU that their plan was totally disregarded.

Now, in addition to that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the general consensus out there is that the tourism sector and industry has crashed and burned in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Crashed and burned. And I want to make reference to the Chaguaramas development under the CDA. All of these projects that started under the former Government was really—the objective of that and the aim of those projects was to boost the tourism industry in Trinidad and, of course, again, to boost the economy by trying to expand our revenue generating capabilities apart from oil and gas. That was part of the diversification thrust.

So, the CDA was, of course, given the responsibility to boost tourism in Trinidad and Tobago, well, not Tobago but Trinidad. Again, after 19 months we are seeing that all of these projects are on hold. If you take a drive down to Chaguaramas you would see that the hotel is on hold and all of the water park and all of that—I know that there are some legal issues. I also understand that the new chairman of CDA, Mr. Lutchmedial, also spoke about some of the projects getting the green light to go ahead. I do not know if it started. I think the Minister of Tourism can clarify in her contribution whether or not, and which projects have actually restarted so that we can get this diversification of the economy going. It is really a simple thing, because the plans are there, the projects started, we had private sector investment. Under the CDA it was full private sector investment, and therefore this is something that should not be discarded like the plan that CWU would have given the Minister for TDC. It should not be discarded and should be taken seriously when it comes to promoting the diversification thrust.

Now, we speak about tourism, and sometimes the Minister is quoted as speaking glowingly about what is happening and what is going on, the marketing thrust and all of that. But, right here in Trinidad we have this fiasco with the Maracas Beach project.

**Mr. Singh:** Oh, that is a tragedy.

**Miss R. Ramdial:** The Maracas Beach project, a serious fiasco and a tragedy to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and it is really something that we need to take note of. Because, you know, people say when you demit office—and in governance it is a continuum.

Now this project, it was granted to a contractor, yes, rightly so, new Government came into being and I do not know, for whatever reason, they decided, you know, that particular contract and contractor, something was wrong there, so it was put on hold, I think it went to court and all of that. And that particular project stalled for 19 months, and we have people throughout Trinidad and Tobago commenting, writing about it, editorials, pictures, social media, viral with what is happening at Maracas Beach, and nothing. [*Desk thumping*] There is no sense of urgency. Just a day ago the Minister of Works and Transport spoke about—okay, finally, I saw him, sorry, turning some sod with the new contractor for the project. Turning some sod saying that it was about to start and all of that. I mean, why is it we have to do these things, really? The governance process. Because that project, as I said before, was given—granted, I think it had started in some parts, and they scrapped it and all of that.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, really, the priorities are misplaced, totally misplaced. The same thing with Las Cuevas Beach Resort and Maracas now, just a couple of days ago you were hearing about the toilet facilities being shut down because of the water woes that we are all experiencing at this point in time. And nothing!

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Your time has expired. Do you care to avail yourself of the additional 15?

**Miss R. Ramdial:** Yes, I do.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Right, kindly proceed. [*Desk thumping*]

**Miss R. Ramdial:** So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, my point is, how are we to properly market Trinidad and Tobago as a tourism product when these simple issues exist? These simple issues exist: water, a shortage of water, no contingency plan for the facilities at Maracas Beach and at Las Cuevas.

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[MISS RAMDIAL]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

I understand that something was done actually and now it is back to normal, but we cannot have these things happening over and over, time and time again for it to hit media, and hit social media, and it gives us a bad outlook as a country, because that just does not exist here. That goes international. So, at the end of the day we need to be a little more proactive when it comes to dealing with diversification, when it comes to dealing with tourism, revenue generation, and this is something we are not seeing for the current Government. We are not seeing—and, you know they laugh about plan. They like to say we have no plan, but that is in fact the truth. [*Desk thumping*] There is no plan. There is no foresight. You know, if we had a real plan for tourism we would not have these little simple problems happening. If we had a plan for transport between Tobago and Trinidad, the sea bridge and the air bridge, we would not have these problems happening. [*Desk thumping*] So, we need to take note of that and be cognizant.

In addition to that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would also like to say that I would like to turn to now to some constituency issues before I end. And in the constituency of Couva North, the major problem or the biggest problem at this point in time is water. And not too long ago the Member for Siparia, the Opposition Leader brought a Motion to this House to deal with the water shortages in all of our constituencies, even in some of the PNM held constituencies. And it is a serious matter. It seems as though the Minister in charge of Public Utilities is not doing what he is supposed to do. It is a management problem. The Member for Chaguanas West would have spoken about it. It is a management problem.

I do not want to boast too much, but when we were in that office, led by Mr. Singh, the Member for Chaguanas West, and myself. First of all, we were extremely accessible to the public. [*Desk thumping*] We had our communications department nearly on every radio station on a Monday morning, especially during the dry season, to get information and feedback as to where the problem areas were. We had our social media communications going on, and we had a real good thing going on there with respect to the hotlines also. [*Interruption*] Yes, and we had some good managers in place. I do not know who is there now, and I am not casting any aspersions on who is there at this point in time.

But, what I am saying, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we had a proper management plan led by the Minister himself. So, if you have a Minister who is not leading his Ministry properly, what can you expect? What really can you expect? So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we need to be cognizant of that. I want to draw to the Minister of Public Utilities' attention that the schedule that WASA is putting out there is

misleading. And in many areas when they say water coming it is low pressure, so people cannot even full up their tanks at the end of the day. So, it is the wrong days, low pressure, less hours. We really need to look at that, because that is a basic amenity that every single citizen depends on for survival. We need to be serious about that. In addition to that—and it is funny how these problems fall under the Minister of Public Utilities, eh.

The second issue, Mr. Deputy Speaker—and I have written to the Minister about this—the Union Village Recreation Ground, that was one of the last projects we did with respect to the lighting up of that recreation ground. The infrastructure is there, the hardware is there. All we are waiting on is the commissioning of the lights where the Minister comes with the Member of Parliament and flick a switch, and lights. I have been begging the Minister for 19 months, I have written to him, I have written to the previous Minister who had promised me—the Member for D’Adabie/O’Meara—we had already organized for him to come down to the constituency to commission the lights. And that is why I am saying I wrote to the second Minister, I have not gotten a response to my letter, but we need—*[Interruption]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members, the slight remarks, stop them, please. Proceed.

**Miss R. Ramdial:** But, the constituents for that Union Village Recreation Ground, we really need those lights. Everything is there, as I say, it is just the commissioning, so I would plead and urge the Minister of Public Utilities, please. I am inviting him down to the constituency of Couva North, we would treat him properly, with respect, and everything else that comes with office, but we are asking you, please come and commission the lights so the community of Union Village can have a proper recreational ground for the young people, so that they can engage in positive activities. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker, on another note, I would say also that the constituency of Couva North, of course, is a vibrant one, and earlier on the Member for St. Ann’s East spoke about enhancing communities and all that was being done, and I want to assure that we would be seeking the Member out with respect to her Ministry and all that is there to be offered. Now, in addition to that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, again, I want to reiterate to the Minister of Finance that at this point in time, he has one of the most important duties to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and that is, of course, to safeguard first and foremost the purse of Trinidad and Tobago, and to continue to grow and expand the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. From this mid-term review, we have not seen that happening. I do not

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[MISS RAMDIAL]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

know when we are going to see it, all we are seeing is a barrage of taxes, continuation of taxes for revenue generation. Something that we cannot and the people of this country cannot continue to experience for much longer. It is very, very stressful; it is becoming overbearing to a certain extent.

Now, we have this property tax that the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago have to deal with, and this is something that they are not taking lightly. We have retirees with issues, we have persons who would have built and expanded their homes for years, they have no idea with respect to the valuation, the process, what is going to happen. There is a lack of communication from the Ministry of Finance to the people of Trinidad and Tobago when it comes to the property tax, and the implementation of the property tax, and therefore I would like to lend my voice to the numerous voices out there, the business sector, the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, and other stakeholders, that we are not ready for this property tax at this point in time.

As much as the Minister may see it as a revenue generating one, the people cannot handle another tax, and then in September where we have another cut in the fuel subsidy coming, so that is going to be another increase, which would lead to an overall increase of cost of living, it is really burdensome, and I think that this Government needs to reflect and take a look at the road that they are carrying us down. It is not a very happy road. It is a very overburdened, and of course as we have said, a crisis situation that we are heading into.

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

**The Minister of Tourism (Hon. Shamfa Cudjoe):** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to this discourse. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know the time has been shortened and so I want to be able to touch on a number of the matters raised by Members opposite, and to touch on some matters of my own.

I want to first and foremost say as a Tobagonian, Member of Parliament for Tobago West and as a Tobagonian, I have spoken on the matter relating to the *Super Fast Galicia* before. I have answered questions in Parliament, I have spoken to the media, and I am here to say again tonight, of course it is no good situation being experienced by the people of Tobago right now, but you have to lose one to get one. You have to lose what was not working to get what is working, and I want to talk a “little bit” on that. [*Desk thumping*]

You see, if the Members opposite were so concerned—you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they stand in this Parliament and they speak like if they were never in Government a couple years ago. Like if the people of Trinidad and Tobago have forgotten. It has only been two years and we remember, especially the people of Tobago remember. You, the now Opposition, when you were in Government, all the things that you had done

to Tobago and all the things that you have said to Tobago, if you were so concerned about Tobago in 2014 when you were doing the *Super Fast Galicia* deal, you would have been sure to select a boat that was efficient enough to do the work between—[*Crosstalk*] We know very well and good, and we read it in the press, it was not, because it failed five out of the seven categories of assessment, and it was not suited for berthing. [*Desk thumping*]

Five out of the seven categories, and you told us to be still because this is only a temporary arrangement, and it is going for seven months. [*Desk thumping*] We remember that. It was 2014. This is only three years after. You told us that, yes, it failed five out of seven, so it is only temporary, so it will be for seven months. Seven months passed and you continue to drag on this situation that had been untenable, so you had stakeholders in Tobago complaining, stakeholders in Trinidad complaining about the same *Super Fast Galicia*, and instead of going out and doing a proper procurement process so that Tobago, or should I say Trinidad and Tobago, should have the boat of the quality that it deserves, you continued to invest in a boat that you knew failed five out of the seven categories, and you knew it was a temporary arrangement.

So, here we are three years later with the same situation. And this Government took the decision to face—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Silence!

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:** This Government took the decision to tackle head-on the situation. We have been complaining about the *Super Fast Galicia* for so long in Tobago. There are many times when the cruise ships came in and the *Super Fast Galicia* had no place to berth, and it would not come to Tobago, and we used to be crying out the same way, and you were deaf to that. So, all this love you have for Tobago all of a sudden, we remember all of that, a couple years ago. [*Desk thumping*]

**Miss Ramdial:** I have always loved Tobago.

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:** You were the same Government where a couple years ago, in 2013, when you lost the Tobago House of Assembly election, you were out in the public saying that Tobagonians were clannish and that we were tribal, and encouraging your supporters not to support Tobago tourism, do not go to Tobago, and if you have to go for any means take your groceries and so on with you. Do not spend a cent over there. [*Desk thumping*]

All that is right now on your UNC pages from your same supporters.

[*Interruption*] Those same people who stand and—this same people in Opposition now, Members in Opposition now, who stood in Government and did not meet with the Chief Secretary to treat with Tobago matters, who barred up around the airport saying that refurbishment was taking place there, and there was nothing taking place there, who turned their backs on Tobago tourism stakeholders—all of a sudden have a heart for Tobagonians? We remember. It was only three years ago. So, to come now—[*Crosstalk*]

**8.00 p.m.**

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member. Again, I would like to hear the discourse of the Hon. Member. So the constant chatter, please avoid it. Proceed, Member.

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Now this matter of land titles and former Member of Parliament, Mrs. Deborah Moore-Miggins' article on land and property tax. Yes, the matters relating to the property tax are real, and the Attorney General will stand and speak more in depth on it.

But I remember, Mr. Deputy Speaker, being a Member of the Opposition, sitting in seat number three over there when the land and title—it was an omnibus package as the legal people call it, it was on the Order Paper. As a matter of fact, they brought it on the Order Paper a couple of months before the Tobago House of Assembly elections. And after they lost the election, it slipped off of the Order Paper and the legislative agenda. And every time I posed that question as to when the debate is going to happen, and if it is going to return on the legislative agenda, I was being told soon, soon. Your time in office came and left and you left that land titles issues the same way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I remember that in time for the Tobago House of Assembly election they would have established a fake committee to come over there and fool Tobagonians to tell us that they have established this committee to deal with land and title, land registration and title matters. When you look at the Cabinet Notes today, the committee was never properly established and no work was done. And we remember when the, now Opposition and then Government came to Tobago and handed the people, what was supposed to be land titles and when they opened it was blank.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** “All dat went on?”

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:** All of this went on under you, when you were in Government and all this love and care for Tobago. You came to Tobago and hand



the people blank papers and took out pictures with them, and told us that you had—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** Who is you?

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:** Members opposite who are now in Opposition that was in Government.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members. [*Crosstalk*] Members. Member for Couva South—Member for Couva North, sorry. Again, the Speaker will rule, the Member speak “you” in terms of reference to the other side. She is not speaking directly to any particular individual. Proceed. [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. Member:** What? Wayyy!

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will tell you something, she would not run down my time. I will tell you, they like to come here—Members like to come in this Parliament, Members opposite especially, and speak about a lot of things that they know nothing of. Christlyn Moore busy sending you a set of texts, a whole lot of things you know nothing of. I would sit for you to tell me where Archie Gully is. [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. Member:** You in my phone?

**Mr. Charles:** You in charge now.

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:** Yeah? Where Archie Gully is? No, you have never been to Tobago, you do not know anything about Tobago. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is my time. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members!

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is my time.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members! Princes Town, thank you.

**Mr. Padarath:** That is what the people of Tobago thinks of you.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members, the decorum of the House is still— [*Crosstalk*] Members, the decorum of the House is when a speaker is speaking, silence. Okay, I am going to ensure and enforce the rule. Continue, Member.

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They could say what they want, this is my time and I will speak. When you have your time, you could

speak. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, they come here and they speak all kinds of things that do not make any kind of sense. You know how shelves in Tobago have no grocery and all this kind of stuff. When you speak to Tobagonians, the situation is different. And, yes, there are challenges, of course, there will be challenges. Of course, there will be challenges, but we are going through this process and we understand that this Government is working diligently to restore proper services to Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And we are talking about two more fast ferries to Tobago. And we are talking of not leasing a boat to transport cargo. At this point in time, over 50 years of independence, we know that Trinidad and Tobago is separated by a body of water. We should own a boat of our own. And that is what this Government is going to do; ensure that Trinidad and Tobago has a boat to transport cargo to call their own. I will not be distracted, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is my time.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to speak a little bit about this myth, and I see the newspapers running with it. Arrivals in Tobago was 80,000 a couple years ago and it is now 20,000. And I kept saying that that does not sound right, so I decided to do my own research. What they have been doing is adding from 2008, the cruise arrivals with the airlift arrivals to get the 80,000 back then, and then compare it to airlift arrivals here only.

**Dr. Francis:** Fuzzy maths.

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:** Fuzzy, fuzzy maths. So they say in 2008 Tobago had 80,000 arrivals and now they have 20,000. Yes, it was 80,000 then when you add cruise and airlift and now you are comparing it to airlift only.

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Go back and check your maths. And I want to call some of the figures because, yes, tourism is down in Trinidad and in Tobago. But that comparison of 80,000 to 20,000 is a total UNC lie, and I want to place that on the record right now, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now, the Member would have raised the issue of \$12 million spent on Tobago Jazz. And, yes, there have been questions being asked about the spending for Jazz and so on, but we want tourists to come and we want a top-class kind of experience when it comes to Jazz and our different festivals, and we want to compare it to St. Lucia's Jazz.

St. Lucia spends an average of EC \$14 million per year on its jazz festival. When you do the math, that is TT \$42 million on their jazz festival per year. So how do you compare that? That is apples and oranges, TT \$12 million for Tobago Jazz versus TT \$42 million from the State for St. Lucia Jazz. So do your research. Do your research

before you come here trying to make people feel bad. You know nothing, nothing about Tobago. Reading one set of wrong information from Christlyn Moore. Never been in Government, not in Government, would never be in Government, so keep accepting texts from her and telling people foolishness.

**Miss Ramdial:** Tell that to Mr. Remy.

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:** Mr. Remy—*[Interruption]*

**Miss Ramdial:** He is ashamed of you—

**Madam Speaker:** Couva North, please. Please continue, Member.

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:** I will tell you something, Madam Speaker. And I am answering. This Mr. Remy matter. This matter relating to the union is in the court and it will be ventilated there, but I will tell you something. Mr. Remy has his business to treat with, the communication workers union and its members, and the Government has its business, to run the business of this country to the best of our ability to benefit all. I have respect for the union. *[Desk thumping]* Everybody has their role to play but we all have to be very cognizant of the reality of what is taking place today and if we really want our tourism to move, to grow, to benefit all we have to make the necessary changes, to re-engineer our structures and re-tool our strategy to redound to the benefit of not just us here today or not just the workers of TDC, but the generations to come and that is what sustainable development is about. *[Desk thumping]* So this Government stands willing and ready to face the—and make the hard decisions head on and that we will do in the best interest of not some but all of us here in Trinidad and Tobago.

So I want to move on from that, Madam Speaker. I want to treat also with the matter of the final matter that the Member would have raised about no water at Las Cuevas and Maracas. Madam Speaker, this is something that happens yearly around this time and if you check the records at TDC you would see the notices and advisories from even in their time going four, five years back around this time. So this is nothing new to us. This is nothing new to us. It happened under the PNM, it happened under the UNC, but this is not even about party; this is about the advancement of our tourism and development of our country. So I would not waste my precious time to have this tit-for-tat conversation with you. Go back, do your research and tell Christlyn Moore do her research too.

So, Madam Speaker, I want to speak now, let us talk about tourism plan. It is the same Opposition that when in Government had not produced a marketing plan for TDC. Over 10 years TDC had not one and now asking for one. But as I said,

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[HON. S. CUDJOE]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

this Government would do what it ought to do—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** By closing it down. [*Laughter*]

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:** This Government will do what it ought to do to advance development in this country and that we will do.

Madam Speaker, I want to speak to some of the things that have been happening in the Ministry of Tourism. I want to start with some of our marketing initiative. We would have undertaken a number of the usual activities, like hosting tour operators and so on. In October of 2016, we hosted 13 tour operators from the US and the UK and we would have had them network with stakeholders in Trinidad and stakeholders in Tobago also.

In November of last year we would have launched a taxi cab marketing project in Canada and that would have resulted in an increase in our arrivals from the Canadian market. In the first quarter of this year, we saw an 11 per cent increase in arrivals from Canada. Now last year about October/November, the THRTA, The Trinidad Hotels, Restaurants & Tourism Association along with the Tour Operators Association, came together and requested the Ministry of Tourism a tour, a French/Caribbean Road Show and the Ministry of Tourism was happy to lend the support to that initiative and the stakeholders have reported that it was very successful.

Madam Speaker, I want to go on now to another marketing initiative which is called, “Stay to Get Away”. Now last year we would have revised the Stay to Get Away initiative and it was very successful. We would have set out to get support from 50,000 Trinbagonians and we got support from over 54,000 Trinbagonians participating in the different deals at the hotels and participating in different tours. I want to say that domestic tourism is a viable source of income for our economy and it helps to keep the local tourism sector afloat in our low months. So this year we are going to do the Stay to Get Away initiative again in the July and August period and we are partnering with the Tobago House of Assembly that usually does the endless Tobago weekend initiative to encourage staycations, to encourage our locals to stay at home to boost our economy as it relates to tourism, to promote a better awareness and appreciation for Trinidad and Tobago. So we want to make Stay to Get Away or should I say the staycation campaign to run throughout the entire year. And on that note, Madam Speaker, in the new entity we are going to have a domestic tourism desk which had never existed before to focus particularly on domestic tourism.

Now I want to touch on another marketing initiatives. For the first time in the

history of this nation, the Ministry of Tourism has developed an App, a smart phone application called, “Go Trinbago”. And I want to talk about Go Trinbago because it is something that we are very proud of in the Ministry of Tourism. When we launched the Go Trinbago—the Go Trinbago App cost us \$180,000 and it was developed at the end of last year and launched in January. And when we launched in January, we had 515 downloads.

Madam Speaker, today we can boast of over 609 downloads and we moved from eight countries in January and now we have stretched all the way to 73 countries that would have downloaded the Go Trinbago App. And the Go Trinbago App is in the Google Play Store and it is also in the top 100 applications in the iPhone or should I say in the Apple Store. Under Google Play, it is the number one application that speaks about information on Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, I want to share with you some of the top places or some of the top items of interests for some the people who would have downloaded this App across the 73 countries that are participating. Some of them include doubles, people wanted to know about Lara Fete, bird watching, Hyatt Regency, Trinidad All Stars Steel Orchestra and chocolate tasting and making. So we have so much—*[Interruption]*

**Mr. Mitchell:**—Brian Lara Stadium.

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:**—and very soon, the Brian Lara Stadium and as we proceed to fulfil our agenda to develop our tourism, Madam Speaker, we will be looking at cluster development as it relates to sports also, because we boast of international standards as it relates to our infrastructure for sport, so we are leaning towards sports tourism as a means of boosting our tourism. Events Tourism is very effective in Trinidad and Tobago, more so, Trinidad than Tobago and the Tobago side of things would focus on leisure.

But I think that this new move that we are about to make as it relates to these structures, it reflects what actually, the way we are set up. For instance, the Tobago House of Assembly has full responsibility for Tourism development in Tobago. So we would have had before a Tourism Development Company charged with the mandate to develop tourism in Trinidad and Tobago, but really could not have really executed its powers really in Tobago, because the Tobago House of Assembly has full responsibility.

The Tobago House of Assembly would have already had on its agenda, the intention to open its own entity to implement tourism, so it now falls under the whole vision of having its own entity. We are looking also at a regulatory

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[HON. S. CUDJOE]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

authority because we are one of the only countries in the Caribbean that say we are serious about tourism but do not have mandatory standards to govern the sector. So for instance last week, two weeks ago I met with British Airways Holidays and one of the complaints would have been about the quality of the room, the quality of the tourism infrastructure, the different standards, even training for taxi drivers and so on.

If you go to the UK today, the black cab taxi drivers they have their stamp of certification when you have to take courses in tour guiding and so on and we want to make that mandatory, mandatory for all tourism service providers, because if we want to compete with Barbados or we want to compete with Jamaica, we have to be able to stand next to them and the quality of our product must be up to standard. So we make no apologies as it relates to that. We would have sent out for RFPs, for the consultation so that all the stakeholders could be consulted as to the best way that we could institute standards, mandatory standards and regulations to our Trinidad and Tobago tourism.

Now, over the past year, Madam Speaker, we would have focused very, very seriously on stakeholder consultation and it is interesting that I would hear people in the media and people especially in Parliament trying to fool people to say that the Ministry of Tourism and the Minister of Tourism have not been consulting stakeholders. This is the most, the largest number of stakeholder consultations ever undertaken by any Minister of Tourism. I have checked my records and we have established a Stakeholders Relations Unit in the Ministry of Tourism. We are meeting with stakeholders weekly. We are even going out to the different sights and visiting them on their place of business, on their site of business. We did the large hotels last year and this year we have partnered with the smaller tourism association and the smaller entities and we started in Port of Spain last week, we went down to Chaguanas this week and we are set to continue to visit them to get up close and personal to see their issues, to look at how we can change our incentives or improve our incentives regime to help to grow these businesses so that we are ready for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century tourism. And that is something that this Government is serious about.

Madam Speaker, you see over the years there are tourism Ministers who talked tourism. And we are actually here putting action to it and doing what we ought to do, to raise the bar, to lift the standard, to up the ante as it relates to tourism development in Trinidad and Tobago. So we would have consulted stakeholders on policy, on the different things that are going on in the Ministry of Tourism and seeking their partnership.

Now, Madam Speaker, I want to turn a little—let us talk about accommodation. I would have forgotten that. Accommodation and occupancy rates. I would have read in the papers reports about 10 per cent and 7 per cent occupancy in tourism in Tobago. And that is totally untrue. Madam Speaker, when you check the records from the Tobago House of Assembly, the records from the Tobago House Assembly show us that last year the average occupancy rate was 32.6 per cent occupancy rate in Tobago. And if you think that that is, yes, it is a drop, but if you think that it is far from the years before let me share the records with you.

In 2015 the occupancy rate in Tobago was 40.8 per cent; in 2014 it was 40.7 per cent; in 2013 it was 41.9 per cent. So Tobago usually has an occupancy rate of about, around 40 per cent. In Trinidad, the occupancy rate usually goes around 60 per cent. And that is the way it has been from 2012 even before that to now. And let us talk a little bit more about occupancy rate in Tobago. If on weekends when there are huge events in Tobago, even on the regular weekend, you have Caribbean Airlines reporting as it is moving 16,000, 17,000, 18,000 people between Trinidad and Tobago for them to vacation in Tobago, where are these people staying, Madam Speaker? Where are these people staying? If they are not staying in the hotels then it begs another question. Where are they staying? And it is the same conversation that the Barbados Hotel & Tourism Association is having. You are seeing people coming on air list but many of them are not staying. About 40 per cent are not staying at the hotels and what you have now is the non-traditional accommodation facilities, like for instance, the Airbnb, the home away and you called that the shared economy that we have not yet perfected our ability to absorb those numbers in our statistics.

Then you have—I met in my walkabout meeting, the smaller tourism stakeholders, people, especially older women who are living in their homes and using downstairs as rooms for tourism purposes. Some of them are not really registered and some of them are registered with the smaller groups. But you have people living in their homes, bringing people to stay in the room right next to them and a lot of people are making money like that. I know for instance in Tobago, where people use the downstairs of their homes or the months that they are not in Tobago or elsewhere, they use their homes for tourism purposes. What we have to work on, Madam Speaker, how do we absorb these people or how do we at least have an information sharing facility where we can truly capture the numbers.

We also have a challenge in collecting the accurate and timely information. CSO is

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[HON. S. CUDJOE]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

trying to improve its capacity to do so and we in the Ministry of Tourism are also doing our best to capture the information, for the first time we are executing base line survey. And the base line survey tells you what is going on the business side of things and on the visitor side of things. We would have done stage one and stage two of that project in Trinidad and the final report for Trinidad is due at the end of May 2017 and we just got the okay from the Tobago House of Assembly in January to launch in Tobago. We would have launched that programme in Tobago.

You know, I want to go back to this love for Tobago, because you see, Members opposite were a part of that Government that would have instituted the Tourism Upgrade Programme, where stakeholder and hoteliers could upgrade their facilities and get 25 per cent reimbursement. But under that Government, Madam Speaker, it was available to Trinidad stakeholders only.

I want to repeat that, Madam Speaker, under that Government that facility for room upgrade—right now we are complaining about tired rooms and room occupancy in Tobago under that Government. They did not hear the cries of Tobago because Tobago was not yellowing up and Tobago will never be yellow. But, Madam Speaker, they forgot Tobago. They could not hear Tobago's cries but all now they are in love with Tobago.

Madam Speaker, it was when this People's National Movement Government came into power in September 2015, I went to Cabinet immediately. A matter of fact, I met with the stakeholders in Tobago and it was in December we passed the Cabinet decision to have that programme accessible to Tobago. We travelled to Tobago and launched it in Tobago in April 2016 and it is only now, six years later that Tobagonians could now apply after Trinidadians have benefited from that same programme to improve their tourism facilities. Where is the love for Tobago? Where is the love for Tobago that you now speak about?

Madam Speaker, all they know is that they want to rule Tobago. They want to rule Tobago. They do not want to know anything about Tobago or Tobago's people. They are trying to fool Tobago, but we are aware of that. We are very much aware of that and we would not be fooled. Yes, it is not perfect in Tobago right now, but this Government is working diligently with the Tobago House of Assembly to provide the necessary services. We know about you, you cannot fool us anymore. We are very well aware about who you are so we would not be. Madam Speaker, and she is shouting out, "Tell Watson". Watson is just there for a time. Tobagonians would speak to Watson some years to come.

Madam Speaker, we speak about our tourism plan. The last tourism master



plan was dated 1995. I was in second form wearing ribbons and Flame shoes in 2005. [Laughter] Madam Speaker, when we came into Government we established the Tourism Standing Committee headed by Dr. Acolla Cameron that would have met with stakeholders over and over and now we have— [Interruption]

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member for Tobago West, your original 30 minutes have expired. You are entitled to 15 more minutes. If you intend to avail yourself further, please proceed.

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:** Yes, please. [Desk thumping] So, Madam Speaker, allow me to speak a little bit about that because the stakeholders, the standing committee headed by Dr. Cameron would have met with stakeholders from as early as February 2016 and I am talking about stakeholders, Trinidad Hotel Association and the list goes on and on, the taxi drivers and came up with the tourism plan, the Trinidad tourism road map which is now before the Cabinet. So you ask for a plan. Where was your plan?

So, Madam Speaker, we understand that this new direction that we intend to go would call for a change in attitude and a change in culture. The World Travel and Tourism Commission would have, in April 2017, would have just issued its last report and in those reports Trinidad and Tobago is one of the seven Caribbean countries listed on the report. We came in 69<sup>th</sup> out of 141 countries. Barbados came in at 58, but we were assessed on so many different area spots. There are two areas that stuck out to me that we did not perform very well in.

Now let me talk about what we performed well in. We performed very well in ICT, in readiness, in price competitiveness and so on, but Madam Speaker, there are two areas that we must treat with and it calls not just for the Minister or the Ministry of Tourism, but all of government approach. A matter of fact, an all of Trinidad and Tobago approach and one is customer service, how we treat with tourism as to whether or not tourism is our business, how we handle our customers. I would have spoken over and over again about our need to improve our tourism awareness, tourism education in our schools and the way we treat each other and the way we treat customers and another one is crime. We came in fourth to last and sixth to last in those two areas.

So we have a duty to change the culture and I would like to say a good place to live is a good place to visit. So we are not changing the culture of protecting our environment or any of that for the tourist. We are doing that for ourselves, Madam Speaker, and that is why the Minister of Tourism has embarked upon a serious, a robust education and awareness drive where we started in the schools, with the school

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[HON. S. CUDJOE]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

caravan. We have the essay writing competition taking place right now, the deadline is May 31<sup>st</sup>. We have the FCCA, which is the cruise ship essay and poster competition coming up and that is going to take place before August. And we go from school to school and I want to share with you some of the schools that we would have visited so far.

In October we visited the TML Primary School in St. Joseph. We also visited the Tunapuna Hindu Primary School; we visited Bethlehem Girls R.C. School, the Manzanilla Secondary School where we have the very first tourism secondary school club in Trinidad and Tobago. That has never happened before. Madam Speaker, we have for the first time a junior Minister of Tourism in the name of Mr. La Quan Pearie. That has never happened before. CTO had been running its junior Minister of Tourism programme for over 10 years and Trinidad and Tobago had never signed on to it. Now, for the first time you have young people fired up to participate in tourism activities.

Madam Speaker, we also went to Bamboo Settlement Government Primary School, Scared Heart Boys' R.C. School and the list goes on and on and on and on. But I hear—now that we are in this position where we now have to focus more directly on tourism because the luxury of oil and gas and what we would have enjoyed over the years is no longer there. We all have a responsibility to prepare our families, prepare our communities, prepare ourselves to be more tourism friendly, to be more focused on tourism and tourism is not just the Government's business. It is everybody's business.

### **8.30 p.m.**

I could recall meeting with a committee the Tuesday before Carnival, with the Customs, with Immigration, to get ready for Carnival, and each and every person on that committee was surprised to see how they play a major role as to what we serve. Because you know what, Madam Speaker? Your airport is your "hello" and "goodbye". So what happens at the airport is very important. So our Customs Officers and our Immigration Officers ought to see themselves as tourism stakeholders also.

So we are working on it. We have done training programmes with members of Customs and Immigration also and that must continue. Because if we are supposed to stand up next to Barbados and Bahamas, St. Lucia, Jamaica—Jamaica that boasts of its 23,000 rooms under the Jamaica Tourist Association and we are boasting of a little 4,000, so we have to step up our game. We have to be ready and willing to do what we have to do to be on the same level or to be able to compete, to even survive, to even remain relevant in this whole tourism

environment, because the world is moving full speed ahead and we cannot tiptoe around our problems or issues. We have to face them head-on because to get different results, we have to do things differently.

And we have been complaining about these institutions over the years, writing all these newspaper reports, complaining on social media. What are we going to do about it? Well. This Government has put down its foot and has gone through the necessary processes to make a change and to do what is necessary to improve our tourism position and we make absolutely no apologies.

So, Madam Speaker, we continue to liaise with stakeholders. We continue to talk with even the union to do what in the best interest of the workers. And the previous speaker would have spoken about, if we are going to absorb workers from the previous entity. Everybody would be welcome to apply and everybody would be given a fair chance. There are some very skilled people working within the TDC. I can call a couple of them by name but I would not do that at this point. I have met some very passionate, intelligent people who are serious about the industry. So everybody who applies would have a very fair chance. But we had to change the culture as it relates to the sector. We have to change the culture in our destination marketing organization in the best interest of, not just some people, but all people.

So, Madam Speaker, I take my licks. I take my blows. But at the end of the day I stand tall and firm because I know that what we are doing in this Government is in the best interest of Trinidad and Tobago, and we are thinking about the next generation and not like them who were focused on the next election.

So, Madam Speaker, with those few words, I want to thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Tabaquite. [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan** (*Tabaquite*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. One of the characteristics which people believe make them a very good parliamentary contributor is the ability to have a hot mouth. [*Desk thumping*] But people must really deal in relevance, and they must look at how they perform in relation to the portfolio. And the Member for Tobago West, the Minister for Tourism, has presided over the worst decline in tourism ever in the history of tourism, [*Desk thumping*] even in Trinidad and domestic tourism sites where people go on weekends and on holidays and you see the horror which people have to undergo in order to enjoy domestic tourism or leisure moments with their

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[DR. RAMNACHAN]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

family. So it is one good thing to declare that you are in charge, and so on, but you must put yourself really in charge and do what is necessary.

Madam Speaker, you know, the Hon. Member and Minister of Tourism spoke about the grants from the Central Government under the People's Partnership not being available to hotels in tourism. I think I want to correct the record because what happened under their Government is that the small guesthouses and small hotels with less than six rooms were included in the new arrangement made by the Government. But it is untrue to say that the programme of \$250 million support for hotels in Tobago was not, in fact, given to Tobago hotels. And that was launched way back under Mr. Stephen Cadiz when he was then Minister, and I believe Mr. Larry Howai and Mr. Richard Young were all part of that committee, and so on.

Madam Speaker, it is also very important to note that the Minister made some comments about Tobagonians not getting their land titles. On the 11<sup>th</sup> May, 2017, reported in the *Tobago News*:

"...at the Metal Industrial Company Ltd at Canaan, the"—then—"Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar"—

**Hon. Member:** What date?

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** Sorry, not 2017—accompanied by Legal Affairs Minister, Prakash Ramadhar, and Minority Leader, Mr. Ashworth Jack, and among the people who received titles included 94-year-old John Parks—

**Hon. Member:** What?

**Dr. S. Rambachan:**—and Princess Cupid, a visually impaired person. And Parks who is also the father of minority councillor, Yvette Parks—I am quoting from the newspaper:

"...said he has been brought to tears that his title was finally in his possession."

And these are his words:

"I goes on my knees for the Prime Minister, she is wonderful. She is like a glittering star in the east. I have been waiting for 27 years. Money was the problem since I had to get surveyors and lawyers', Parks said."

And the article concluded:

"Tobagonians will no longer have to journey to Trinidad to complete the necessary paperwork."

So one has to correct the record on these matters with respect to what is being propagated here in the House.

Madam Speaker, I want to begin my contribution here this evening by asking a question as to whether the Government is not guilty of promoting a culture of scarcity rather than a culture of prosperity in this country. [*Desk thumping*] And it seems to me that they are operating from a perspective of scarcity rather than prosperity. To see the real wealth of this nation we have to move from a poverty of scarcity to the value of capacity. We have a capacity in this country to turn around this country, but somehow this Government is missing the point. And the real capacity in this country comes from the value we place upon people. People are our capacity and the Government is missing that. And when you place emphasis on people you will realize how much capacity you have in the country to solve the problems you have in this nation.

Madam Speaker, there is a very beautiful story that I will share with you about—it describes how the value of abundance is put into practice, and it happened in a church where a priest decided that he would no longer collect donations in a hat from church visitors every Sunday. And this was a behaviour based on the value of scarcity, he told himself. Instead, what he did, he decided to give away \$10 each to every visitor who came to his church on a particular Sunday. And when he gave this \$10 to each one of them, he said, “Whenever you have been able to grow this money 10 times, bring it back to the church.” And the priest decided to bet on the value of abundance, the productive capacity of his visitors, rather than on scarce donations. And the results were remarkable as great volumes of money began to flow to the church as the devotees enthusiastically invested their \$10 and grew the money many times.

And the lesson is very simple, that the most abundant yet most underutilized capacity of any organization is its people, and that is also true of the way this Government is treating its most important resource in this country, the people of this country. [*Desk thumping*] And in the people of this country we have a capacity to turn around the fortunes of this country. But if you are a leader who is un-inspirational, if you are a leader who continues to propagate old ideas, if you are a leader who embraces only the past, if you are a leader who refuses to embrace discontinuity, then you cannot reinvent the future. Only by embracing discontinuity would you be able to reinvent the future, because the future is often discontinuous with the past.

You see, when you take Vision 2020 and make it Vision 2030, you are not

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[DR. RAMBACHAN]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

practising discontinuity from the past and therefore you are not going to reinvent a future in which there is going to be prosperity. You are still living on the basis of the past.

Madam Speaker, what has this Government been doing? The Government—and the Minister of Finance spoke in his opening remarks today, and he has been speaking all the time and indicating that his major objective is stabilization of the country. But I want to remind the Minister that while he is correct in having to move towards stability, he must also remember that stability itself is a holding strategy, and if alongside stability you do not have programmes for growth of the economy, then you are going to have a problem that perpetuates itself and you are going to create a spiral of poverty in the country, and everyone is going to get poor.

So while you have every reason to move towards stability, you also have to indicate how you are going to grow the economy. How have you gone about this objective of achieving stability? What have you done? I have been analysing your strategies over the last 19 months. You have cut back on recurrent expenditures, and that has had certain implications. One of the implications of cutting back on recurrent expenditures is that what you have done is not been renewing contracts of persons who have been working and in that way you have put a virtual freeze on new employment in the public service.

You have cut capital expenditure. We have seen even in the debate that you have not spent your IDF funds and that in not spending your IDF funds, what you have done is you have restricted the expansion and continuity of a very prosperous construction sector. The sector that has the ability to bring life to the economy, by cutting back on capital projects which could have stimulated that sector to the tune of about \$1.257 billion—and that is only this year; we have to talk about last year also, how much was not spent from the IDF—what you have done is you have brought a halt to an area of economic activity that had the potential to create expansion in the economy.

Part of your strategy in creating stability has been to borrow, but there is a danger in how you have been borrowing. You have been borrowing to cover recurrent expenditure. When you borrow long-term to cover short-term and in terms of your recurrent expenditure, and when, through that borrowing you have not invested it in capital projects that will give you some long-term returns, then you are going to have a difficulty to repay those loans in the future, because your ability to repay depends on your ability to earn.

And then, you have been selling assets. Madam Speaker, when you sell assets that are productive assets—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Cash cows.

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** Assets that are cash cows, yes—that have been bringing you a stream of revenue, when you sell it, and when you take that revenue and you put it again into your recurrent expenditures, then you have truncated the ability to earn from those assets in the future. It is gone. It has gone forever. And that is another thing that the Government has been doing.

Madam Speaker, you know PriceSmart said something recently. PriceSmart said that they had a problem with getting foreign exchange and that they had to ensure that they hedge against this foreign exchange problem. What they said, they were investing in land. They were investing in land because they knew that the price of property would rise and therefore they would be able to recoup if a devaluation takes place.

I want to say one thing, that I support the Minister in his view that devaluation is not the answer to Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] I want to support him on that. What he has said is that he is going to manage it and manage the floating dollar, and what have you. I think that there are many ways—many other ways—rather than devaluation, because devaluation is going to bring a lot of pressure upon the people in this country, a country in which, still, over 60 per cent of the people earn less than \$6,000 a month.

**Hon. Member:** How many per cent?

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** About 60 per cent or more earn less than \$6,000 a month. And I really find it difficult. And what you are going to get is a greater degree of working poor, and you are going to get the middle class, again, more pressure being put on them. Madam Speaker, so when you borrow—when you sell out assets, one would hope that you would not just throw all into recurrent expenditure and it is all sapped up, but you will reinvest it in projects that will earn you a stream of incomes to cover your loans.

And then another thing that the Government did in this stability drive was to suppress payment to contractors, and we know what has happened about that. Now, sure enough, by suppressing payments to contractors, what you are really doing is postponing the debt you owe to them in the future. That is all you are doing, postponing the debt you owe to them in the future. They have to carry overdraft loans. They have to pay interest on their loans. They have workers to pay, and so on.

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[DR. RAMBACHAN]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

Could the Government not have thought a little bit different and said, “Okay, yes, we owe you this money but in the meantime why do you not become a lender of sorts to the Government and that we will give you a certain interest that will help you in these difficult times on the money we owe you, so that you can continue in business by supporting your overdraft, and so on, or pay you part of the principal?” And therefore, you keep these people in business, keep their workers in business, and so on. We have to think outside of the box and invent ways in which we can keep these people alive. So somewhere along the line you are postponing the debt, but the pressure you brought on the contracting sector is one that is horrible—horrible that they have been begging the Government to pay.

And then you cut back on GATE. All right. You cut back on GATE. But what has that done? Have you now in a way by particularly cutting back GATE on people doing Masters and post graduates degrees—are you now affecting your intellectual capital development and your competitiveness as a nation globally?

**Hon. Member:** That is a good point; good point.

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** Madam Speaker, I had a very sad case in my office last week, a constituent of mine, a young lady. She did a first degree and then—her real dream was to do medicine. Her father is a pensioner and she took a student loan which she paid off. But for some reason she got admitted into medical school in St. Augustine. Having gotten admitted, she was able to go through the first term and write the exam, but because she could not pay the fees, she did not get the results.

I wrote to the dean of the faculty asking him to please allow her to write the second semester exams, and she was not able to write it. And this young lady whose dream is to be a doctor—because the GATE programme has been cut and cannot support her, because her father is a pensioner and she cannot afford now to pay another student loan. I really feel deep about that. And I promised that young lady that we are going to try to help her raise some funds to get her back into the programme. Madam Speaker, it is distressing to see a young person from a poor background, really wanting to do well and have to go through that kind of hardship. So that is a very serious thing, when our intellectual capacity is being truncated in this kind of way.

Madam Speaker, poverty alleviation. We know now that more people are suffering because they cannot get the kind and quantity of food that they need. I come to this Parliament and I speak about that all the time because I face it in my constituency and I know there is a reality there that exists. And we are seeing a



big hit on transfers and subsidies. That is another strategy that the Government used in terms of trying to create this stability.

And then, look at what has happened across the country. Let us take one area: school buildings. Look at the number of school buildings that have been left in abeyance. It is going to cost you much more money to restart those properties and get them going and finish them, than if you had found a way to complete them over the last 19 months. Madam Speaker, you are putting yourself, in my view, in more expense. You have to find new ways in order to do it. And this is why I talked about discontinuity. To reinvent the future you have to discontinue your thinking of the past, and the thinking of the past is, "We do not have money; we are in a culture of scarcity; shut it down", when you could be thinking about a culture of prosperity. How do you create wealth? And I will show you in my contribution later.

Then another thing you did is by cutting back on the IDF. In some very important areas the IDF was suppressed, for example, in the area of the Minister of National Security. Across this country the crime rate is extremely high. The murders are extremely high, and what have you. It seems to me that the police have dropped their hands in this matter.

Madam Speaker, I left this Parliament last Friday night and I got home at 1.48 in the morning. And when I got home at 1.48 in the morning and I drove onto my street, there was a white pickup van parked on the other street with about five individuals around it. And there is an abandoned house on that street and all I could see was people moving things from the abandoned house onto the vehicle. I drove around my street block and I came back again. I was afraid to go in my yard, I would not fool you. But I eventually did. And having gone into my yard, I stood there and watched. A Tiida drove up now behind the vehicle. Other guys got out. They packed up the van. One went west and one went east.

I called the Chaguanas Station. Nobody answered the Chaguanas Station. Minister; nobody answered. Minister, that was about between 1.48 and 2.10. I called, in that intervening time, 999, and they finally sent the police. When the police came, they blared their siren in front my gate, by which time, of course, the guys had long disappeared. I say that to you because that is the state of affairs. But if the money that was not used in the IDF was used in capital projects like CCTV cameras on the streets of Chaguanas, we would have been able to say, at that time, which vehicles were moving and where the vehicles were going. The 999 people were asking me: Can I go and get the number of the vehicle. Come on.

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[DR. RAMBACHAN]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

But that is an aside for many people in this House.

And then you close down the highway to Point Fortin project for 19 months also. You closed it down. That is another one of your strategies of getting stability. But what did you do? How many persons went home without any remuneration that the OWTU continues to fight on their behalf, but they are now out of jobs?

You also have suppressed new housing developments under the HDC. How many housing developments have started? But you have done something else in the meantime. You could have looked at what is your inventory of houses in the country and you could have made a policy decision and said, “You know what? Listen. Is it possible for us to offer these houses to people as they are and allow people to repair the houses—value the houses as they are—allow them to repair it?” And you would have gotten a lot of small contractors involved at the people’s expense, in getting the houses going, and you will have put a nice fillip into the construction sector among small contractors. Madam Speaker, now you come and you are imposing taxes in order to achieve revenue.

So these are some of the things that the Government was doing in order to achieve stability. But what I am demonstrating is that all of these things were resulting in a further contraction of the economy. Now the Government says that there is a money shortage in the country; that they do not have money. Madam Speaker, according to the report of the Auditor General on the public accounts for the financial year 2016, page 94.

In 2015, the total revenue of the country was \$60,519,665,000. Madam Speaker, it will shock the country to know that the revenue reported in the Auditor General’s report of 2016 was \$60, 313,756,000. That is only about \$206 million less than 2015. So this is why we keep asking the question. Was it really that the Government did not have money? Where did the money go and how was the money spent? Was it necessary to have all of the suppression that you say you have? All right. So you spent less in terms of what you had budgeted to spend. You spent \$56.57 billion of the \$60.31 billion, giving you a surplus of \$3.74 billion.

Now, what was the impact of that \$3.74 billion that was not spent? How many jobs were lost? How was the economy affected? Is it that as a Government you were unable to carry out your capital development projects? Is it that you did not have the capacity to do it? And that is why I talk about the culture of poverty and the culture of prosperity, which is capacity. Your people have the capacity but your people must be inspired to use that capacity for the benefit of the nation.

[*Desk thumping*] And what we have is uninspiring leadership in the country at this point in time. Because we are still caught up in the old ideas. We are too consumed in blaming the past—blame Kamla for everything—and we are not looking at our responsibility to the future as a Government. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, looking in the rear-view mirror.

So was there really a shortage of money available to the Government? Granted even that they borrowed money, was there a shortage of money? Maybe there was a cash flow problem, I do not know. Maybe there is a foreign exchange problem. But where was your cash, therefore, being utilized? I mean, cash is king, eh. Cash is king. Where was your cash being utilized? How much of it was utilized for debt servicing of principal and interest? And as we speak about that, Madam Speaker, it is important for us to understand that about \$7 billion is used in debt support, payment of interest and principal and so on. But is it possible that the Government should have thought about negotiating the rescheduling of some of these loans to give itself the cash space that it required in at least one to three years? Did they consider that? You cannot go worse than what Moody's is saying. You cannot go worse than Standard & Poors. It is not that you are unable to pay, but I think that people would have understood if you seek to reschedule to give yourself the capacity to get your economy going again, that that should have been an alternative, but I have not heard about it spoken.

And at the same time, as we speak about that, one notices in the list of public debt of Trinidad and Tobago, when you look at the details of these debts, you see that we are still paying some interest rates as high as 11 per cent, 10 per cent, and what have you, on loans that were acquired way back in the 1990s and as—

**Hon. Member:** Serious?

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** Yes—and about 2001. And in a market now where you are getting long-term loans below 5 per cent and 4 per cent, why did the Government not consider going back on the market to renegotiate these loans or to get new loans and to pay off these and cut down on the amount of money that we have to pay to service these by way of 11 and 10 per cent interest payments? Have we been analysing our loan portfolio and the cost of bearing these loans as we move forward? I think that is extremely important that we look at that, in terms of the cost of some of these loans that we continue to have on the books and which, of course, we must pay and which we must, in fact, honour.

So I wanted to raise that point. I will give you one example, Madam Speaker. FCB guaranteed rate loan 1993 to 2022, 11.50 per cent.

**Hon. Member:** What?

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** Fincor, fixed rate bond, 2000 to 2015, 10.13 per cent, and so on, and you go down. FCB guaranteed fixed rates are low. Again, First Citizens Holding, another 11.5 per cent loan. So I think that it is important for the Government to look at some of these. There is one here: FCB fixed rate, Tourism Industrial Development Company, 12.25 per cent. FCB Trust and Merchant Bank, 12.55 per cent.

Unit Trust fixed rate bond, 2001 to 2021, 10.15 per cent; Citicorp Merchant Bank fixed rate bond, 2000 to 2020, 11.75 per cent. So why can we not, in a market in which you can get money cheaper, begin a process to look at this portfolio of loans that you have and see whether it is possible to renegotiate these, or to find a way to bring these to an end through new arrangements that we should be looking at. So, Madam Speaker, I think that it is important to look at that.

**9.00 p.m.**

Then, the Government, you know, made a hue and a cry of having to pay all the backpay that it paid and so on—and I am all for people getting their backpay—but you know, we could have looked at some alternatives. If it is that we could not meet all their backpay and we needed to put some of that money into our capital projects, I am sure among those people who were due backpay—that there were probably hundreds of them, maybe even in the thousands—who are searching for homes, and maybe we could have given them an offer to use their backpay as their deposit on the HDC homes. [*Desk thumping*]

Maybe we could have done that because the investment in the house was already there, and therefore, you could have made that into the backpay. You might have even said okay, we will spruce it up by 50 per cent. If we owe you \$20,000, we will say okay, we will give you a value of \$30,000 as your deposit. It is a money already sunk into the property. It is something that could have been considered, use the backpay as a deposit on the HDC home. Therefore, what I am saying to you is that there has been a paucity of thinking in the Government. [*Desk thumping*] A paucity of thinking as to how to come out of this recession.

So the Government did not spend that \$3.74 billion in 2016, and it now appears that the same thing might be happening in 2017 because as we saw, money is being transferred from the Infrastructure Development Fund of \$1.2 billion, and again I am very worried that the sector that has to do a lot to kick start this economy, the construction sector, is going to be—[*Interruption*]

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

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I did not realize time flies that fast. Madam Speaker, you know, in 2016, the Government had an oil price as low as \$29 a barrel, but yet, they achieved \$60.3 billion which I will say is only \$200 million less than was there in the prior year. That is important for me. The Government is saying they did not have money, something is not correct. The matter is how was this money spent and where was this money spent; and why is it that the capital projects were not done? Madam Speaker, I believe that the Government has been very inefficient in terms of collecting the money that is due to the Government.

In the very report of the Auditor General, on pages 52 to 56, it is very instructive. Let me give you one example. Quarry operators are required to apply for a mining licence which is valid for 5 years from the date of issue, and the status of 103 operational quarries was submitted: expired licence, 76; operating without licence is 19; operating with licence, seven out of the 103. Madam Speaker, do you know what is even worse? From a sample of 20 operational quarries selected for audit examination, the following was noted: production data relating to the quantity of minerals, mined, processed and sold for 17 operators was not submitted; royalties were not collected from 16 operators; five operators mining on private land did not provide proof of ownership of the mineral rights in order to be exempted from paying royalties. Loss of money because of inefficient bureaucracy and management in 2016. That money, had it been collected, we could have known what would have happened and the story does not stop there.

On page 56 of the Auditor General's report, again it is very telling. The arrears reported by the Ministry—and this will be the Ministry of Finance—showed the following, arrears of revenue total \$45.3 billion. That is the amount of money people owe to the Government, \$45.3 billion of which taxes on income and profits was \$42.1 billion. Forty-two out of 60 is two-thirds of your budget. Madam Speaker, the oil companies owed \$14.4 billion, other companies owed \$20.3 billion, individuals owed \$1.6 billion, and withholding tax is \$5.8 billion. That begs the question: why is it that oil companies were allowed to owe this country \$14.3 billion and other companies \$23.3 billion?

I have heard the Hon. Minister speak about the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority and the need to have a Revenue Authority. I want to tell the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East that the change in name does not bring about efficiency. If a

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[DR. RAMBACHAN]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

change in name brought about efficiency, we would have a much more effective HDC, we would have better RHAs, we would have a better health sector and what have you. People do, and people who are capable of production, people who are productive, and again I come back to it, your greatest asset is the capacity of your people, and this Government has missed that altogether.

Madam Speaker, a change in name does not make you more efficient. I am very disturbed that we have come to the point where US \$2 billion is owed by oil companies according to the Auditor General in this report here.

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** How long outstanding?

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** I can only go by 2016 report. When we get the 2017 report we will see how this has impacted, but I want to ask the question—you cannot tell me that all these taxes have been paid. Therefore, I want to ask the question: How many of these taxes that are really collectable now? How many are collectable? Is it that these businesses have closed down and we cannot get the money?

**Mr. Imbert:** You need to understand what is happening. You do not understand it.

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** I am understanding what I read in the Consolidated Statement of Arrears of Revenue as produced by the Auditor General, and if there is some other document then I am prepared to listen you about it. So this Government could have done things differently.

Firstly, they have to get the construction sector going. Madam Speaker, you have to create a natural partnership between the State and the private sector, and for some reason that is in abeyance. People have money parked up in the banks, particular people on fixed income and they are getting less than 1 per cent return on their money; people are becoming poorer because of that especially on fixed income and inflation is eating into their money; and people need to earn on their savings.

On the other hand, Government need buildings, Government need police stations, Government need schools, Government needs low-cost housing, middle income housing and what have you. Madam Speaker, can the Government not create a means by which the people will invest in the building of a police station, in the building of schools, in the building of these houses and so on? Instead of the Government increasing its debt-to-GDP ratio, find a formula where the people will be the ones who are benefiting from the money that they placed to build these buildings, and the Government pays them by way of a rent, or a lease, or what have you. So you do not affect your debt-to-GDP ratio, you give people a

better return on their money, some kind of corporate structure and it can work.

You are going to get a generation of employment, you are going to get improved infrastructure, your ratings may not deteriorate further with Moody's, and at the end of 20 years, or 25 years, you can then decide, okay, I am going to buy back the building at maybe two-thirds of the market value, but not less than the money they put out on the building. So the people get the rate of return on their money for the years that you are paying them and at the end of it, you get back the building and the people get a return on their capital. The natural state of affairs that has to exist between the State and the private sector.

Madam Speaker, agriculture. Pepper is gold in most parts of the developed world. Pepper is gold. Why can we not have a grow pepper campaign and really put NAMDEVCO to work? If you are thinking about trying to plant 50 acres of pepper in one place you may not succeed. But try to get 50 people to plant one acre of pepper and have NAMDEVCO really buy back that pepper at a guaranteed rate, and then you buy the small machine that Caroni Green had already acquired to process the pepper further, you will get six times the price for it when you export it. But what is NAMDEVCO doing? Where is the intelligent thinking in order to get this going? Similarly, I understand we still import tilapia from China, when we should have hundreds of ponds in this country growing tilapia in the country. These are the kinds of things that can be done.

Madam Speaker, we are importing hundreds of millions of dollars in corn and soya to feed and grow chicken here. We have international cultural agreements with Brazil, with India, with other places, and there is an organization call EMBRAPA which is the world's leading research organization into soya and they have been able to grow soya beans in soils in Brazil, in which they never thought they could grow soya beans. We can use that organization to begin to grow soya here, grow corn here, but in this country do you know what happens? Everything is only on experiment, a pilot project. We have to make an instantaneous leap into the future and stop thinking in terms of pilot projects, and pilot projects, and make the instantaneous leap and become doers.

**Hon. Member:** A quantum leap.

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** Yeah, a quantum leap, but requires quantum thinking also.

Madam Speaker, cocoa—cocoa production. You go to Belgium and you see on the little packs Trinidad cocoa. Right here in Gran Couva there are couple of people making black chocolate. Those people need help. The Government should be helping them to expand into larger operations, larger chocolate factories. What the Ministry of Trade and Industry should be doing is going out and finding a

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[DR. RAMBACHAN]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

partner, or finding the kind of training to help these people to expand their businesses and we will become real exporters of value added to the cocoa, not just the cocoa, maybe we should not be exporting the cocoa beans. Just like you stop exporting teak, stop exporting cocoa and turn the cocoa into what it should be termed a value added product [*Desk thumping*] and you will see what happen.

Madam Speaker, call it forward integration, diversification, but we have to stop being spectators to our plight and we have to do. What we need in this country is Imagineering, imagination plus action, and we are short on imagination, and therefore, we are short on action. Imagineering. Madam Speaker, you know what can be done if we use our cultural agreements we signed? India, rice production in Trinidad; China, exotic vegetables; Brazil, soya and corn; Belgium, Germany, Canada, United States of America, chocolates. When you look at the number of agreements we have in terms of what our foreign Ministries have done and put that together, our problem is that we are taking too long to start the process.

Minister, you have to dismantle the bureaucracy that is holding back the process of diversification. Look at the National Flour Mills. They continue just to be importing wheat and just distilling flour, but you have people who have to dump cassava in Trinidad. What we should be doing, have small processing plants that you process cassava flour, dasheen flour, eddoes flour, and eat more healthy. That is the kind of local import substitution that we should be talking about, Madam Speaker. The technology is available to do all of this, but National Flour Mills has to engage in discontinuity from past ideas. Discontinuity. That is the problem. If they continue to stay in the past and if they do not embrace discontinuity, they are not going to invent a new future, and that is part of the problem with a lot of these organizations.

So, Madam Speaker, we do not have to be where we are. We have a lot of intellectual assets in this country, but what have we done with it? Look at the case of buffalypso. We developed the buffalypso, Dr. Bennet. We developed that. Today other countries have taken our buffalypso and what has happened to our herd? Our herd has some kind of disease and some of it had to be destroyed as far as I understand. We have intellectual assets that we are not using. Carnival is an asset we have, but how are we really utilizing Carnival. The Minister talked about tourism and what have you. Madam Speaker, we have to look at these things as products to be marketed.

Madam Speaker, as I said, we are taking too long, just too long, to get where we ought to be in this thing, so we have to do like the priest. We have to give



people \$10, we have to invest in people and tell them go and grow it. There are a lot of the things that can be done in this country if people are given the help, but if you operate from the position of a culture of scarcity, you are not going to engage the capacity of your people in the society.

Madam Speaker, with those words, I thank you very much for this opportunity of contributing. [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Tim Gopeesingh** (*Caroni East*): Madam Speaker, I rise to contribute to this Motion on the adoption of the finance committee deliberations, and basically that was the movement of approximately \$1.3 billion from the Infrastructure Development Fund to a number of Ministries which needed some funding. And so, \$1.3 billion was taken away from the Ministry of Finance and particularly in the Infrastructure Development Fund.

This debate is one of four major debates that have ensued. Since this administration took over, they had the budget presentation in 2015/2016, then the mid-term review, then the budget presentation 2016/2017, and now this mid-term review. So after about eight hours of presentation by the Hon. Minister of Finance, the country is asking after 20 months what has the Minister of Finance, and what has this Government done for the people of Trinidad and Tobago in terms of moving the economy forward.

The Minister spoke at length for about 90 minutes yesterday—it is almost as though it is so long ago—and he gave indications on a number of areas. He touched on a number of areas, some were in a little more detailed than the other, but the population now is asking—wherever you go in Trinidad you see people very despondent, some people say the country is on fumes at the moment, people are waiting to exhale. The economy is crumbling and some people have said we have fallen into a chasm. There was a report recently from the Central Bank that Trinidad and Tobago's economy has experienced in worst economic decline in 33 years since 1983. Remember those were the days when Mr. Robinson was in power at the time.

**Hon. Member:** '83?

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** No, he was not in power. Mr. Robinson started in '86 to '91, but '83. So 33 years ago—we have gone back 33 years now with the worst economic decline in 33 years. Why has that happened? Also, the Central Bank report indicated that real GDP contracted by 9 per cent.

The Minister of Finance—now the Government found itself in difficulty with the decreased price of oil and gas, and less production of gas, but the Minister would have probably invited IMF to give them some type of advice—we will remember that IMF

came down on the same flight with the Hon. Minister of Finance on one of these occasions. What has IMF told this country to do and the Government? We do not know whether they have in fact told them this, but there have been job cuts, there has a wage freeze, there has been a devaluation of the dollar from \$6.33 around there, now to about \$6.83. There has been the removal of subsidies and the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West indicated that she—the Member said that there has been no reduction in subsidies, but we maintain on this side that 13,000 people have lost their food cards; there has been the loss of the school grant, the baby grant; parents with cerebral palsy children are no longer getting the support; and they are finding it difficult to get funding from the Children's Life Fund.

But what the people have experienced is a tax, tax, tax situation, and we will remember that fuel price rose about three times, Green Fund increased by 300 per cent, the business levy by 300 per cent, the corporation tax increased from 25 to 30 per cent. So here it is we want to stimulate the business sector but we are increasing corporation tax by 5 per cent. Whereas you see, Mr. Trump in the United States want to get the business sector going, he has reduced the corporation tax to, I believe, 15 per cent. So this is something the Minister of Finance will have to look at, and the Government will have to look at. Then the personal income tax for people who have an earning capacity over a million dollars, that has be increased from 25 to 30 per cent.

There has been an increase on VAT on over 7,000 food items. Food prices have almost doubled. There is a 7 per cent online tax that has been put on, and now we have the imposition of the property tax. So the people are saying, "Why have you got to tax us, tax us, tax us, tax us, tax us, everything." They are afraid now that their

T&TEC rates will go up, and the WASA rates will go up, but for that to go up they have to go before the RIC to determine whether they will be given an increase in rate. The people are worried because if all these things are happening and then the water rates go up, the electricity rates go up—and this seems almost inevitable. Where are we going to put our people? The working poor are becoming poorer, the middle class is being wiped out.

I quoted a statement from Winston Churchill recently and it really remains with me, that taxing the people is like a man standing in a bucket trying to lift himself. What are you doing? You cannot do it. And so if you want to cause a better standard of living and a quality of life for people, you cannot keep taxing the people because who are feeling the pinch is the poor and the impoverished. I want to remind the Government that we had difficulty in the last year, 2014/2015, where we had to cut expenses by about 30 per cent in every Ministry when the

price of oil dropped, but we were able to manage and we did not impose one single tax in the five years we were in Government. [*Desk thumping*] Not one tax was added because we—sorry?

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** Property tax was added.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** No, we had no property tax. No, there was no property tax that we imposed, Faris.

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** You paid?

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** No. There was an amnesty from 2010 to 2015 on the property tax. You would know that Faris. You have properties, I have properties, we did not pay any property tax.

**Madam Speaker:** Member, stick to the contribution, please.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Sure, thanks, Madam.

**Madam Speaker:** And Member while I am on my legs, I would ask you to not to dwell too much on the taxation point. That has been—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Sure, I am moving on.

**Madam Speaker:**—dealt with tremendously during this debate. Thank you.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Thank you, Madam. I am guided. So the issue of the Government saying that—they are making excuses that they met an empty Treasury, and therefore, they had to take some strong actions and do certain things, but they carried that misinformation for a long time. The hon. Minister and the senior members of his Government would know that when they took Government in September, in October they received close to \$15 billion from the sale of TGU shares, Clico, and taxes that they received. So they kept saying that they met an empty Treasury, but yet still in one month they had \$15 billion coming to them during that time. When we were in Government and we went into office, we had a \$25 billion fiasco with Clico, a \$500 million issue with HCU, and \$5 billion being owed to contractors. So what happened then?

After five years of hard work, dedicated work with delivery, with conscientious dedication to our roles as Ministers, and from strong management of the economy by two very competent Ministers of Finance, Minister Dookeran and then Minister Howai, we were able to leave about US \$11.6 billion in foreign reserves [*Desk thumping*] and we moved the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund from 3.5 to US \$5.6 billion. So in total, we had about US \$17.2 billion as savings equivalent to over TT \$110 billion, and the rating agencies, Moody's and Standard

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[DR. GOPEESINGH]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

& Poor's, have always spoken about that is one of the main areas that they have not continued to downgrade us even further because of our savings in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund and the foreign reserves.

What has happened to the debt to GDP? The debt to GDP in 2010, it was about 31/32 per cent. When we demitted office it was 43 per cent. So a 12 per cent increase within five years. In 20 months the debt to GDP has moved from 43 per cent to 60 per cent, 17 per cent increase in 20 months as opposed to a 12 per cent increase during our time in five years. So that speaks volumes for management of the economy. And so, we are not seeing economic activity.

Recently, on one of the newspapers they mentioned that the total debt in Trinidad and Tobago is \$123 billion. That surpasses our GDP, Madam Speaker, and I have some macro figures here published by the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. So this is Government's publication, Information Memorandum on the FCB bond issue, dated Saturday 4 February, 2017. And the macro picture is as follows:

"In Trinidad and Tobago, provisional data show that the domestic economy remained weak."

This is the Government putting out this information.

"Available labour market data from the... (CSO) indicate that rate of the unemployed increased to 44 per cent in the second quarter of 2016 from 3.8 in the previous quarter and 3.2 per cent in the corresponding quarter of 2015."

We believe now that the unemployment is about 4.6 per cent, and when we demitted office, it was 3.2 per cent.

"The widening of the VAT base effect February 2016 helped push food inflation to 9.4 per cent in February 2016..."

This is a release from the Ministry of Finance and the Government on the economic review. It goes on to say that:

"Private sector credit weakened gradually over the first eleven months now have 2016."

**9.30 p.m.**

"Real estate lending experienced some slowdown..."

And:

"Preliminary data for the Central Government accounts revealed an overall

deficit of 5.0 per cent of GDP...”—\$7—“billion) in fiscal year 2015/16 (October 2015 - September 2016), in contrast to a deficit of 1.8 per cent of GDP (\$2.7 billion) in the previous fiscal year.”

I just have a few statements to make on this again.

“Provisional estimates indicate that public debt (which includes Central Government debt and contingent liabilities) stood at...”—\$87.44 billion—“at the end of December 2016 compared to...”—\$76 billion—“at the end of December 2015.”

So \$10 billion increase in debt in just one year and they spoke about the external debt and so on. So those were quotations from the Government information which they released on the bond issue.

And then the Central Bank also issued some information on a macroeconomic perspective. They said:

Much remains to be done as the International Monetary Fund estimates that they need to adjust GDP by 8.5 per cent over several years to ensure that debt levels remain manageable.

And they quoted some economic indicators:

GDP per capita in US dollars, in 2015, it was US \$18.138 and in 2016, it went down to \$16.722 and in 2017, it is at \$17.247, whereas in 2014, it was \$20.184.

The GDP per capita, as I indicated, the GDP has been worsening. And they spoke about the fiscal balance worsening, the foreign direct investment falling, foreign reserve falling from a 12-month import cover to less than 10-month import cover.

So, what has been happening, Madam Speaker? There have been a lot of editorials across the country from the different newspapers. One of it I got here, quite in 2016 which is still reflected today, speaks about stimulating the Trinidad and Tobago economy. Tuesday, March 08, 2016, an editorial at the *Trinidad Guardian*:

“One way to restimulate the economy would be for the government to spread over time, payments on the \$5 billion that is owed. It could generate new activity in a wide range of areas - construction, financial services, and industry and commerce.”

So the newspaper here, editorial, speaking about stimulating the economy in terms of generating new activity in construction, financial services, industry and

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[DR. GOPEESINGH]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

commerce and here it is we are doing just the opposite—taking money from the IDF programme to put into recurrent expenditure and a total cessation of construction, the economy is on a standstill.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Caroni East, I will ask you to go on to the next point. Many speakers before you have made the point about stimulating the economy and dealing with those precise matters of which you speak. Just move on.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Right. I am guided, Madam Speaker. I want to come to the point of the estimates of the Development Programme for the financial year 2017, out of which the Minister was able to provide from the Ministry of Finance \$1.4 billion approximately and to indicate that this is recurring theme of the Government, taking money from the Infrastructure Development Fund to put into recurrent expenditure and these are the figures that are summarized in their budget document. The budget document is Estimates of Development Programme Expenditure 2017 and I quote the summary page on it that the actual figure for the Infrastructure Development Fund, in 2015, was \$3.584 billion; in 2016, the estimate was \$3.532 billion but the Revised Estimate was \$1.546 billion. So the Revised Estimate showed that almost \$2 billion from the Infrastructure Development Fund was not spent. We ask why? You had allocated that and you did not spend it, the money was there to be used.

And so therefore, no new projects were basically started. There were a number of projects that could have been started and obviously it was not done. And the savings from that, \$2 billion less, is that part of the statement that you said that you have saved \$10 billion? It is not that you saved \$10 billion, you were not able to spend the money [*Desk thumping*] from the Infrastructure Development Fund. You did not have the competence and the capability and the capacity to spend that money and, therefore, that remained in abeyance. So you take that now and you say that you have saved that amount of money.

And what is happening in 2017, as we had discussed in the committee work, while we were in the Finance Committee. The amount that was allocated in 2017 for the IDF was \$2.629 billion but you took out \$1.3 billion for it. So you end up with \$1.3 billion. So, October, November, December, January, February, March, April—seven months passed. You had \$2.62 billion. It seems as though you could not spend anything in that or you did not spend anything on that, and you decided now you will take out \$1.3 billion. So it means that you are really not serious about kick-starting the economy or having any construction whatsoever. That

money is used for projects in a number of areas.

I just want to refer to the education sector. Education was given in 2015, 257—let me make sure what has been brought forward here. Right. And I am quoting from the details of Development Programme expenditure, 2017: social infrastructure, 2015, actual, was at \$701 million; estimate in 2016 was \$545 million. So already, it was less in 2016. Well, we could understand because you do not have as much money so you put a “lil” less, from 701 to 545, and then the Revised Estimates is \$148 million. So in 2016, when you had \$545 million to spend on Infrastructure Development Fund in education, you spent 148, yes, almost \$400 million less. You had \$400 million more to be spent, you did not spend it.

And why you did not spend it? You have to ask yourself this. You had a number of projects in schools to be done. We showed you that we constructed 104 new schools during our time and you cannot doubt it. I gave—I put it out there in the public. It was advertised. We have the listing of the schools and I have it again and I will pass it on to the hon. Minister who—and the two Ministers of Education who said that we do not have it. I have the list of schools: 67 Early Childhood Care and Education Centres and I have the list from Aranguez straight down to Warrenville TIA. Sixty-six here. Thirty-one primary schools:

Rousillac, Riversdale, Tunapuna GPS, Balmain, Penal Rock Road, Mount Pleasant, Palo Seco, Lengua, Arima, Tulsa Trace, Barrackpore, St. Barbara’s, Eccles Village, Monkey Town, Febeau, Enterprise, Union Presbyterian, Manzanilla, Nariva, Lower Cumuto, Kanhai Presbyterian, Charlieville, Egypt Village, Rose Hill, Rio Claro, Paramin for the Member for Diego Martin North/East, Point Cumana for the Member for Diego Martin West, Rose Hill for the Member for Port of Spain South, New Grant, Cap-de-Ville, Penal, Quinam, Munroe Road, Durham Village.

And the secondary schools:

Marabella South, Aranguez North, Couva West Secondary, Princes Town East, Five Rivers Secondary, St. Augustine Secondary and additional blocks were built in Diego Martin North, Iere High School in Princes Town.

And I also have the list of the 78 schools that we left under varying stages of construction and the list is here. I will pass it on to the hon. Minister, through you. And we have 65—well, some were going through the IDB tenders but we stopped at 42, and there were another 23 that were going through the IDB second phase. So those were early childhood education. Some of these were 90 and 95 per cent complete and then we had primary schools. Twenty-three primary schools at

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[DR. GOPEESINGH]

Thursday, May 11, 2017

varying stages of construction:

Arima Hindu in the Minister's constituency, Belmont RC, Chatham, Curepe Presbyterian, Cypress, Egypt, Endeavour, Fanny Village, Flanagan, Freeport, Harmony Hall, La Fillette, Lower Morvant, Macaulay, Marabella, Piparo, Preysal, Ramai Trace—Dr. Moonilal, Member for Oropouche East—Reform Hindu, Rousillac, San Juan Boys' and Girls', Santa Flora, Siparia Union.

All these schools were under various stages of construction. And secondary schools, we have Carapichaima West, St. Joseph—[*Interruption*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member, could you kindly make the link of all these schools that you are calling out to what the presentation is please?

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** So I will give it through the Chair, Madam Speaker, but I just want to make the statement of Shiva Boys', Parvati Girls' and Siparia East. So I can give this across to both Ministers of Education for them—the proof of the pudding is in the eating and thank you for allowing me to read the names of the schools.

So let me come back to the point, Madam Speaker. The point is that they have five, four—almost \$400 million that they could have used to construct or continue construction of the schools: the ECCE centres, the primary schools and the secondary schools.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Speaker, may I invite you to look at Standing Order 55(1)(b) please?

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Caroni East, in terms of, as I said, a lot of these things were presented before by other speakers. I am going to give you a little leeway to tie in what you are saying to the Standing Finance Committee Report and the Bill that is before us.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Yes, Madam Speaker. I am tying it into the fact that the Infrastructure Development Fund which \$1.3 billion has been taken, [*Desk thumping*] it could have been used for the construction of these schools and it is directly relevant. Why has the Minister—why have we got to subject ourselves to removal of \$1.3 billion from the Infrastructure Development Fund, and the Minister of Education spoke about that there are a number of schools that they are wanting to do so I have to respond to the Minister in stating that, in stating the schools that ought to have been constructed.

So, on the details of Development Programme expenditure 2017, there are a number of primary schools listed which we left at various stages of construction,



and secondary schools, and there was funding for ECCE centres and not one thing was done for these schools over 20 months. This is unpardonable and unacceptable [*Desk thumping*] by a government who says that they are really interested in education. How could you leave 78 schools under construction with grass growing tall around them, bushes are coming, rats and vermin and the schools now are being—things are being stolen from inside them and being vandalized? So, Madam Speaker, this is why. This is what we have to say. You are moving money, \$1.3 billion to give to recurrent fund when money was allocated for continued construction of schools and you had no desire to continue the construction of schools.

In addition to that, there were hundreds of contractors who were owed close to about \$600 million. You paid a few, you decided you are not paying a few. What is the reason? You say you have audit and audit and verification. After 20 months, you are still having verification and “yuh pay Ernst & Young \$20 billion already”, one billion per month [*Crosstalk*] and “yuh paying PriceWaterhouse” now as well. What is it? Some people say, is it spite? Is it vindictiveness that you are not continuing the school at Shiva and Parvati and Siparia? When you look at the estimates of Development Programme, page 289, you see the Revised Estimate for 2017, nothing has been allocated for Shiva Boys’, Parvati Girls’ and Siparia East Secondary. Why is that? This is it here. So this is the money taken away. The \$1.3 billion from the Infrastructure Development Fund to carry where? They “doh” have the capacity, the capability and the competence to do anything as far as that is concerned.

So people are extremely unhappy in this country. They are sad. They are angry. They feel disappointed. They feel that they have been lied to. They feel that they have been betrayed.

**Madam Speaker:** Member, we said word “lied” is not parliamentary.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** All right. They feel that the untruth has been spoken to them. [*Interruption*] Yes, they feel deceived. They do not have confidence in this Government at this time. The people do not have confidence that they put out a bond, FCB bond and it is only 66 per cent as subscribed. If people have confidence, they will eat up that bond as they did in the past. There were bonds issued in the past that had over 200, 300 per cent oversubscription, but the “red and ready Government” and “we time now Government” shows gross incompetence and inability to manage the affairs of this country. [*Desk thumping*]

People are saying that their incompetence is so pervasive in this Government

and they say well, there is—people are saying it, eh. There is some degree of arrogance in this Government as well and there are two senior Members of Government with over 26 years of experience and they feel that they are incapable of carrying this Government forward and carrying the work of the people and making this economy something that we can be comfortable with.

Madam Speaker, what has happened to this national economic advisory council? Over 20 months, you have not heard anything about this national economic advisory council. What have they told this Government?

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member for Caroni East, your 30 minutes have expired. You are entitled to 15 more minutes. If you wish, you can avail yourself of it.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Where is the revenue authority? For the 20 months, the hon. Minister of Finance has been talking about this revenue authority. The IMF told them, strengthen your ability to tighten the areas where you can get all your taxes but only old talk, glib talk: revenue authority, we will bring it in—and they have been talking about that since they were in Government. Up to 2010, they were talking about that, about revenue authority and they were challenged when they said that 2,000—when we indicated that almost 2,000 jobs would be lost when you have this revenue authority and they are nowhere close to it. So you want to tax the people, tax the people, rather than strengthening your ability to collect your taxes.

What has happened to your National Tripartite Advisory Council? What has happened to your diversification programmes? Nothing. Madam Speaker, people are saying we are heading down the pathway as Venezuela where you cannot even get toilet paper in Venezuela as evidenced in the Treasury building recently when you could not get toilet paper in the Treasury. And then people are saying now that there is widespread corruption emanating from the other side, from issues like the acquisition of the \$255 million Massy thing which I am passing on, the Brian Lara Stadium, Ministers paying cheques, Ministers changing residence close to their contractors in Moka in Maraval. These are things that are happening before the eyes of our people.

So the editorials are out putting things:

“Adjustment, while necessary, must be equitable.

If low-income, working people are not convinced that everybody in the society is feeling the pinch of adjustment, there is likely to be an explosion of

anger that may have political and social consequences.”

This is the editorial. This is an editorial of a year ago. You could imagine how it has worsened. On Sunday, March 20, 2016.

So, Madam Speaker, what about the statistical institute? The Minister of Finance came into this Parliament and berated the Central Statistical Office [*Desk thumping*] and he said the CSO is the worse and we cannot rely on their figures. Today, he is making a volte-face and coming back and saying that the only area that you can get reliable information is the CSO. What has happened? The CSO has worked a miracle? Have they changed around? Because they are giving you the figures that you want to hear, not the real figures. So where is your statistical institute? They are quoting wrong figures for unemployment and the Government is refusing to establish this statistical institute so it can continue to hide behind that outdated data on unemployment, the cost of living and other primary indices.

Madam Speaker, they promised the nation on continued transfers and subsidies to non-performing state enterprises. What are they doing about the state enterprises that are non-performing? But they instead want to close down Caroni Green. They close down CISL and Caroni Green workers come under my constituency in Mon Jaloux and 70-something workers have gone. What has happened to the IPO of First Citizens? Nothing has happened. What has happened to any incentives for business investment, except for a tax break for millionaire yachties? Millionaire yachties got their tax break but nobody else got their tax break. So, what has happened to the Sandals project? We are hearing nothing about the sandals project now. There is no update on the Sandals at No Man’s Land, seemingly confirming widespread reports that the investor is no longer interested in the project. We want to hear what the Minister of Finance has to say when he is winding up this.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Speaker, may I invite you to consider Standing Order 55(1)(b), please?

**Madam Speaker:** Member, in terms of Sandals that you have just mentioned and some of the matters you have just raised, as I reminded you, they have been dealt with. I am not going to warn you, I am going to ask you to go on to another point in the remaining time that you have.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Yes, I am going on to another point here now, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Please. Another fresh point.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Yes, fresh point. Certainly. It is a new point that I do not think

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[DR. GOPEESINGH]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

anybody discussed for the entire evening. I want to speak about the foreign exchange regime. Nobody spoke about that. [*Crosstalk*] Nobody. One of the newspaper articles spoke about Sunday, March 26, 2017:

“Analyse, consult before changing forex regime”

It went on to say:

“Mr. Imbert’s proposal to provide local manufacturers with preferential access to foreign exchange—placing them at the front of the queue ahead of the retail/distribution sector and car dealerships—is worthy of national consideration...”

And it goes on. The:

“...Central Bank presentation in December 2015, the manufacturing sector was identified as the country’s second largest consumer of foreign exchange, using close to US \$2 billion between January 2013 and November 2015.”

That is US \$2 billion. That is about TT \$13 billion. In three years, the manufacturing sector, so they used about \$4 billion per year.

“...the retail and distribution sector...‘the most voracious consumer of foreign exchange,’ swallowing almost US \$4.5 billion or nearly one-third of the total foreign exchange sold over the period of close to three years.”

So, US \$1.5 billion per year in the retail and distribution sector.

“...payments, which were the third largest user of foreign exchange...”

Credit card payments.

“...credit card payments...the third largest user...consumed about US \$1.8 billion; car dealerships, the fourth...used up \$1.3 billion...”

That is in three years.

“and the telecommunications sector, the fifth largest, demanded US \$900 million.”

And then from the largest—[*Interruption*] I was just reminded that Mr. Terrence Farrell, head of the National Economic Advisory Council, indicated by the work that, and the policies that the Minister of Finance is imposing now on the forex programme, the forex programme is going to be causing a lot of corruption. And, in fact, this editorial says it here:

“...the minister should be aware that providing privileged access of foreign exchange to manufacturers harkens back to the EC-O system...”

Madam Speaker, you are quite young. You might not remember the EC-O—  
[*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member, please.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** I will leave you out of it, sorry. You know, we go back a long way, “doh worry”. [*Laughter and crosstalk*] I have a lot of respect for you, Madam Speaker, a lot of respect. It harkens back to the EC-O system and in 1980s which required companies and people to apply for a licence to get foreign exchange. Two people were charged at that time because they were dealing with licence. So the editorial goes on to say:

“Unless such a system is tightly managed...”

Minister of Finance, this is for you and for your Government.

“Unless such a system is tightly managed and properly supervised, neither of which has ever been a T&T strong point, it is fraught with the likelihood that bribery and corruption would prejudice the purpose of the preference.”

Exactly what Mr. Farrell is saying there.

Madam Speaker, I had some issues on the HSF but you will tell me—you will rule me offside so “ah doh want tuh get de red flag from you” so I move on from there. But permit me, in the few minutes, I have left—17 and 37 and 9—I have about eight more minutes. Seven or eight more minutes. I am a good mathematician eh. [*Laughter*] Pure and Applied Maths in A levels in one year and so on.

**Dr. Moonilal:** “How much subjects? How much O levels?”

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** I have five A’s, and distinction in A level. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Standing Order 48(1).

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** I will speak directly to you, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** No, but I remind you about 48(1), relevance.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Madam Speaker, I had to respond to the Minister of Education in the few minutes in some of the statements he made.

**Miss Mc Donald:** You are the only parliamentarian to write the Queen.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Port of Spain South, you know I love you very dearly.  
[*Laughter*]

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[DR. GOPEESINGH]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

**Madam Speaker:** Please direct your contribution to the Chair, please.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** I apologize. Yes, Hon. Minister, it is not because I want to come and attack the Minister of Education every day. It is not my nature. It is not my nature. I mean, I have 31,000 private patients in Trinidad. I have seen 120,000 women around the world; 17 hospitals I worked in; trained in four universities, so it is not my nature. So I love my colleague, the Minister of Education. I told him that if there is any help that I can give him, I am very willing to give.

**Mr. Garcia:** No, thank you. [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

**Madam Speaker:** Order, order.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** We both sat on the education advisory committee in 1997 together when he was President of TTUTA so we go a long way back, 20 years. But when you see before your eyes that you worked hard and you worked diligently for five years to carry the education sector where it was, as a world leader in education. The first country in the world to achieve universal early childhood education where the United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon praised us for that. When we had the best academic performance in 2014 and we bettered it in 2015. But when you see that the education sector is going down and it is swiftly reversing, you have to take stock of it. So my issue is that I do not feel that the hon. Minister of Education has the competence and the capacity to carry this education sector forward, [*Desk thumping*] and this is why I have been calling for the Prime Minister to remove him from his position. And why is it—[*Crosstalk*] No, no, I do not need this. I do not need politics. I do not need to be here.

**Madam Speaker:** Member, please.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Yes.

**Madam Speaker:** Could you please discontinue the crosstalk. Member for Caroni East, could you direct your contribution to the Chair and you may proceed. But also, I would like you to address the matter that is before us. I may understand a bit of the historical context but I think you need to come to present day. Thank you.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Right. But I am just quickly responding to some of the issues. The issues are: no text books. They tried to top it up and they have not paid the publishers. They are owing all the publishers. They cut the School Feeding Programme. They removed the homework centres. They destroyed the primary school curriculum. Now they say they are bringing back laptops but if they have two more months to put the laptops in the school, 15 laptops per school, they cannot do it. We acknowledge the history change in the curriculum.

The Students Support Service has been decimated. Where are all the school social workers? They are being owed; month-to-month contract. ICT technicians, month-to-month contract. They scrapped the private sector partnership in the ECCE. People have been going from since 2016. The academic performance in language arts and mathematics in both the SEA and CSEC have worsened. The amount of students getting less than 30 per cent in the SEA has increased.

**10.00 p.m.**

So, Madam Speaker, it is important for us to have an appreciation of what is happening. There is swift regression on the education system where all the gains that we have made in the education sector are being swiftly reversed. They stopped the school construction programme. So from a world leader in education, where are we now? Fighting to stop all the school violence, and so on.

And I empathize with him. I empathize as a Minister of Education, there is school violence, which we have to deal with. But we had over 23 programmes and policies put into place which were working and the Minister of Education and his team seem to be not deciding to carry out any of these programmes. So you see, what you call "prestige schools" having the difficulty with fights, and so on. So, hon. Minister, I am prepared to help. We are prepared to help. And we want to see the education sector move forward.

As my colleague, the Member for San Juan/Barataria indicated, when he was speaking about the work of the Minister of Health, which we share, administration upon administration, what is working well we should continue with them and not to stop them because you have your own interest, and so on. So, this should be the nature of the game here.

And, Madam Speaker, I want to close by saying that when the Minister of Finance speaks about shaping a brighter future, where is the brighter future for the people? It is absent. People are dismayed. It is worsening. It is painful and miserable. Where is the blueprint for transformation and growth? What growth has taken place? What transformation has taken place? This is a reality. No transportation, no growth, but we have a red print for increased criminal activity, not a blueprint. Tears of pain, stagnation and regression and reversal of all gains that we have made under the People's Partnership Government. Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Rushton Paray** (*Mayaro*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to join in this debate at this late hour. I promise not to be very long. I will not repeat anything that has been said before. I would try my very best.

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[MR. PARAY]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

Madam Speaker, this Bill is about moving moneys. It is not about adding more moneys to various departments. [*Continuous interruption and crosstalk*]

**Madam Speaker:** I would like to hear the Member for Mayaro. It is late, so the Members who may be a bit unsettled can take a little walk and return. Member for Mayaro.

**Mr. R. Paray:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Yes, Madam Speaker, as I was saying, you know, this Bill is really about moving moneys around. It is not about adding more moneys to ministries. And, why do we do this? We do this, as in any other business operations, as the year proceeds and the environment changes, we have to look and see where we can get the best value for money. And I am sure this is the intention of the hon. Finance Minister; to make sure we get the best value for money as we close the year off.

In the corporate business world also, Madam Speaker, the bottom line of these businesses is really to make a profit at the end of the day, which is, in terms of, they want to see dollars and cents in the bank account. But, in Government business, Madam Speaker, the primary objective really is the welfare of its people. And the money has to be spent in areas where the best welfare will be achieved at the end of the day. We look at education. We look at health. We look at national security, social services, local government, community development also, but of paramount importance to me, Madam Speaker, the Government really ought to be looking more at food and food security in this country today, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I listened attentively the hon. Minister of Finance when he gave his presentation yesterday, and it was absolutely surprising in the 90-odd minutes that he spoke, there was no mention of agriculture in that conversation, no mention of food and food security and the importance of it, you know. There was a variation to pay a bill, but other than that, in the mid-year review I really feel it should give a Minister of Finance an opportunity to lay a direction, talk about a course change, look at the environment and say: well, we are moving moneys into certain areas to get effective in certain areas.

But, Madam Speaker, in the 2017 budget speech, agriculture got about 10 or 12 lines in that budget document, and unless I am subject to correction, Madam Speaker, in reviewing the Vision 2030 document also, the areas of food and food security is very, very, vague in the writing, and I am sure it is a draft, as the Minister would have told us earlier on and I am hoping that in the conversation, as it goes to the JSC, we have the opportunity to talk more in some of those areas and build on the area of food and food security.



Madam Speaker, one of the words that is normally championed in this Parliament by the Government is an all of Government approach when finding solutions, [*Interruption*] whole of government approach, sorry. And I get the feeling that agriculture is not part of the Government. It is not part of the conversation, because every time you look at the budget statement, you look at the delivery yesterday, the Vision 2030 statement, if the Government's approach is the whole of Government, agriculture is sorely missing.

Madam Speaker, why is agriculture and food security so important? I know the Minister of Planning and Development would have spent a lot of quality time, good time, in reviewing and refreshing the 2020 document to get it to 2030. But if you look at the sustainable development goals, Madam Speaker, there are so many of these goals that speak directly to agriculture and food security. I will not be long but I just want to highlight them quickly.

Goal 1. No poverty.

Goal 2. Zero hunger.

Goal 3. Good health and well-being.

Goal 6. Clean water and sanitation.

Goal 8. Decent work and economic growth.

Goal 12 Responsible consumption and production.

Goal 14. Life below water.

Goal 17. Partnerships for these goals.

But, Madam Speaker, if 50 per cent of the SDGs speak to agricultural policy and framework but it is given eight lines in a budget statement, less than 2 per cent of national budget, in my respectful view, it is treated with scant courtesy in a policy future document, then what are we saying to our citizens? The 2030 document talks about ethics and morals and green cities and good transportation and a new way of life, higher education, you know, creating a better environment, living space for our citizens. But we cannot feed them. In 2030, if we do not redirect our food and food security policies, what good would all of that do to a society that cannot feed itself? So, Madam Speaker, it is, to me, a clear case of the cart wanting to lead the horse, when looking at the issue of food and food security for this administration.

So after 20 months of governance, Madam Speaker, I still do not believe that

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[MR. PARAY]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

the Government understands the monumental shift that is required, in terms of the restructuring of the economy, the relevance and the importance of agriculture and the policy changes that have to be made to get us on the right track to get to 2030.

So, Madam Speaker, I will try to make the assumption that, out of the \$1.3 billion that is being varied, I want to say that some variation of moneys could have been gone into areas under the agricultural sector that I think can bring more value, better value, at the end of the day, for the citizens of this country. So, in doing that, I will take a very brief outlook of how we got here, some areas on what we ought to be doing and perhaps some ideas that I would like to share, as we develop the whole agricultural sector in Trinidad and Tobago.

So, one would ask, Madam Speaker, what has the administration done? What has this administration done in the 20 months? How have they bettered the agricultural sector? And to get the answer, all you have to do is to ask, for instance, the Agricultural Society of Trinidad and Tobago. You have to ask the sheep and goat farmers. You have to ask the Cocoa Farmers Association. You have to ask the Rice Farmers Association. You have to ask the Sea Food Industry Company of Trinidad and Tobago. You have to ask Caroni Green. You have to ask the various fishing associations. At least today we now have to ask the praedial larceny police unit. All of these organizations, Madam Speaker, have their own telling tale to talk about, of how things have not worked over the last 20 months.

When you have a government that comes in and says: "Look, we are the better option. We are the better choice. Give us a chance. We will redirect. We will re-engineer." But after 20 months nothing happens, it is really a misplace of trust, I believe, on the people who would have elected you. Madam Speaker, why does that happen? My respectful view is the position that this Government has taken in the last 20 months. It is what you call governing by blaming. So, you blame the Partnership and you blame Kamla Persad-Bissessar for every single thing under the sun.

**Mr. Hinds:** And rightly so.

**Mr. R. Paray:** That is all right, but you see it is easy to blame. It is easy to blame somebody. It is very easy to blame, but effective and progressive leadership is hard. That is hard. It is easy to blame. [*Desk thumping*]

You know, Madam Speaker, I wonder if the people in my constituency, more so the people of Biche, Union and Bristol Village, would blame the Member for Chaguanas West for the water that was delivered to their homes after 100 years. And

for all those years, Madam Speaker, you travel through the country side and you see little children, some in pampers, some in jockey shorts and “dey pushing barrows, dey pushing little buckets; dey with corn oil, one gallon corn oil canisters; containers toting water from standpipe, from rivers and so on”. Would those people blame the Member for Chaguanas West for that?

I wonder if the thousands of students who would have benefited from the tertiary programmes at UTT, that the Member for Chaguanas East, by breaking down those barriers and getting more people into the education system. I wonder if they would blame the Member for Chaguanas East for that.

Madam Speaker, a systems engineering by profession, I have been called to replace many contractors from time to time for doing poor and shoddy work. And when my employers asked, you know: “Mr. Parry, why are we having certain delays on the project?” I cannot tell them the last contractor did a bad job because they hired me. I am saying the issue of blame cannot work, especially in the critical period that we are in, and the Government needs to be creative. They need to take the issue of leadership by the rein, come with creative ideas and steer this economy forward.

Madam Speaker, clearly the rubric of development by high-rise buildings and infrastructure, as opposed to the welfare and care of our citizens, is taking us centre stage again and that has me a bit concerned.

Madam Speaker, if we expect the country to have economic transformation to weather the storms ahead, we will require strong and robust leadership, and clearly the leadership is lacking. It is lacking in policy direction. I have the full belief that many of those honourable gentlemen on that side and ladies are good quality intelligent people but the policies that they putting into place, they are not working. Madam Speaker, saying it inside here and you are seeing it on the outside. You have people. You have businesses. You have associations. They are telling you that the policies are not working. So when we say it inside here, well then there is the partisan politics that goes with it. Well, you have to say that. But if you go outside on the ground and you listen to these Chambers and the organizations that are working day after day and people, they tell the story and it is not different from what we come here and we say.

Madam Speaker, I am almost tempted to read a scorecard of the non-achievements of the administration so far. But in preparing for this conversation here this evening, I went through my last two contributions, in terms of the last mid-year review and the last budget, and the surprising thing is that nothing has changed. The issues that I spoke about in the last two deliveries on that. Nothing has changed. Nothing has been done in the sector. Nothing has been

achieved in the sector that I could come here and talk something different tonight and that is scary, Madam Speaker.

You know, it is like the issue of firearm permits. You know, there is a call in public space that the Commissioner of Police should be granting more firearms and so on, and they say: "Well, that is not an issue. There is a firearms Appeals Tribunal." But the problem there is that if the commissioner is not denying any permits, well then there is nothing to appeal. So it comes back to this. If the Ministry and the directive, the policy is not achieving anything, well then there is nothing to really complain about.

Madam Speaker, I want to direct a bit of focus on the issues of the rice farmers in my constituency, because if we are appropriating moneys within Ministries, I think the rice farmers really deserve some money. Because up to today, there is an outstanding amount of payment to our rice farmers. They come from Biche. They come from Navet. They come from Cumuto/Manzanilla, and they come to our office and they say: "MP, can you talk to the line Minister to find out what is happening with our moneys?" And, you know, they are not getting the moneys but they are expected to get their production out there, or they are expected to churn the work and get products out there to the market.

Madam Speaker, on March 12, 2017, the *Trinidad Guardian* reported that 200 tons of rice valued at \$400,000 was left to rot at the National Flours Mills at Carlsen Field. The Minister of Trade and Industry came and the Hon. Minister made a pretty water-down reason, in terms of tempering the angry folks who were saying: "Well why do we have 200 tonnes of rice rotting?" Madam Speaker, whatever the reason for it, that has to be unacceptable in this country by any standard. And the reason why it has to be unacceptable is because we import over 35,000 tonnes of rice annually. And you know what? We can barely produce three to five to eight, probably 10,000 tonnes in a good year.

So, the question really is: Why are we allowing these systems to breakdown? Why are we allowing the systems to reach to the point where we have to have our goods rotting on the ground? Where are the managers of these organizations? Where are the managers of these facilities? Who are we holding accountable for these things? That is a real concern to me. Who is going to pay for these types of negligence?

Madam Speaker, we have not considered, in this country, facilitating more niche market production of rice using organic methods. Now, there is an international organization called the Rice Research Institute, that is literally giving away the technology, the training and the science to small and developing countries like the Caribbean. And right now in Europe and in South America, this research organization is working with Government to help build the rice

production, using organic methods.

Madam Speaker, in agricultural societies like in Nigeria, in my research, the Government is taking a firm hand in putting private/public sector partnership with farmers and they are linking the knowledge and the technology from in the universities and the kicker here is that they are really embracing young farmers. They are encouraging youth into farming. So with that tripartite type of arrangement, these agricultural societies are making strides because they know that the 800 million people that are below the poverty line in the world today, that is earmarked to grow well into 2030, if we do not get these sustainable development goals going and start putting a break on it. So, Madam Speaker, the bottom line for that is, perhaps, we could have used a bit of variation to work with our rice farmers, get them some payments and start looking at some technology to support small rice farmers. Let us ramp up that 10,000 into 15,000 or 20,000 tonnes of rice a year.

Madam Speaker, I want to touch a bit on two state enterprises that have been literally—one has been shut down and I think one is on its way out sometime in July. And, again, if we were to vary appropriation into those state enterprises, we could keep them alive, keep them going and these two state enterprises really have merit. They speak directly to the sustainable development goals that we have to look at. And I really feel I need to speak about them to justify why we should have been spending money in those areas.

Madam Speaker, the closure of Caroni Green Limited put about 77 people out of jobs. And, in my respectful view, Madam Speaker, these are not ordinary people. God has blessed their hands with the ability to offer care and nurturing to our lands. There is an old saying: He who takes care of the land, the land will take care of them. But, Madam Speaker, this Government found US \$5 million to help bail out a toilet paper factory because they were saving jobs. That was a very noble thing to do. I want people to work. In tight economic conditions we must put people to work. We must keep them working. But, when you put that against what happened in Caroni Green, we have 77 jobs to save. These are 77 people with the "Madius" touch who are growing and nurturing food and—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** “Madius”? Midas.

**Mr. R. Paray:** —Midas, thank you—Midas touch and they are growing food. Why was that not given some consideration, in terms of importance?

But, Madam Speaker, Caroni Green Limited stood the scrutiny of a joint select committee meeting of this Parliament. And unless I am mistaken, their responses were

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[MR. PARAY]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

very fair. I think the responses were very real, and I thought that, you know, they were on the right track in helping the country, in terms of its food and food production. But the reality of the matter, Madam Speaker, is that CGL was funded by a grant from the European Union and that grant was utilized to train persons to get those Caroni (1975) lands into productive activity. But, Madam Speaker, I do not know what is the joy, if there is a joy, in closing, you know, these agencies that are producing, especially in food. I mean, I cannot rationalize one good reason you would shut a farm down that is producing.

Madam Speaker, besides the creative explanation or the accounting that was given to justify the closing of the doors of Caroni Green Limited, which, by the way, is still the best model for food production, import substitution and foreign exchange earnings, I would like to share what were some of the reasons given. There was a claim that Caroni Green Limited spent \$7 million to earn \$700,000. There was a claim that it was an abuse of taxpayers' money. There was a conversation that there, perhaps, were some fraud and mismanagement, and there was a bold claim that nobody in CGL knows anything about agriculture.

They also claimed that Caroni Green Limited was competing with private farmers. But the facts can be found very, very easily here, Madam Speaker, and I want to read from the financial performance from the audited reports done by Ramdass and Company. And I just want to read a couple of the actual financial statistics, Ma'am, very quickly.

The revenue in 2014, was \$1,859,000; in 2015, it jumped to \$7,831,000; in 2016, it jumped to \$8,689,000. But, Madam Speaker, the cost/the surpluses that were achieved went from \$558,000 in 2014 to \$3,825,000 in 2016. Why did the claim of spending \$7 million to make \$700,000 make such a big impact? Madam Speaker, when you are investing in land as a farmer to make produce, you have to invest in infrastructure, water, pumps, ponds, tractors. This initial investment has to be spread across 10/12 years. So there is no way that one or two crops can give you a return on that. So, clearly, you know, the conversation of it being a bad deal was really not a persuasive answer when looking at the data.

Madam Speaker, I want to just talk about some of the other claims. Well, they say that it was taxpayers' money. Well, as I now said, it was part of a European grant. There was \$21 million that was taken out of that grant and put specifically in Caroni Green Limited to get that project going.

As I am on the topic of the European grant, Madam Speaker, up to today our cane farmers are still being owed portions of that grant. Piece of that grant was paid under the last administration.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Would the Member give way, please?

**Mr. R. Paray:** Sure.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Speaker, contrary to what the Member is saying, Madam Speaker, the Caroni workers, the money is available. The Cabinet has indicated that the money is available. Some of the Caroni workers have come and collected what is owed to them and we are just awaiting the others to come and collect.

**Mr. R. Paray:** Thank you for that. I would remain, I would be guided by that explanation, but that is not what have been said to me, Madam Speaker, and I am speaking on behalf of the farmers that I have spoken to.

Madam Speaker, [*Interruption*] I will do so. Madam Speaker, the promise; there was a promise that was made to these cane farmers, pre-2015, by the then Opposition Leader that he would pay that money. And there are farmers today that are literally begging for their money and it is not being provided. But this is what they are telling me.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Tell them to come to me.

**Mr. R. Paray:** I will do so. There is a claim, Madam Speaker, under Caroni Green Limited, that there was fraud and mismanagement. Madam Speaker, in that very same audit report, and I just want to read an excerpt from the audit report under a heading called "fraud". And I would like to read from the report, extracts from the audited financial statement.

We have no knowledge of any fraud or suspected fraud affecting the institute involving management, employees who have significant roles in internal control or others where the fraud could have material effect on the financial statements. We have no knowledge of any allegations of fraud or suspected fraud affecting the company received in communications from employees or former employees, analysts, regulators or others.

So these are the auditors saying there are no issues of fraud there.

Madam Speaker, there is a claim that nobody in CGL knows anything about agriculture so we are just throwing money at them. If CGL had no expertise, would the money that they were being paid—it is difficult to explain why international organizations were visiting Caroni Green Limited to take a first-hand look at their processes and procedures. Madam Speaker, if I could just mention a couple of them.

The Chairman and members of the Guyana Private Sector Commission for

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[MR. PARAY]

Thursday, May 11, 2017

Agriculture.

The Bahamas Agriculture and Marine Services Institute.

A team of about 40 regional distributors for Caribbean Chemicals;

—just to name a few. So if they do not know anything about farming and agriculture, why are these people coming from outside of Trinidad and Tobago to see what they are doing?

There was also the claim that there is private sector competition. Madam Speaker, that is another false premise. If anything, Caroni Green Limited was in a symbiotic relationship with the private sector. Groups such as the Wallerfield Farmers Cooperative and the Gasparillo Farmers Group were participating in that CGL programme. There was a farmer training programme that was being conducted at the PCS Nitrogen model farm training facility. So how could they be so wrong, in terms of having a justification that we should shut down CGL?

**10.30 p.m.**

Madam Speaker, I maintain the view that the decision was ill-conceived, [*Desk thumping*] and to really shut a producing farming operation that is producing is really mindboggling. The Member for Chaguanas West, in his contribution earlier on, Madam Speaker, said that something was rotting in Denmark in his contribution. Well, the only thing that I know is rotting right now in Mon Jaloux and Union is about 9,000 pounds of peppers that are on the trees and are rotting and falling on the ground. That is US currency on the ground, and there is no explanation, there is no reasoning that someone could tell me that that make sense.

Madam Speaker, to close off the CGL component of this discussion, I find it a bit curious as to the timeline of shutting the operations down. On March 8<sup>th</sup>, Madam Speaker, the Minister in a meeting, he agrees to support CGL. They had a meeting and they talked about the operations, and he was in agreement that the operation is worthwhile and whatever assistance you need, I will consider it.

On March 14<sup>th</sup>, Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Finance makes a request to CGL to propose their funding and development requirement, and then on March 16<sup>th</sup> the Prime Minister advises of its closure. So something is wrong, something smells a little fishy in that whole closing down of that operation, but I am saying that if we could have vired some money from that \$1.3 billion to keep that operation going, we would have had 77 people back on the job. We would have had that 9,000 pounds of good green peppers ready to send in March to create foreign exchange for us in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, just to run through very, very quickly to some areas that



show that there were no major improvements. Nothing that has been done—  
[*Interruption*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Mayaro, your 30 minutes have expired. You are entitled to 15 more minutes if you wish to continue.

**Mr. R. Paray:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to—and I know it may cause a bit of pain on the other side because people do not really want to hear the truth. [*Crosstalk*] No, no, no. I would say it. I would say it. There has been no real reduction in the food import bill as claimed by the hon. Minister a couple days ago, because the consumption patterns have not changed. There has been no real substitution. The only thing that impacted the import bill, Madam Speaker, is the fact that you are not getting foreign exchange to buy the goods.

There has been no abatement in the food inflation. As of January 2017, Madam Speaker, it still stands at 7.6 per cent; absolutely no impact on food substitution; no impact on foreign exchange earnings; the cocoa industry is still in shambles, little or no action by the new board; failure in the coconut industry, almost a total collapse; failure to operationalize the two packaging houses at Brick Field and Brechin Castle; failure to provide farmers with their subsidy payments; no major impact in access road development for farmers; failure to complete, well, the cane farmers payments—well, I will pass the Minister's message on; failure to expedite the processing of leases, or faster processing of leases. I know some that were in the works under the UNC administration were recently granted by the Hon. Minister, but nothing new; failure to bring the Galeota Fishing Port Complex on stream; failure to bring the Ortoire Fish Landing Site on stream; failure to—I mean, nothing has been done to talk about achievements in the sector of agriculture in this country.

Madam Speaker, I want to talk quickly on: where can we go from here, in the last 10, 15 minutes that I have? We have to ask ourselves in this country: Why are farming families keep pushing away their children from farms?

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Speaker, if the Member would give way? Madam Speaker, may I just indicate that contrary to what the Member is saying, the Galeota Port and Facilities Warehouse is approximately 50 per cent completed with full completion scheduled for December 2017. I would really appreciate it if the Member does not put incorrect information into the *Hansard*.

**Mr. R. Paray:** Madam Speaker, with the greatest of respect to the Minister, I live there. That facility has been the same way for the last 20 months. [*Desk thumping*] There is nothing going on in the facility. The Minister has made

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[MR. PARAY]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

several pronouncements when we ask the question in this House, and they are always moving the timeline down, but when I drive there, nothing is happening. The last promise that we got about that facility was that the Seafood Industry Development Company was going to take over management of that facility. I understand the Seafood Management Company is lined up to be on the axe, the cutting board by July. I mean, I appreciate the input Madam Minister, but as I tell you, I live there. I see it every day.

Madam Speaker, I was saying why children are not going back into the farms. We need to deal with banks; we need to deal with new business areas to encourage young people to participate; we need to manage the availability of land and pricing for our young people; and we need to make agriculture profitable again. Madam Speaker, the fact is the structural environment in agriculture has not changed in 60 years. The same systems and structures that have been driving farmers away still exists today. So, what do we need to do, Madam Speaker? We need to create a policy that will allow for the creation of more farms in communities. More farms means more jobs; more jobs means more trade, more commerce in the community, but to do that we need to really create big change in the sector. What we are doing for the last 20 months, the steps are too small if anything is happening. We need policy reform. We need to move or to consider the movement away from traditional agriculture to organic production of things like poultry and eggs and meats, because all these areas are viable export commodities to earn foreign exchange, Madam Speaker. We need a policy to create the next generation of farmers. We can look at modern apprenticeship programmes attached to loan facilities for farming so these kids get loans—we put them in apprenticeship programmes, get them onto farms. We need to get creative in getting the next generation of farmers.

Madam Speaker, what if we were to bring something like a farm bill to this Parliament, where in that Bill we gave the ADB a mandate to create new farms in communities by allocating, let us assume, a half a billion dollars with ½ per cent interest with the purpose of building new farms. So, there are those who may say: Where will you get that kind of money from? Well, we have property tax, probably. I do not know. We can take the money and do something that is really going to push this agricultural agenda going forward, and I am sure people will not complain so much if they knew where that property tax money was going to be spent.

What if this farm bill that we could bring to this Parliament could give land owners incentive to develop their lands for agriculture use, just as we give tax concession to develop housing estates? Let them install infrastructure, roads, lights, security, irrigation and ponds and through the ADB fund farmers can walk into farms within a couple weeks instead of years waiting to get onto farms. Let

us ask these land developers, these agricultural land developers to deliver some 10, 15, 20 acre-plots as long as the space would permit.

What if in this farm Bill, Madam Speaker, we could have allowed university graduates in agricultural science, general science and natural sciences to access these plots, access ADB funding with apprenticeship training to further develop the sector? What if the farm bill created a policy to have a number of next generation farms in each municipal district? We have 14 municipal corporations. Let us decentralize. [*Crosstalk*] But nothing is happening. We need to get it to happen, Sir, decentralize the administration of agriculture away from Port of Spain down into the corporations.

Madam Speaker, what do we want? We want a successful agricultural sector. Why do we want it? We want it to protect the health of our citizens while boosting economic activity. When do we need to start? We need to start now. We need to get the Ministries together, have NAMDEVCO involved, use the Agricultural Society of Trinidad and Tobago and other such networks to get productivity rolling—do the necessary needs assessment in terms of the food requirements and the land inputs to get them produced. Where are we going to do it, Madam Speaker? As far as possible locally or as may be necessary along with the Ministries of Trade and Industry, and Foreign and Caricom Affairs.

Madam Speaker, I want to wrap up now by saying that I believe that this mid-year review is really spinning top in mud. It is my hope that come September—between now and September—that some thought, some processes and conversations that we would have brought here—I always keep saying that as an Opposition, the conversations we have in this House is not to oppose but to give the national community an alternative view. Many of us today have presented an alternative view, and I hope by September 2017, if the Government does not change that you will take some of the ideas and put it into practise. So, Madam Speaker, with those few words, I want to thank you for the opportunity.

**Mr. Prakash Ramadhar** (*St. Augustine*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] Let me begin by congratulating the Member for Mayaro. [*Desk thumping*] His delivery really underscored what a parliamentary contribution ought to be about. Without rancour, vitriol or any such disturbing elements he has given, as he has said, an alternative view as to how we can improve this nation's future. It is easy really to continue to attack without build, but I also want to share congratulations along the Bench of the Opposition. I think every Member in their effort to show the weaknesses of the Government, has also shown the way forward [*Desk thumping*] and that is good; that is healthy.

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[MR. RAMADHAR]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

Having said that, it is unfortunate though, I had to listen to my friend, the Member for Tobago West, who perpetuated on this floor, a toxic element of misstatement of fact, first of all, which are not indeed facts, and a sort of animosity that is uncommon in the way we should do things here. Let me just say, to have heard the Member for Tobago West unashamedly put before the national population of Trinidad and Tobago, that the Partnership Government only speaks about caring for Tobago, but that she is the one who truly loves. Nothing could be further from the truth, because I will tell you.

When we came into office in 2010, one of the first things I was directed as the Minister of Legal Affairs to do by the hon. Prime Minister, was to put an office in Tobago from Legal Affairs to ensure that the people of Tobago, would have full and easy access to all of their civil registry documents—[*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] I am not finished. I am not finished—as part of a new dimension where we would have computerized systems for the delivery of birth certificates and other documents in minutes rather than months or years [*Desk thumping*] and we put it in every regional corporation. [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Diego Martin North/East and Member for Arouca/Maloney, would you all like to make an interjection? We know there is a way for it to be done.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Sorry, Ma'am.

**Madam President:** Please continue, Member for St. Augustine.

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** There is no denying there was an office, but it was not up to full operational capacity, so that the people of Tobago were like stepchildren that when they required certain documents, they had to travel to Trinidad, sometimes missing their boat, their plane or whatever and had to overnight here, and we decided look, we are going to put a full complement, a full operational Ministry in Tobago and that is what we did. [*Desk thumping*] That is a fact that cannot be denied by any honest-minded person.

The other thing, what a pain it was to have heard the Member for Tobago West who should know better, and I suspect knows better, but chose not to say so, that the issue of land titles in Tobago, it was the People's Partnership Government, one of its first efforts was to ensure for the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, that land titles were given as a matter of right with as much ease as was possible.

It was not easy, because many studies have been done. I am sure efforts were

made in the past and the latest had been under the Mc Kenzie report from 2006, but instead of titles emanating from that, all they had was a report on a shelf that was very dusty. We were able, when I say “we”, under the direction of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, to say, no, enough time has passed, and the people of Tobago deserve far better. We instructed the Registrar General’s Department to do these things, to allow a system to be created, so that land titles could be given to the people of Tobago.

I was extraordinarily proud on I think the 15<sup>th</sup> of January, 2013 to have participated with the hon. Prime Minister, Kamla Persad-Bissessar at the time, to have distributed the first of those land titles to more than nine persons then, and the system had continued. To have suggested—that was the first, it was not easy. It was difficult because Tobago has very peculiar, very different cultural developments as to how the lands were demarcated and so. So it was hard, but we did it. So to have heard that all they got were empty pieces of paper is an indictment, not on the Minister of the time or the Government of the time, but on the Registrar General’s Department of Trinidad and Tobago, a Department respected, not just here, but throughout the region as one of the best in the entire region. But they passed that off in such a way to diminish the efforts of a good heart with good intent, and with the willingness to make it happen, and we made it happen, and nothing can change that. But it is not surprising, but it is a dangerous sort of context that my friends have repeatedly used.

Even when we were in Government, we were attacked in the worst possible way, creating corrosive elements that really damaged the social fabric in the country and created divides that we should never have had in the politics or on the ground. [*Crosstalk*] Let us not go there. But we do know what has happened in this country and we need to fix it, and we need to fix it fast. That is why it is important for truth to be the most important thing, the most important currency of a people’s Parliament. But the greatest deficit in this country, is not just economic, it is a deficit of truth, and to have heard the Minister of Finance speak, for not one but two budgets and many other statements in between, and to have heard him in this Parliament in the last few days, and to have heard my friend speak, it appears from their point of view that this country is a perfect paradise as it is right now.

Tobago is doing so well, the numbers that have been called, Tobago is seeing an up rise in the number of visitors. They do not need help. Nothing is wrong. There is no shortage of food or lumber of anything else, contrary to everything that we know to be factual. They attempt now to blame the past Government that

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[MR. RAMADHAR]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

provided as best as they could have, a meaningful supply of food and goods to Tobago and now by their failure try to deny the facts of the past—[*Crosstalk*]—try to blame us now, two years into their Government, having brought \$38 billion in further debt; having spent \$90 billion that the country has not seen the benefit of those dollars. [*Desk thumping*]

But you know what is terrible? There is a lot of terrible things, but we want to help them fix it. I have heard—and I could not believe it when I heard it and maybe I am wrong. I always doubt myself first—that the Government was able to what? Save \$10 billion! Is that that true gentlemen? Ladies? Save \$10 billion! With all of the clamour of how awful the People’s Partnership had left the economy, and with their efforts to budget to get rid of what? Corruption, waste and mismanagement, they were able to save—let us look at that word “save” \$10 billion. What does that really mean? Had they budgeted for waste, mismanagement and corruption and did not got rid of it or is it a lack of competence that they could not have spent the money that we have as a Parliament given them to spend on behalf of the people? Now, that sounds good. It is a pretty word “save”—we save, you did well. Not at all.

**Mr. Imbert:** Where you hear that?

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** From you.

**Mr. Imbert:** Not at all.

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** When on the ground for the last couple of years my lady—now, if I am wrong, tell me I am wrong. I am willing to say so, but we have been hearing that they saved \$10 billion. What we do know, for those who live in Trinidad and Tobago, is for the last two years the economy has ground almost to a halt. I pause to highlight the halt, because wherever you go, whomever you speak with in terms of business or employees, they tell you—those who have small businesses, in particular—they are really on the edge. Their income has so been reduced, they could barely make ends meet and there is a grave danger that they will have to close and layoff whomever they have.

In fact, Madam Speaker, back to the Tobago issue. If everything was so right and good and proper, I understand at this very moment the truckers are protesting in Tobago. [*Crosstalk*] They cannot sleep, because they have their goods rotting and they cannot deliver it. [*Desk thumping*] The people of Tobago want food and there is a danger they would not get it. I am back now to the economy having been stalled.

Is this a deliberate effort to prove by their own manufacture that the Partnership left the economy in such a bad state that they could do very little? They are creating a reality of a toxic nature. I keep using that word, because that is what it is. If it is that you had the capacity to spend and stimulate the economy and you chose not to, that was a deliberate mischief and wickedness on the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Because if businesses shut down, workers are laid off, then families themselves are put on the breadline, not to mention the physical and emotional and well scars and fears that they have created by that. So I could not understand how a responsible “loving” Government could have spent \$90 billion, but it has not reached to the benefit of the man on the street.

I was taken with great attraction to the delivery from the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West who spoke very well. But in speaking she said something I thought rather peculiar. She said that the last Government spent money on—Member for Oropouche East—200 grounds when we could have spent that money better. Well, I could not believe what I heard. What could you spend money better on than to put an area where the population of Trinidad and Tobago could go and exercise and meet and consider it their community space? Because you have heard the Minister of Health and the former Minister of Health speak equally about the need to deal with non-communicable diseases. The need for exercise is crucially important, the quality of life depends on your health.

And if the people who are afraid—and they were not under the Partnership—of crime as they are today, they populated those 200-plus grounds. Every evening you will walk and you will see the kinds of numbers of the old and the middle aged and the young walking, having a good family experience on those grounds. These days, though, because of the fear of crime, a lot of people have withdrawn from those grounds. The quality of life in this country has taken a serious, serious dip, a decline. I am not proud of it, I am not happy for it, because I always believe—and I repeat the statement as often as I could—that you are the Government, yes you are in charge, and if you succeed, we shall all succeed, but if you fail we all pay the price. I believe that you should be helped, but right now I believe that you should be removed because they are not listening with any care. Ideas have been given and we have not seen any action taken to effect good ideas.

Madam Speaker, I am not going to be very long, but there are certain things I must speak too. I was aghast when I heard the Member for Chaguanas West speak this evening about the purported minutes of a meeting of the Board of Directors of TSTT. It is scandalous, reprehensible and unacceptable thing to have heard. If it is true, then those who are responsible must be brought to book, to be made responsible and in some way pay for what they have done. What we have here is

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[MR. RAMADHAR]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

not a buyout of a company but really a bail out of high friends in high offices. Just like you did with Clico, where they put this country into an economic hole on the basis it was too big to fail and, therefore, one could have understood, but we had to pay our tax paying dollars for the ill and the poor business management and possible corruption of a few where they pauperized most of the population to that end.

In relation to TSTT, do you think Neal & Massy would have gone into any business with the expectation to lose? Do you think they would have invested with the expectation that they would not make a profit? In fact, the commentators are quite right. What they did is when they went in they did not expect Digicel to have reared their competitive head as well as they did [*Desk thumping*] and not being able to compete with Digicel, they realized there was a big looming loss ahead of them—also at this time and also in the past—but they had no future in the thing.

What did they do? It is important to see this very small country and this small society, the leading lights of the captains of industry, who they are, being interlocking directorates—the who is who in this country and who populate the boards of TSTT and those who populate the Board of Neal & Massy—and to see if this was truly a good business deal or whether it really was. Once again, the people have been sold out to high friends in high office for big money, and that is a continuous repetitive thing in the society where the poor Trinidadian and Tobagonian, the man and women working every day, ends up having to pay, because let me tell you why.

This deal—and we have heard now there is about \$30 million gap between what they bought first—said it was a maximum pay—to what they actually paid. What is the real value, the economic value to TSTT? I find it embarrassing to go into the issue of whether the line Minister knew, the Minister of Finance knew, the Office of the Prime Minister knew—[*Interruption*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member, I am just going to—I am giving you some leeway, but in terms of dealing with the NEAL & MASSY/TSTT, that point has been made several times in this debate with respect to the bailout and with respect to the knowledge. So I am going to give you a lil leeway, but I would ask you to move on quite swiftly please.

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** I am very grateful to you, but you see and it is important for us all to speak about this. This must never go silently into the night because if we do, then there is no hope. You see, when I started off with the deficit of trust



that is what I am talking about. Because unless the population believes in its Government and that they are looking after the interest of all of us in every decision they take—of course, you can make mistakes—but if you take deliberate decisions that sell out the rights or the protection of the people then you are not going to have a population that is going to support some of the difficult things that are ahead of us, and that is why it is important always to ensure that whatever we do, even if we do make a mistake, it is an honest one and not a calculated one. That is the point and I shall move on from there.

So, Madam Speaker, having said all of that and having heard my friend, the Member for Mayaro, one of my constituents came to see me two days ago. He has an historic business, Ramsaran's Dairy. He came to tell me that he has so much difficulty now in being able to buy the raw material to manufacture what he has manufactured for more than a generation. But that he is pained when he could go into any supermarket and find milk imported from Germany. There is something called Moo, Moo milk, but he could find that in supermarkets. He is asking me as his Member of Parliament to find out how come money could be given for them to import milk, not in powdered form, but in liquid form without the transport cost and everything, but he has difficulty when he goes to the bank to get foreign exchange to buy the simple things for him to run his business.

### **11.00 p.m.**

How could we have Häagen-Dazs in this country when Flavorite is floundering? What is wrong with us?—industries here and we believe in free market. *[Interruption]* Yeah, we will find out soon. You will find out soon. You see, they do not know what is happening, right. Businesses are literally on their last leg, and they have no idea and they do not care to know. We need to do things now. When a patient is in danger you need to analyse it, what the problem is, diagnose it, and find what the solution is, and give effect to it. How many times have we spoken on this side about these problems of small businessmen who are being kept out, suffocated because they cannot get foreign exchange to buy raw material to produce things for us all, but, yet, we see imported good stuff coming in. I do not have a problem with that if the businesses were protected to begin with, but I have a problem with it when businesses are suffocated they can close, and those who work they would lose their jobs.

These are the things that need a little bit of micromanagement in difficult times, but I am not getting that sense from the hon. Minister of Finance, or anyone on that side, in particular, who has the authority, or who have the authority to look at these things and to help fix it. So, Madam Speaker, I promised not to be very long, but I cannot move on without having reference to this deficit of trust when it is important. I want to give you a little story to put it in context, when I first came

into the politics in 2007, my campaign manager was a councillor by the name of Sahadeo Boondoo, and it was Caroni Central, a real stalwart. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Indarsingh:** May his soul rest in peace.

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** May his soul rest in peace, great man. And he would walk and introduce me to everyone that we could have come upon, but as soon as he introduced I would find Sahadeo in the back, so I said, Boondoo, why “yuh” always hiding in the back? He said, let me tell you something, I “doh” want to hear what “dey” tell you, “yuh kno”, I want to hear what they say after you leave. And my friends do not really appreciate, because it happens in Government, that people tell you the things they feel you want to hear, and you all are falling to that trap. So your little clique telling you all is great, all is good, but I sometimes walk after you have left, and to hear the things that they say about your Government you would be very worried, and you should be very worried. Because you have three years, unless you wish to call an early election, which we will say, please bring. [*Desk thumping*] That is why you would have heard many of our colleagues on this side take the opportunity to help you, to advise you, because you are leading us down a path of destruction, economic decay and failure.

Property tax; you know, the deficit of trust, some time ago it appeared in a national newspaper, advertisements, about a certain form that will come to you, and that there was a deadline put for the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May, that if these forms are not filled out and returned that there could be imminent prosecution with a fine of \$500. Madam Speaker, it is so wrong for a sitting Government to so misrepresent the position, because if we were to look at the law, and if, with your leave I could please read, under the Valuation of Land Act, Chap. 58:03, section 6(1):

- “(1) Every owner of land in Trinidad and Tobago shall, by 1st April 2010, make with the Commissioner, a return of the land in the form set out in Schedule II.
- (2) Where the owner of land fails to file a return by 1st April 2010, the Commissioner shall by Notice inform the owner that he is required to file a return, failing which he may be liable to conviction under this section.
- (3) A Notice under subsection (2) shall be sent by registered post.”

What is it that they sent out? A document that purports to be in accordance with Schedule II form, but they put their own manufactured bit at the top, making it non-compliant with the form itself.

All this document is, with the possible heading of the Ministry of Finance, and so, is a flyer. It has no legal consequence or effect whatsoever, [*Desk thumping*] but they have terrorized the nation that if they do not fill this thing out by the 22<sup>nd</sup>

of May, and that is the belief of most in the country, that they can be prosecuted. How could you terrorise people like that with a total misstatement of the law? This document is not the notice. The notice, if at all it should come, must be in one's name, and at least by registered mail, because how could you prove, how could you prosecute unless there is basis service that you have received it? And that is the folly and fallacy and the wickedness in some to run along that line, but I want to assure you of one thing, that there will be a legal challenge to this. [*Desk thumping*] The courts ultimately will decide on the legitimacy, the legality, the nullity, or otherwise of the effect of this property tax regime that they intend to prosecute upon the people's heads.

Then you ask yourself the question, the Minister himself has put out, and the Ministry, they have put out, they expect to raise about \$500 million on property tax. Listen, there are people who are willing to pay it, who can afford it, good for you, but there are many others who cannot pay, or who are afraid that they will not in the near future be able to pay, and it is to them we must give comfort. It is to them whom that we must protect, and we will do so in the courts of law, and on the streets if necessary. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, I do not know, and it is not my area of law, but I have never seen any law written with the specificity of section 6, where it speaks directly to 1<sup>st</sup> of April, 2010; this is May 2017. So that there is an inconsistency and incoherence with the threats and what the law has written is, but, as I say, that is a matter that we shall have to deal with in the courts. In the very near future, and I imagine within the next week, we shall be hearing more about these challenges.

So, Madam Speaker, it would also be remiss of me to not remind ourselves that this is a Government that came in on untruth. They had campaigned that when they came in they would reduce VAT. They did on luxury items, from 15 per cent to 12.5 per cent, but the real jam in this thing, the sting in the tail was that all the foods that the People's Partnership Government had ensured did not have VAT, they put 12.5 per cent tax on that, over 7,000 items, and that, I tell you, was the beginning of the end of your creditability. There is more, we had always warned that this was a Government that cared only about big business and ignored to the small, the small and medium sized, the small man, the little entrepreneur. When they imposed the 7 per cent tax on online purchases that was a blow, not to the big, because if they are importing they do so wholesale, and if it came by ship you do not pay the 7 per cent, but if it came by air you pay a 7 per cent. There is no logic and no coherence in that other than to destroy the small businesses. There are many, I could tell you in St. Augustine many small businessmen who have little import businesses, where they fix computers and electronics, and so, and

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[MR. RAMADHAR]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

they import by flying it in, and they are the ones who pay 7 per cent.

So there we go. There is a Government that we have to support in terms of your success, because if you fail we pay the price, and that is why it is necessary for us to stand in protection of the people, but to help you along the way. But I think now is the time also to identify that you have lost your credibility you have, and that your continuous effort to attack the Partnership and blame us for all, that is now really way behind us. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Hinds:** Partnership.

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** Yeah, at the time was the People's Partnership Government, and today we have a future ahead of us. What we do as a people will determine whether we fail or we succeed, but it is not going to be easy, because we need to change the way we do things.

My friend from Mayaro, I am very happy he spoke the way he did, because that is the answer. God has given this land the greatest wealth that anything almost that we plant here will grow, and grow in such profuse quantities and quality that we could make the best of it, but we have to change the mindset of our people. This hate factor that we have for agriculture that the PNM repeatedly over the years, anything that grows green and grows from the earth they destroy. They closed down Caroni. They closed down the citrus from Caroni. They close down now—what?—Caroni Green. I remember, painfully, before I was in the politics even, that hard-working farmers, when they were hit by floods and all their crops decimated they would get the grand cheque total of forty-something dollars—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Twenty-seven.

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** Twenty-seven. And, you see, that is the sort of thing. So you want to know why it is that people have moved away from agriculture, it is because it is so risky. Myself, having been involved in it, when you plant crops and you get either a drought or a flood you can lose it all, and, therefore, the risk is great. But when a Government shows the disrespect to it, then what is there to support you?

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member for St. Augustine, your original 30 minutes are spent, you are entitled to 15 minutes more, if you intend to avail yourself of it.

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** Thank you very much, Milady.

So that the long and short of it is that we do need now to protect our farmers, to show them there is a way that a Government that cares and will support them.

In certain countries, you have—[*Interruption*]

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Members, it is late, I would like all Members to particularly familiarize themselves to Standing Order 53. And, again, as I said, I invite any Member who finds it difficult to take a little walk and rejoin us. Continue, Member for St. Augustine.

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** Yes. I am almost done. I was making the point in certain countries you have agriculture insurance, and that is something we could possibly look at, because we do need to have that sense of security when we go into food production. I could tell you a personal experience also: I grew up, my father had a farm, and goats and sheep, wonderful animals, and in one night they will come and steal 10 and 15 of them. We had no choice but to close, no choice. We planted corn, as large and as long as your arm, the most beautiful thing; pumpkin, 80, 90 pounds, and it would be stolen. That is why it is necessary—[*Interruption*] Yes, you have never seen corn that big, yes.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Show a little respect for the agricultural sector.

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** The point, as I close, is that we have the answer, it is whether we have the will to do it. So, Madam Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity, and I truly wish the best for our country. I truly wish the best for our Government, and I truly wish for a better future for us all. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. David Lee** (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I know it is late and I would not be as long as my other colleagues. I would like to be the first, maybe in the next 45 minutes, to wish the Leader of Government Business, happy birthday. [*Desk thumping*] I know I do not have the power to give her the day off tomorrow, but I hope the Hon. Prime Minister would be so kind to give her the day off. Madam Speaker, I would not be repetitive, and I would be brief in my few points that I have to make. I want to jump straight into the energy sector. The energy sector was not spoken about in this debate. [*Interruption*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Couva South, would you like to take a little walk and return and join us? That would be your choice, but you are entitled to take a little walk and rejoin us. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. D. Lee:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. So I just want to get in straight into my contribution on the energy sector. I want to start off by yesterday's presentation by the Hon. Minister of Finance, when he opened up, maybe in his first two minutes, or so, in his presentation, he said, and I quote from the

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[MR. LEE]

Thursday, May 11, 2017

*Hansard:*

“Fortunately, as a result of sustained focus by this administration on increasing oil production over the last year, the country is now back up to almost 76,000 barrels per day, an increase of 10,000 barrels per day.”

This was yesterday on the 10<sup>th</sup> of May.

Madam Speaker, also on the 10<sup>th</sup> of May, in a meeting with the Energy Chamber in Claxton Bay at the Cara Suites Hotel, the Petrotrin President, Mr. Harewood, said that Petrotrin has started increasing its crude production from 41,000 barrels per day, in February this year, to 46,438 barrels per day as at the end of April. So, Madam Speaker, I do not know if the Minister of Finance could add some clarity between himself and the president of Petrotrin because there is a disparity of over twenty-something thousand barrels a day. *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Imbert:** What nonsense you are talking?

**Mr. D. Lee:** I will give way.

**Mr. Imbert:** I thank the Member for giving way. I was referring, Madam Speaker, through you, if you would take the time to read, I am referring to national oil productions. Is Petrotrin the only oil company in Trinidad and Tobago? Come on, you could do better than that.

**Mr. D. Lee:** Well, I mean—*[Interruption]*

**Mr. Imbert:** You mean nothing.

**Mr. D. Lee:** I know this is his normal antics at this point in time.

**Mr. Imbert:** Antics?

**Mr. D. Lee:** His normal antics. And let me say, again—*[Interruption]*

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Diego Martin North/East, I understand that, you know, you have been here for long hours, but I would just ask you to exercise a little tolerance and decorum. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. D. Lee:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. So maybe in his windup he could explain that again. *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Imbert:** Explain what?

**Mr. D. Lee:** But I also want to jump into an article, and I quote from an article on Monday, May the 8<sup>th</sup>, 2017, in the *Trinidad Guardian*:

“Colm saves \$10 billion”

**Mr. Imbert:** I did not write that article.

**Mr. D. Lee:** “Ah”?

**Mr. Imbert:** I did not write that.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Diego Martin North/East. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. D. Lee:** This article, Madam Speaker, says:

“Belt-tightening has helped that State spend \$10 billion less than expected in 2016, the Auditor’s General report for the...”—[*Interruption*]

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Speaker, may I invite you to look at Standing Order 55(1)(b), that same statement was made about 10 times already by 10 Members on that side. It is the same article.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, I will give you a little leeway to see where you are going with that. As made by the Member for Arouca/Maloney, we have heard at least three other Members speak about that article. I will give you a little leeway to see where you are going, but, please, be mindful of Standing Order 55(1)(b).

**Mr. D. Lee:** Thank you, I am guided, Madam Speaker. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Hinds:** Only because your name is Lee you get a little leeway. [*Laughter*]

**Mr. D. Lee:** Very good one there, Member for Laventille. But in this article I do not think it was read out, it was from members of the public stating certain things about this savings. And I refer, and I—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Imbert:** A makeup story.

**Mr. D. Lee:** No. One, Eric Williamson:

It is amazing how they boast about saving money when almost all arms of the state—[*Interruption*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Diego Martin North/East, are you making an interjection?

**Mr. Imbert:** Yes, Madam, but would the Member give way?

**Mr. D. Lee:** No. Madam Speaker, I am speaking to you. [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Speaker:** Order. Order. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. D. Lee:** Madam Speaker, I am getting to understand the tactics at this

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[MR. LEE]

Thursday, May 11, 2017

hour, at this time. Madam Speaker, and I read—these are comments from the John Public in the newspapers, and I do not think it was read out before—one, Eric Williamson:

It is amazing how they boast about saving money when almost all arms of the state are on the verge of collapse. Workers are operating under extremely harsh conditions, people are going months without being paid, basic items like toilet paper and water are being denied.

Madam Speaker, that is in the article. Another member of John Public of the nationals of Trinidad and Tobago, Brian Star, and I quote—*[Interruption]*

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Speaker, again, I ask you to look at Standing Order 55(1)(b).

**Mr. D. Lee:** I will move on.

**Madam Speaker:** Thank you very much.

**Mr. D. Lee:** I will move on, Madam Speaker.

Let me go back into the energy sector, Madam Speaker. The recent report of Standard & Poor's and Moody's makes it clear that one of the main reasons of the downgrade is that this Government has failed to stimulate investments in the energy sector. *[Desk thumping]* Madam Speaker, you would not believe this if you read the newspaper as reported, and reports from the Prime Minister's trip to Houston. When you read reports in the daily newspapers, on the press releases from the Office of the Prime Minister, you would believe that Trinidad and Tobago is the new Singapore. Madam Speaker, when I referred to those articles, for example, on the 27<sup>th</sup> of April, when the Prime Minister went to Houston, Prime Minister Rowley's Meeting with bp Yields Fruit:

“Coming out of yesterday's meeting between Prime Minister, Dr. the Honourable Keith Rowley and BP senior executives the company is set to invest billions of dollars in Trinidad and Tobago.

BP will invest USD five billion in Trinidad and Tobago over the next five years.”

Madam Speaker, that issue has been under the PP Government, and it just so happened that the Prime Minister went to Houston, but that deal about that \$5 billion has been around under the PP Government.

Madam Speaker, it was just pure public relations about bp investing \$5 billion in the next five years. Then he talked about Shell going to make Starfish a reality, EOG was going to do exploration; after all of this PR, the rating agencies—*[Interruption]*



**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Speaker, Standing Order, 44(10).

**Madam Speaker:** Member, you are entitled to refer to your notes but you cannot read, remember it is a debate.

**Hon. Member:** He is reading?

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Yeah, he is reading the whole script.

**Mr. D. Lee:** Well, my notes. So, Madam Speaker—I know again what they are trying to do, Madam Speaker.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** What are we trying to do, we are trying to enforce the Standing Orders.

**Mr. D. Lee:** I know. I know. I know. So, Madam Speaker, in the energy sector there is a company in Trinidad and Tobago, it is Mora Ven Holdings, and I have some letters from Mora Ven Holdings. On May the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017, a letter was written to the hon. Franklin Khan from Mora Ven, Executive Chairman, George Nicholas III, and Mora Ven is asking the Government of the day to help them to be able to conclude some negotiations with Repsol, because the Mora Ven company, a local company, local oil company, Madam Speaker, and I quote a letter:

Mora Oil has a find in the range of 200 million barrels of oil, and also 60 million barrels of oil that could come to this Government and to the country of Trinidad and Tobago.

And they are not allowing Mora Ven to be able to negotiate and give them the kind of assistance that is required to bring this to fruition.

Madam Speaker, the Government of the day rather go to Venezuela to try to deal with the Venezuelan Government, while right here we have a local company, Mora Ven Oil, that is sitting on over 260 billion barrels of oil, that all it needs is a couple of negotiations.

**Hon. Member:** Billion?

**Mr. D. Lee:** Two hundred and sixty million barrels of oil. I correct if I said billion, Madam Speaker. If I can refer to my notes, Madam Speaker. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** No.

**Mr. D. Lee:** No? I just wished you happy birthday and you are treating me so.

Madam Speaker, what really has this Government done to protect the energy industry, Madam Speaker? Petrotrin oil production has declined. You have decreasing crude oil production, Madam Speaker. We have seen, and they have

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[MR. LEE]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

never come up with any new strategies by this Government to increase oil production. Madam Speaker, I quote an article on January 23, 2017, by Loop T&T:

Imbert: Petrotrin's T&T best chance for increased oil production.

State-owned Petrotrin is the country's best chance to reverse the current decline in oil production.

I say that, Madam Speaker, because when you look at the variation of appropriation for the fiscal year 2017 by this present Government, and by the Minister of Finance, there is nothing there in it to really grow Petrotrin and help them come out and make them a stronger, according to him, a crown jewel for this country, Madam Speaker. The PNM in their manifesto, in the energy sector, Madam Speaker, they talked about creating an environment in which producer companies, both existing and new, become aggressive without seeking new discoveries in oil and gas. This is the PNM manifesto, Madam Speaker. It talked about facilitate and encourage the growth of locally-owned energy sector companies, through appropriate, fiscal and monetary incentives and concessions—that is not happening, Madam Speaker, especial with Mora Ven—develop appropriate strategies to monetize the discovery of reserves of natural gas found in deep waters which are classified as expansive gas, Madam Speaker.

This Government, Madam Speaker, is a Government of talk and no walk. Today after 20 months of this PNM governance, none of those promises have been realized. We have had no new bid-rounds for further exploration, no new fiscal incentive packages to encourage investments, Madam Speaker. No indication that any new exploration and production will be undertaken. This Government continues to boast about a new bid round, but, yet, there has been no plans for this bid round. Madam Speaker, they have formed a Petrotrin Committee. The Government has moved to appoint a committee headed by Selwyn Lashley, the PS in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, to investigate the operations and make recommendations on the restructuring of Petrotrin.

This is another form of red tape. While this may bring results or understand operational problems, what has been done now in the short term to increase production, Madam Speaker? Madam Speaker, I have a report from Petrotrin that says, basically, from my investigation from people in Petrotrin, they have told me that over the last 12 months they have lost—Petrotrin, because of their inefficiencies have lost about US \$522 million. Madam Speaker, the point I am saying is that Petrotrin for this country is a crown jewel, and some sort of resources financially should be put into Petrotrin to give it the kind of help that is needed.

Madam Speaker, in respect of natural gas, we have talked about the natural gas master plan, and the Hon. Prime Minister said it would be laid in Parliament, and to date we have not seen anything of that. Madam Speaker, only recently coming out of the Houston trip by the hon. Prime Minister, and we were hoping that certain things would have benefited this country, but what came out of that the Government loses the Angelin construction project. That was not talked about by the Minister of Finance, and we have lost a golden opportunity through bp, and a lot workers are without any employment because of that project not taking place in Trinidad and Tobago.

Are there any incentives within the energy sector that this Government, through the Minister of Finance, has brought in this mid-term review? Nothing, Madam Speaker. Because of the downgrade by Moody's, the downgrade has placed unsecured loans in jeopardy, especially within the energy sector. A lot of the energy sector loans are unsecured, and because of this downgrade by Moody's and Standard & Poor's, a lot of their debt now, a lot of their financiers might be asking for Government guarantees. Madam Speaker, I now kind of want to turn to diversification in Trinidad and Tobago. I would have hoped that in his mid-term review that the Minister of Finance would have touched on diversification, because with the downturn and the loss of revenue, this Minister of Finance has not brought anything new to this country, or to this Parliament about trying to raise revenues for the country of Trinidad and Tobago. It is about tax, tax, tax. That is all he has brought, Madam Speaker.

**11.30 p.m.**

**Madam Speaker:** Member, I was just going to advise you, with respect to that point, I think you should move on. Thank you very much.

**Mr. D. Lee:** I will not go into that point, Madam Speaker. That point has been beaten throughout the afternoon; it has been talked about.

I want to talk about the diversification. Given our economic crisis, there is a need for pertinent diversification or sustainable support for other industries within our national economy, which can generate economic growth and revenue generation to finance our debt commitments and service, as well as create jobs.

The question must be asked as to how much of this \$1.3 billion, which was appropriated was actually used to support diversification. We must further question how much money and how many policies were created to support diversification in the past fiscal year. Given our junk status, falling energy revenues and an economy that is heavily contracting, one must ask what master projects have been started by this administration to diversify and create an extra stream of income in the past 20 months.

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[MR. LEE]

Thursday, May 11, 2017

What did the People's National Movement commit in its manifesto? They promised, and I read:

“Stability and investor confidence

It will be a priority of the incoming”—People's National Movement”—PNM administration to reverse this downgrade by proactively addressing all of these areas of economic weakness which have been left unattended by the present Government.”

What has happened since then, Madam Speaker? Moody's has downgraded Trinidad and Tobago to junk status. Moody's gave us two reasons for the downgrade, Madam Speaker, and that has been talked about. But I want to add, why is it that for the last 12 months or last year when Moody's and Standard & Poor's gave a good rating to this country, the Minister of Finance did not have a problem? [*Interruption*] I am talking.

**Madam Speaker:** Members, please. At this hour I am having a little difficulty in hearing, so I would like Members to listen in silence. Please continue, Member for Pointe-a- Pierre.

**Mr. D. Lee:** Why last year the Minister of Finance did not look for a third credit rating if he was unhappy with the rating?

**Madam Speaker:** Member, I am going to stop you, because I think you understand. Thank you, please.

**Mr. D. Lee:** I am moving on, Madam Speaker. In the Minister's contribution yesterday, he talked about referring to the World Bank. He talked about getting help and going to the World Bank to do several things for this country. I am kind of taken aback, because I think when this Government came into place, they formed an economic board headed by Dr. Terrance Farrell, so I was assuming that Dr. Farrell and his team would have been able to do the same things that this Minister of Finance is going to the World Bank to do. So, Madam Speaker, I do not know if he can explain that.

This Government also promised job creation and promotion of social justice. I quote, this is their manifesto:

“...‘there should be adequate means of livelihood for all, that labour should not be exploited or forced by economic necessity to operate in inhumane conditions but that there should be opportunity for advancement on the basis of recognition of merit, ability and integrity’.”

But we see a host of companies closing down, and a lot of my other colleagues have touched on those companies that closed down. Besides the State organizations, there are a lot of private companies that are also feeling the downturn in the economy and they are also closing down.

They promised “Tripartite relationships and cooperation”. Again, that is something that has gone and fallen by the wayside. I think the union has pulled out of that. They promised “Procurement reform”, and I just would not touch on it, only to say that why is the reform taking so long to come to fruition under this present Government?

What incentives has this Trinidad and Tobago Government given to businesses to encourage diversification? The answer is none. What support have they given to the manufacturing sector? What support have they given to the service sector? What support have they given to the local arts and craft sector? As far as development of human capital, there are things in here that this Government has not done.

Madam Speaker, I now want to touch a little bit on my constituency, in respect of the appropriation and variation. It is quite unfortunate that in the last budget, coupled with these appropriations before us today, that many of these services and programmes which are critical to our citizens, did not receive adequate funding. Many of these programmes affect the welfare and quality of life of my constituents in Pointe-a-Pierre, such as their education, their mobility, their safety and livelihoods. It is quite unfortunate that this Government and the Minister of Education did not see it critical to allocate funds to complete the Macaulay Government Primary School which was started in 2015. Part of this uncompleted project also catered for a special needs school for the differently abled children of my constituency.

Another school that has also been postponed is the completion of the Harmony Hall Presbyterian School. The residents of Pointe-a-Pierre continue to suffer on a daily basis from deplorable road conditions. One of the issues also affecting the residents of my constituency, as it does neighbouring Couva South and Tabaquite, is the effects of the landfill dump. The smoke and air pollution affects thousands of residents each year, causing severe respiratory problems.

Madam Speaker, as I conclude, given the current situation plaguing our nation, Government must answer the following questions: How were these funds which were appropriated or even that were utilized in the past year used to facilitate economic growth? How are the funds which have been appropriated

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[MR. LEE]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

now going to create confidence within the economy? What new policies have been created to encourage investments? It would appear that yet again, this appropriation signifies the absence of vision and political will of this current administration to do what is best for the citizens of this country.

This nation has gone from appropriation of prosperity to poverty, as the green tax and business levy have been raised, the Ministry of Finance has suspended VAT refunds, and the Government has reintroduced property tax. The current policies of this administration have ruined an environment of opportunity to an environment of suppression and struggle. No longer are citizens being benefitted—*[Interruption]*

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Standing Order 44(10).

**Madam Speaker:** Member.

**Mr. D. Lee:** As I close, no longer are citizens being benefitted.

**Madam Speaker:** As you close.

**Mr. D. Lee:** No longer, Madam Speaker, citizens are being benefitted from productivity, but are actually being taxed into poverty. I thank you.

**The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just let me deal with some of the more inaccurate statements by Members opposite. First, let me deal with this completely untrue allegation made by the Member for Siparia, with respect to the assistance being given by the Government to His Excellency the President, with respect to the appointment of the Procurement Regulator.

The Member for Siparia took up a lot of her time yesterday to create a fiction with respect to this matter. I think it is necessary for me to read into the record again, the Minutes of the Third Meeting of the Oversight Committee for Public Procurement Reform on Friday, July 10, 2015 under the UNC Government. This committee was chaired by Timothy Hamel-Smith, former President of the Senate under the UNC and sundry others, all UNC appointees.

On page 3 of these minutes:

Mr. Hamel-Smith summarized the main discussion points from the meeting of the oversight committee—this is the UNC committee—with His Excellency the President, on Thursday, July 02, 2015. Among the key discussion outcomes were that the process involves the creation of a job description for the regulator, placing the advertisement, assistance in reviewing the applications by the committee and eventually submitting names from the committee for the consideration of His Excellency.

So in 2015 the UNC-appointed oversight committee, chaired by no less than the former UNC President of the Senate, reported that they had met with the President and they were working out with the President a system whereby the Government, the Ministry of Finance, would advertise, would review applications and would submit names of potential candidates for the consideration of His Excellency. Far more involvement in the process than this Government—far more.

They had agreed that the Ministry of Finance under the UNC would advertise for candidates, applicants for the post of Procurement Regulator, receive the applications, review them, shortlist them and submit names to His Excellency for His Excellency to make his selection. We are simply procuring a consulting firm, and that firm will then work with the President to come up with a list of names, so that His Excellency could make his selection. We are far removed from the involvement of the former government.

But I had to listen to the Member for Siparia with a song and dance, pretence, pretending that her administration had not done this exact same thing. It is shameful, shameful and talking about how this Government is breaking the law, and yet they were going to shortlist, review and send those names to the President for his consideration. That is what they were doing. I have to hear all this tomfoolery about breaking the law.

The next thing, Madam Speaker, I had to listen to—it was painful—to listen to the Member for St. Augustine, in his pious, sanctimonious delivery, saying that the PNM Government has imposed VAT on all basic food items. I had to listen to that. Madam Speaker, I went and I looked at Schedule II, amended Schedule II, zero-rated items effective February 2016 under this Government. I looked at the items that are zero-rated and are not subject to VAT as a result of the actions of this Government. The list is pages and pages: unprocessed food, parboiled and brown rice, all-purpose and wheat flour, whole, skim lactose-free milk, pasteurized milk, white and whole wheat bread, baby formula, cheddar cheese, corned beef, curry, sardines, smoke herring, toilet paper, yeast, baking powder, pasta, brown sugar, oatmeal, dried leguminous vegetables, peas, beans. Pages of basic food items that are not subject to VAT, as a result of the actions of this Government. But I have to hear the Member for St. Augustine talk about all the items that they had VAT free, we put VAT on them. I had to listen to that, and this is in the public domain.

The next thing I have to hear is that the UNC is going to challenge these notices, that the PNM Government has illegally sent out to property owners. It is

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[HON. C. IMBERT]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

distressing, because the Member for St. Augustine is a lawyer. And when one goes to the Valuation of Land Act, one sees the following. Section 6 of the Valuation of Land Act:

“Every owner of land in Trinidad and Tobago shall...make with the Commissioner, a return of land in the form set out in Schedule II.”

So there is no requirement for people to get a notice. There is no notice that could possibly be illegal. The law requires property owners to submit a return in the form that is in Schedule II. And all the Commissioner of Valuations has done as a courtesy, has sent property owners and say, “Here is the form and please submit it.” That is all that has happened. There is no notice of assessment that has been sent to anyone. The assessment comes afterwards, after the return of property is submitted, the Valuation Division will then use the information on that form and its own information to determine what the annual rental value of properties is and then do an assessment of what the property tax will be.

So then no notices have been sent to anybody, it is simply a copy of Schedule II, telling owners, “Please submit this, so we can see what kind of property we have, and then we can make an assessment of the value.” If people do not send in the form, the Valuation Division will make its own assessment, which it is entitled and empowered to do under the law. So all this foolishness about tearing up the form and, “Doh send it in”, all you are doing is endangering people, because if they do not send in the form, then the Valuation Division will, as it is allowed under the law, make the assessment on its own. It does not have to bother with what the person says because the person has told them nothing.

**Mr. Ramadhar:** Read the law.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Absolutely ridiculous. Then I have to hear the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre reading a newspaper article. [*Interruption*] Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Diego Martin North/East, I think now that I have stood up you can proceed.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I had to listen to the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre; boy, that was difficult. The President of Petrotrin gets up and speaks about Petrotrin’s production, and the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre who represents the area in which Petrotrin resides, does not know the following: that if you go to the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries website, which has been publishing data on crude oil production in Trinidad and Tobago for years. For all



of the years of the UNC, you go to their website and you get the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries bulletin, you would see the following: crude oil production—and I am reading now from February 2017:

BG, 414 barrels; BP, 13,133 barrels; Trinmar, 19,831 barrels; Petrotrin, 11,846 barrels; Petrotrin leased out, 6,042 barrels; Petrotrin independent producer, 3,036 barrels; Petrotrin farm-out, 721 barrels; TEPGL, 1,001 barrels—I wonder if he even knows what TEPGL is?—Primera, 296; EOG—I wonder if he ever heard about EOG, Madam Speaker—1,254 barrels; Bolt, four; TEPL, 280; BGCB, 454; MEPR, 98; NHETT, 67; BHP—I wonder if he ever heard about BHP?—11,740 barrels, for a total national oil production of 75,946 barrels of oil produced in February 2017, of which Petrotrin produced 46,000 barrels.

It is incredible that the Member of Parliament for Pointe-a-Pierre is unaware that Petrotrin is not the only producer of oil in Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, I am astonished. Where has he been living? Has he never heard of Poui, Teak and Samaan? Has he never heard of Perenco? I am just shocked that the Member, making some preposterous argument that I am misleading the Parliament because Petrotrin say that production is 46,000, and I say is 76,000 and “de two ah we cyar be correct. One of us wrong”, and not realizing that Petrotrin produces 46,000 and the other oil producers produce the other 30,000. “And he living in Trinidad and Tobago,” and he represents a constituency where the head office of Petrotrin is, and he talks to people in Petrotrin, but they would not tell him that Petrotrin is not the only producer of oil in Trinidad and Tobago. I am just astonished.

**Hon. Member:** And he was the head of MIC.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Yes, and the head of Metal Industries. I am just astonished. It is incredible.

Then, Madam Speaker, the next thing I have to listen to is that “de *Guardian* write a story—de *Guardian*, yuh know”. If you read “de” story you cannot see any statement or comment attributed to the Minister of Finance, if he bothered to read it. If you read it, there is nothing in there that indicates that any part of that statement was in any way associated with the Minister of Finance. But he goes on to say, “De Minister of Finance boasting that he save billion” I am not part of that story. It is just preposterous. If you go back to the budget statement of 2017, delivered in this House on September 30, 2016, I reported on page 12 of the budget statement that the revised expenditure for 2016 is \$11 billion lower than originally estimated.

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[HON. C. IMBERT]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

I was standing right here, he was right there, and September 30, 2016 I made that point, that the expenditure for 2016 was \$11 billion lower than originally estimated. “So what we in, May now?” So October, November, December, January, February, March, April, May—eight months later he cannot remember that I came in this Parliament and said that the revised expenditure for 2016 was \$11 billion less than originally estimated? “He cyar remember dat, Madam Speaker?” But I am boasting; a *Guardian* story that is in no way connected to me, has become a boast coming from the Minister of Finance.

And then a bunch of strange people commenting on this fictional boast. “I am sure all ah dem is online comments; I sure all ah dem make dat up.” I am not connected to the story. I am not part of the story. I am not interviewed in the story. They “doh” have anything attributed to me in the story, but there are comments on “Look how de Minister boasting”. It is just an absurdity; imagine that, an absurdity.

I also need to put into the record what Standard & Poor’s said about Trinidad and Tobago, and about the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. I am quoting from Standard & Poor’s April 2017 rating, which is headlined Trinidad and Tobago’s outlook remains stable. This is what Standard & Poor’s had to say:

“The ‘stable’ outlook is reflective of S&P’s belief that current economic policies”—our policies—“including deficit reduction and stabilization of the debt burden, will result in modest economic recovery over the medium term period 2017 to 2020.

The current Administration’s”—this administration, this PNM Administration—“fiscal and monetary policy adjustments, along with exchange rate policies, in the midst of less than favourable economic conditions, also attributed to the ‘stable outlook’.”—Let me repeat that.—“The current Administration’s fiscal and monetary policy adjustments, in the midst of less than favourable economic conditions, also attributed to the ‘stable outlook’.”

And for Hon. Members opposite who cannot understand English, what they are saying is despite the very difficult challenges that this country has faced and is facing, the current administration’s policies are contributing to the stable outlook that Standard & Poor’s have put on Trinidad and Tobago.

Listen to this—I had to listen to Members opposite talk about how we have failed to attract investment, and how when the hon. Prime Minister went to Houston and he spoke about investment it was all imaginary. Listen to what

Standard & Poor's is saying:

“Furthermore, taking into”—account—“the Government's”—this Government's—“commitment to attracting foreign investment to the energy sector and fiscal consolidation along with the continuing economic policies”—of this Government, Standard & Poor's—“project that the debt burden will stabilize over the next two years.”

So Standard & Poor's, far from indicating that there was a problem with investment, has indicated that this Government's efforts to attract investment in the energy sector, together with the fiscal and monetary policies of this Government, have caused our outlook to be switched from negative, as it was under the UNC, to stable under the People's National Movement Government. And those are the facts; not the fantasy that I have had to listen to all night—this fantasy.

Let me also deal with something. I understand the Member for Princes Town demanded to know something from the Attorney General. I should indicate that I have in my possession a document, and the document is dated June 25, 2015. It is dated June 25, 2015 and it is from a real estate entity, and it is to the Court Executive Administrator of the Judiciary of Trinidad and Tobago. It indicates that in June 2015 the Judiciary had been given a list of properties that may fulfil the requirements of the juvenile court project, and included among those properties was a property at the corner of Fyzabad Main Road and Delhi Street, Fyzabad—Delhi Road.

I now read from another document:

The Judiciary having previously viewed prospective properties and finding several to be unsuitable, was invited by Laura Homes TT Real Estate to consider six options for the siting of the juvenile court in early June 2015. Among these options was the subject property located at lots No. 3, 4 and 5, corner of Fyzabad and Delhi Road, Fyzabad. Judiciary representatives conducted a site visit on August 23, 2015—before the general elections—and found the property to be suitable for the purpose of accommodating a juvenile court. Subsequently, a letter of offer was submitted by the agent on August 26, 2015 to the Judiciary.

And this is the subject property that is owned by the spouse of the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, and this is evidence that the Judiciary had identified this property before the general election, and a letter of offer had been made before the general election.

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[HON. C. IMBERT]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

So I say, Madam Speaker, shame on them. They would have this information. They would have known that the Judiciary, working with the Property and Real Estate Division. They would have known that, that since June 2015, under the last government, the Judiciary, working with the Property and Real Estate Division of the last government would have identified this particular property as the most suitable property for the juvenile court project in that part of Trinidad.

They very well know that, but they would come in here—it is just like the decision of the UNC-appointed oversight committee when they met with the President in July 2015, and agreed to make available to the President assistance, including procuring names of suitable candidates and sending a list of potential candidates for regulator to the President in July 2015, months before the general election. These minutes would have been available to the Ministry of Finance, available to the government, available to the Prime Minister. But coming to this Parliament, everything in this debate has just been one pretence after another.

### **12.00 midnight**

We had a report of the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives. The Committee dealt with variations and expenditure of a number of heads: the Judiciary; the Industrial Court; the Parliament; the service commissions; the Statutory Authorities' Service Commission; The Elections and Boundaries Commission; the Tax Appeal Board; the Registration, Recognition and Certification Board; the Office of the Prime Minister; the Ministry of Finance; the Ministry of National Security; the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs; the Ministry of Health; the Ministry of Labour, and Small Enterprise Development; the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications; the Ministry of Tourism; Ministry of Public Utilities; Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries; Ministry of Trade and Industry; Ministry of Housing and Urban Development; Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs; Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. And every Member of Parliament got this document: the Second Report of the Standing Finance Committee of House of Representatives on the consideration of proposals for the Variation of Appropriation for the fiscal year 2017. But we have been in this Parliament since yesterday, since yesterday—[*Interruption*]

And I have struggled to hear any intelligent reference to any of these Heads of Expenditure, Madam Speaker. We are here to talk about the variation of appropriation from all of these Ministries: Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs; Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries; Ministry of Housing and Urban Development; Ministry of Trade and Industry; Ministry of Energy and Energy

Industries; Ministry of Public Utilities; Ministry of Tourism; Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development; Ministry of Health, et cetera; all of these Heads of Expenditure and everything is explained. Every single thing has been explained in this document.

But I have struggled to hear a single Member on that side talk about anything that is contained in this report, nothing. The Member for Mayaro, instead of talking about the report, what we have come here to speak about, what we were convened to do, telling the Minister of Finance that I should be saying what I doing for agriculture, when the Motion before the House, if Members would only read is to approve the report of the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives. That is what we came to do, you did not even have it in your hand. None of these Members even referred to this document.

All they did for the last two days is attempt to “buss mark”, bramble and “buss mark”. And the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, I have never, never, heard such wilful political ignorance as I have heard in this Parliament tonight. Every single thing the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre said was wrong; everything was wrong; every statement he made was incorrect; every point he made was bereft of fact. Amazing. Nobody came and spoke about this report at all, Madam Speaker. So since none of them have spoken about it, let me speak about it.

We have come to this Parliament to vary the appropriation for the fiscal year 2017. As I indicated previously, there was a surplus in the Infrastructure Development Fund that rolled over from the last fiscal year into this fiscal year, and that surplus is sufficient to allow the Government to execute its development programme for 2017; it is adequate. So there is no problem in varying the appropriation from the Ministry of Finance into all of these other Ministries to do all of these projects and programmes. It will not affect our development programme for 2017 in any significant way. There will be no loss of funding for projects, projects will continue as programmed and as planned.

What beats me, Madam Speaker, the Members opposite some of them were in Government for five years, and those of them who had portfolio responsibilities, for example, the former Minister of Education who has disappeared, he will know that there are funds such as the GATE fund into which deposits are made, and that every year for the last several years there has been a surplus in the GATE fund, and therefore, the amount that is spent in any given fiscal year will be less than the total amount of money standing to the balance of that fund.

It is the same with the Infrastructure Development Fund. There is a surplus in the Infrastructure Development Fund which can now be used to deal with projects

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[HON. C. IMBERT]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

after the transfer of this \$1.3 billion. There is no significant effect on the capital programme or the infrastructure programme, and I was at pains to explain all of this and they have all been in Government and they all know this.

So that all we should have been discussing is not the transfer out of finance of the \$1.3 billion because that has minimal effect on the capital programme because the money is already there in the IDF. Not that. We should be discussing what is being done with the money.

For example, the transfer to the Parliament to allow the continued operation of constituency offices, to allow for the medical programme for the Members opposite. They made a decision in 2012 that Opposition Members of Parliament would benefit from a medical plan where there is a certain sum of money where Members of Parliament if they fall ill can access a fund managed by the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. But for some mysterious reason, Madam Speaker, even though the Minister of Health—at the time, the hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan—had brought that Note to Cabinet and Cabinet had approved it, the Member for Siparia, for reasons best known to that Hon. Member, suppressed the operation of that medical plan for Opposition Members of Parliament.

So even though there was a Cabinet decision which was reported to the House committee, Members on this side who were in Parliament at the time and had medical expenses were unable to access these funds because the then Prime Minister decided that that should not be operationalized, and not one penny was disbursed to Opposition Members of Parliament—PNM Members of Parliament—not one penny was disbursed to Opposition Members of Parliament. Whereas on the other hand, since every single one of them was a Minister or a junior Minister, they were entitled to free medical care at the cost of the State.

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Gastric bypass.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Yes. And they used it for all sorts of strange purposes. So, let me make this clear, Madam Speaker, we are transferring funds to the Parliament to allow the medical plan [*Crosstalk*] for Members of the Opposition to get access—[*Interruption*]—Madam Speaker, I heard it behind and in front. Thank you. We are transferring funds to the Parliament to allow the medical plan that was suppressed by the last Government and particularly by the last Prime Minister and as a result not a single Opposition MP, not a single PNM Member of Parliament, was able to access any funding for medical expenses from 2012 right down to September 2015. We in this PNM administration are operationalizing that system and now they who are in Opposition will be able to access funding for medical attention.

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Finance. You original 30 minutes have been spent. You are entitled to 15 more minutes. If you wish, you may proceed.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. So one of the matters that they—I would expect them to talk about is the fact that the Government is proposing the transfer of funds to the Parliament to pay for overseas travel to allow Members opposite to travel and go to conferences, to allow Members opposite to operate their constituency offices and to allow Members opposite to get medical attention. I would have thought that this would be something that would be important to them.

**Mr. Hinds:** They could get therapy, “loss therapy”.

**Hon. Member:** You would need it.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** In addition, Madam Speaker—[*Interruption*]

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Retroactively.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** In addition, Madam Speaker, I would have thought that it would have been of interest to the Members opposite that we are transferring funds to the service commissions to top up their votes for wages and salaries; that we are transferring funds, again, to the service commissions to allow them to pay for critical computer software; I would have thought that was important; I would have thought it was important to hon. Members opposite that we are transferring funds to the Ministry of National Security to continue payment for the system contracted by them to Huawei International for the supply and installation of telecommunication equipment. That is one of their projects and we are transferring \$126 million to pay for that project. That project is costing this country \$500 million. That is the kind of debt that they put us into, \$500 million.

And I would have thought that it would be of interest to the hon. Members opposite that in this report of this standing committee, there is a request for a transfer of \$126,891,000 to continue and complete the payment for a project that they initiated and that they put on the books of Trinidad and Tobago. I would have thought, Madam Speaker, that it would be important to Hon. Members opposite that funding in the sum of \$18,563,000 was being transferred, again, to the Ministry of National Security to settle outstanding payments to Harris Corporation with respect to the supply and delivery of a digital safety communication system for a project that they initiated. I would have thought that that was important.

All of these transfers I would have thought that we could have a debate on that. That we are transferring funding to Servol; that we are transferring funding to the Accreditation Council; that we are transferring funding to allow children to receive school meals; that we are transferring \$196 million to the Ministry of

*SFC Report (Adoption)*  
[HON. C. IMBERT]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

Health do deal with trade payables, for critical services such as medical supplies, equipment, plant maintenance, food at institutions; I would have thought all of that is important, but it appears it is not, Madam Speaker. It appears it is irrelevant to the hon. Members opposite that what we came here to do was to transfer, for example, \$296 million to the Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation to pay for principal and interest payments on a loan taken out by them, and spent by them, and we are now saddled with that loan that we now have to pay back.

They spent out all the money, Madam Speaker, and then they saddle us with a \$1.5 billion loan, which they—they used all the money, and I would have thought that would have been of interest to them, to explain to this Parliament what they spent that \$1.5 billion on in that mad rush in that election year, I would have thought that was important, Madam Speaker. I would have thought that it was important to them that we are transferring \$75 million to the Squatter Regularisation Programme to provide security of tenure to eligible squatters. I would have thought all of that would be important to them.

But, nay, none of these things in here. We are here to debate a Motion to adopt this report. [*Laughter*] But nay, none of that is important to them. Instead we have to hear foolishness like: How come Petrotrin say oil production is 46,000 and you say is 76,000?—when I am talking nationally and Petrotrin is talking locally. I have to listen to that. I have to listen to the Member for St. Augustine say, “They put VAT on all food”. I have to listen to that. Madam Speaker, it has been painful, it has been painful, and— [*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** You need some Panadol then.

**Hon. C. Imbert:**—as a result, Madam Speaker, as a result, since I have attempted to address all of the matters that Members opposite refuse to address because they were not prepared. They came for this debate, they were not prepared, they were fumbling and bumbling for the last two days, completely missing the point of this matter before the Parliament. So, I have sought to bring the debate back to its moorings, to bring it back to where we are supposed to be, and with those words, Madam Speaker, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Report adopted.*



**FINANCE (VARIATION OF  
APPROPRIATION) (FINANCIAL YEAR 2017) BILL, 2017**

*Order for second reading read.*

**The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert):** [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam Speaker, I beg to move:

That a Bill to vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorised by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2017) Act, 2016, be now read a second time.

Madam Speaker, for all of the 25 years I have been in this Parliament, it has been the practice that no matter which Government has been in power that when the Parliament moves to debate the report of the Finance Committee whether it is for a Variation of Appropriation of a Supplementary Variation of Appropriation, because the Bill seeks to legalize the changes to the appropriation that are contained in the report, and because there is a rule against tedious repetition in this Parliament, it has not been the practice and, in fact, it is pointless for hon. Members to fail to cooperate and to insist that they must debate both the report and the Bill. And since the Bill seeks to deal with the report that I have just asked the Parliament to adopt, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

*Question proposed.*

**Madam Speaker:** And before I have call on any Members, I just want to caution Members that during the debate on the Report of the Standing Finance Committee, Members were allowed lot of latitude to discuss various issues, although it was the wish of the House that both matters be debated separately. However, it appears that in their contributions Members recognized that the report and the Bill were one and the same. And therefore, the Chair is going to strictly enforce the Standing Orders with respect to tedious repetition, also with respect to the Standing Order that says that:

“...it shall not be competent for any Member to raise a question substantially identical thereto in the same session except upon a substantive motion for rescission.”

And further, this being a variation, the Chair is of the view that it is caught by Standing Order 87(2), so that if Members are going to speak—and the rule says “strictly”—they will be strictly confining their contributions to the matter with respect to which the Heads of Expenditure deal with. And the rule says “strictly” and the Chair

is going to be strict in restricting Members to that. Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh** (*Couva South*): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to make my contribution on the Bill which has just been piloted by the Minister of Finance as it relates to an Act to vary the Appropriation of the sum of the issue which was authorized by the Appropriation Act, 2016.

And, Madam Speaker, whilst the Minister of Finance attempted to give us a historical lesson and in his years of being in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, we on this side have a responsibility to make our contribution and make our voices to be heard in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

And, Madam Speaker, there are some issues that I would like to raise in the context of what has been presented here in the Bill under the different Heads of Expenditure and more so some of the issues that I will raise have relevance to the workers of Trinidad and Tobago and the labour movement and, by extension, the constituents of the constituency of Couva South.

And, Madam Speaker, immediately I want to look at the issue of Head 09, the Tax Appeal Board, and the amount being increased to \$751,100. In light of the fact that we have been told that this will address the issue at the Tax Appeal Board and the impending property tax, I do not know that if given the state of confusion in the minds of the citizens of the country and the impending deadline—[*Interruption*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member, remember I said I am going to strictly enforce the Standing Orders. If you are dealing with Head 09, the Tax Appeal Board, and the expenditure \$751,100, we have been given the purpose for which that money is being varied and increased, please confine your contribution to that.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** I am guided, Madam Speaker. At the end of the day, as I said, in relation to the Tax Appeal Board I hope that this will improve the efficiency and day-to-day administration and operation of the said board in dispensing the backlog as it relates to tax appeal which exists at the said board.

In addition to this, Madam Speaker, in relation the Ministry of Education where the sum has been increased by \$180,476,866, it is important to note that within the continued work and development at the Ministry of Education and what has been outlined during the presentation that dealt with the report, I would want to raise from the point of view of the constituency of Couva South that the Sonny Ladoo Early Childhood Development Centre—[*Interruption*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member, I am not going to allow that. We dealt with

schools. I believe the Member for Caroni East went through a whole list of 78 schools. I am not allowing that.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Whilst I am guided by what you have said, I was simply raising it in the context of the interest of the constituents of Couva South.

**Madam Speaker:** Member, I heard you. Please, move on.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Thank you, and I am guided, Madam Speaker. In relation to Head 28, the Ministry of Health, the increases or the increase of \$196,500,000 in relation to that particular increase, I hope that it will go a long way at it relates to ensure that chemotherapy sessions at the San Fernando General Hospital and more so the San Fernando Oncology Centre will continue to take place on a sustained and what we would call consistent manner taking into consideration that—*[Interruption]*

**Madam Speaker:** Member, that point was raised already in the debate that just concluded. Members, the point with respect to chemotherapy treatment, the drugs for chemotherapy were extensively and exhaustively dealt with. Please, continue.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will move on to the Head 30 as it relates to the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, an increase of \$9 million. And as it relates to this particular increase \$9 million, I hope that it would be of value to the labour movement and the workers of Trinidad and Tobago based on the state of social dialogue and the industrial relations environment in the country.

It is a known fact that based on the policies that this Government has introduced over the last 20 months, and more so within the last couple of months, we have seen a number of closures of state companies and more so in one specific example the closure of the Tourism Development Company and the manner that it was done—*[Interruption]*

**Madam Speaker:** Member, I remind you of Standing Order 48(1). As I have said the debate is quite limited for the particular Head, we have what is being applied to, I will allow you to address that.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Guided, Madam Speaker. As I said, I hope that this \$9 million will—a large part will go in the direction of the operations of the National Tripartite Advisory Council.

**Madam Speaker:** Member, again, I caution you. If you can stick, the purposes are

*Finance Bill, 2017*  
[MR. INDARSINGH]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

there, if you want to deal with those purposes, I will allow you. Okay? The purposes for the \$9 million was there in the report. If you want to deal with that, I will allow you. I am not allowing you to go into anything else.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. As it relates to Head 35 and the Ministry of Tourism, I hope that part of this \$5 million will be spent in keeping the Sugar and Heritage Museum at the Brechin Castle—[*Interruption*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member, I repeat the guidance, and I really would not want to go to the next step. Please, comply with the ruling of the Chair.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am guided as it relates your sense of direction. At the end of the day, I think that there is the need, whilst the increases have been clearly spelt out under the different Heads in relation to the Government's work over the next six months, we are of the opinion that there is the need for transparency and further accountability. [*Desk thumping*] From the point of view of the Opposition, I want to give you the assurance and give those on the other side, to give them that sense of warning that we will fulfil our responsibility to ensure that we hold the Government accountable in relation to how the relevant [*Desk thumping*] increases are spent under the respective Heads. The Member for Siparia. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** I think, with your leave, I want to make sure that you do see this side of the House.

**Madam Speaker:** I just take that to mean that we are maybe all very tired.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Yes. I guess we are.

**Madam Speaker:** And I will take it in that vein. Member for Siparia.

**12.30 a.m.**

**Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar (Siparia):** We begin the debate on this Bill, which is a variation Bill, 2017, Finance (Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2017) Bill, 2017, and we note that this Bill seeks to vary Act No. 3 of 2016, and the variation is contained in the schedule, Part I, which deals with the amounts increased, and Part II which deals with the amount decreased.

Madam Speaker, with your leave, I crave your indulgence because I would like to respond before I go into the meat of the matter and the substance of the variation in appropriation, just to respond to the words of our colleague, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, and just for the record to indicate, the Minister said whilst it has been the practice to do both Motions together, the Opposition is insisting on doing it

separately. I just want to make it very clear, that we exercised our rights under Standing Order 50, which says that Motions may be debated together, but if they agreed to that procedure that was not agreed to. So we are fully within our rights to speak on this Bill [*Desk thumping*] under Standing Order 50, just to set the record straight.

So, what we have here is a variation of what was presented to this honourable Chamber, this House and to the national community in the budget debate last year 2016, for 2016/2017 fiscal year. It does not seek to supplement the amounts allocated, the amounts appropriated, but it seeks to move the amounts above. Now, when we came here last year the Hon. Minister and the Ministers on the other side would have indicated many of the items that they wanted to cover under allocations under each head—and today, and from the finance committee we have learnt of the ones that will not take place. So, what is the state of play after we leave here today, and well, of course, it goes to the Senate?

First of all, we would see that whereas the Ministry of Finance had been appropriated under Act 3 of 2016—for the Ministry of Finance—\$140 million for Caricom Development Fund, and under the IDF another \$2.629 billion. We now have a variance of minus \$19.4 million, and a further variance of a minus \$1.2 billion. So the revised estimates under these Heads, which is Sub-Head 04/009/11, Caricom Development Fund, under Head 18, Ministry of Finance which was initially \$140 million, has now been revised down to \$120.5 million. Under the Ministry of Finance, again, we will be taking out moneys by this variation of appropriation, under the Sub-Head 04/009/11, the IDF, whereas \$2.629 billion has been allocated, the revised amount now by this variation of appropriation, under the IDF, is \$1.371 billion.

Now, we have spoken of this drop or taking away from the IDF to place in other places, and the hon. Minister of Finance, if I am not tediously repeating him, but he did some of that himself, he said that it was used for other things, and that is how the process works. But I have some serious concerns under decreasing the IDF, as this Bill seeks to do, for the reasons given by the Hon. Minister, which is to say that projects did not get off the ground, projects were not started, all of this is contained in the report, so I will not go into detail. But, in a recessionary period that we are now, when we remove money from the Capital Development Programme, which is the IDF, then we are in fact further decelerating, detracting from growth.

**Madam Speaker:** Member?

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Yes, Ma'am.

**Madam Speaker:** I will caution you with respect to Standing Order 55(1)(b). That

*Finance Bill, 2017*  
[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR SC]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

point has been laboured already in the debate just recently concluded.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Hon. Speaker, I am dealing with what is before us. I am looking at what is being varied, either up or down. We are on a Bill which we have not debated, we did the Finance Committee Report, but I am seeing that we are taking away from these Heads and, with the greatest of respect, is it that we are not to comment on these at all? I agree that we must stay in 87 and confine ourselves to what is before us, but this is before us, and I seek your clarification, Madam.

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Members, I indicated, the report forms the basis for the Bill. When Members debated the report they were allowed considerable latitude to deal with all matters, whether contained in the report, it was wider than the report. In fact, as I said before, Members even went into the Bill, and therefore I am of the view even though the Bill is before us, and as you quite rightly pointed out, according to Standing Order 50, it is the right—and nobody wants to curtail that right. However, my ruling is that it is an abuse of the Standing Orders for us to now, at this stage, go back to matters we have just recently concluded.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** I am guided. With great duress, I am guided by the ruling of the hon. Chair of this House. [*Interruption*] I am guided. I am guided. I may have a different view, but I take the ruling of the hon. Madam Chair.

So, let us move on. Head 40, Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, we now have a variation down. So, whereas by Act 3 of 2015 there was an estimated appropriation of \$801 million, we are down now be \$35 million to 766, which came from the explanation given as a shortfall in subsidy on the sale of petroleum products. So, those were the decreases, and then we came to the increases which are contained in the Schedule, Part I of the Schedule. In this we see increases going to the Judiciary, for the Industrial Court, for Parliament, Service Commissions, Statutory Authorities, and so on. All the various Heads as carried in this Bill.

I have a concern with Head 22, which is the Ministry of National Security, where I see that \$149.4 million has now been added to the original allocation to the Ministry of Finance—Ministry of National Security. And whether Madam will allow it or not, this point has not be raised, and it has to do with when we came with Act 3, we are varying Act 3 of 2015. With Act 3 of 2015, we were told that the moneys under the Ministry of National Security, which we are now varying, that those moneys would be used for several things to help us in the fight against crime. And one of those was with the municipal police officers and the utilization and recruitment of more of those persons. I

have seen no allocation even then, and now in this variation, to take care of that promise. I have seen no allocation, nothing in the variation, \$149.4 million, nothing has been done with respect to the joint border patrols. So, several things that were promised under Act 3 of 2015, which today we are seeking to vary, have not materialized, did not happen, did not, self, come to pass. [*Desk thumping*]

I see under Head 39, the Ministry of Public Utilities, we are getting an increase of \$275 million, explanations given why we are given this. And given the original allocation to the Ministry of Public Utilities, now getting an additional \$275 million, we have had no reprieve, and in fact it has become only worse with respect to the supply of water to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] So, I raise that issue. Should we give them more money? Will they perform?

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(1), this is not relevant.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Yes, it is.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** It is not.

**Madam Speaker:** One minute please. I would allow it because there is a supplemental to WASA, and therefore I will allow it.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** I thank you, Madam Speaker. So, under the Ministry of Public Utilities, \$275 million being allocated. This is Head 39, and we still have serious problems with respect to WASA.

My colleagues have spoken, as we all know, earlier, and the Member for Chaguanas West, I think, and also for Couva North, on the management issues at WASA, but I feel very constrained that by the time we come to the end of the fiscal year additional moneys being given, that we would hope that the Minister of Public Utilities would have improved the supply of water to citizens.

Another Head—well, we did not speak at all. In fact, I was very surprised that many major Heads and Ministries were not accounted for at all in this mid-term review from Members on the other side. Then we come to other Heads that are being varied. The Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, again in the original allocation the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development is being given the variation of an additional \$9 million. We raised here and elsewhere in the public domain, the loss of jobs to so many people, and the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development had promised they will

*Finance Bill, 2017*  
[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR SC]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

bring legislation. A year later, no legislation, none for the protection of workers.

**Madam Speaker:** I would not allow that, please.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** More money we have is being expended—

**Madam Speaker:** And, it is the same reason I do not think I have to repeat it.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Tedious repetition. We see here also an increase to the Ministry of Health, and if I may say so, it might be the praising time, but I really was impressed by the contribution from the Member for St. Joseph. I will not go so far as the hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan did, but I was impressed by the contribution made, and to take on board the projects and programmes.

An increased allocation is being given to the Ministry of Health to the tune of \$196.5 million, and therefore this is an area that is sorely lacking and it is an increase I think that is well justified and well needed to increase their allocation. But the issue of the shortage of drugs, I hope this will help with that aspect in terms of citizens. I mean, up to today people are being turned away for chemo from the San Fernando General Hospital, I am told. So, Minister, you are getting \$126 million more—

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Would you give way, please.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** I certainly will. I am sorry, make sure you do not fall afoul, constrain yourself.

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** I am just responding to you. I made it clear today that the chemotherapy as promised was mixed at St. James yesterday and delivered to San Fernando today, and that will continue.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Thank you for the clarification.

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** You are most welcome.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** I trust, Minister, we may be putting a system in place that it is not when the problem arises you mix it today to send tomorrow, but you in fact have a management, first-in first-out on a regular basis so that we do not have this problem with respect to chemo, and which raises the Oncology Centre. I pass there most times when I am coming here—

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Speaker, 48(1).

**Madam Speaker:** Member, it may have been that you may have been



attending to other pressing matters at the time, but there was an extensive discussion on the chemo treatment, the mixing of drugs, nothing here deals with the Oncology Centre, and therefore I rule that it is irrelevant. Please move one.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Thank you, Madam, I will try to stay within the Standing Orders and within the appropriate variation Bill. We look at the allocation to the Ministry of Education, an increase of \$180.4 million, and in the explanations given we see the issue of laptops, so that is clearly before us in terms of what some of that money is going to be utilized for. And whilst that is laudable—

**Madam Speaker:** Member?

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Yes.

**Madam Speaker:** Again, tedious repetition, laptops [*Interruption*] were extensively dealt with by several Members.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Well, I would just read every one of the Heads and just say they were increased, and I think I would fall within the Standing Orders.

**Madam Speaker:** Go ahead.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** So, the Judiciary is getting \$20.5 million more, which will take the Judiciary to a revised allocation of \$378.1 million. The Industrial Court from this is being given an additional \$4 million, which will now take their allocation to \$40 million, whereas it was \$36.5. The Parliament is getting an additional \$209.4 million, up from \$199.4 million, and I welcome that increase to the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. The work done by this Parliament is tremendous, up to all hours of the day and night, so we welcome any increase to the Vote of the Parliament.

Service Commissions, estimated \$67.2 million, now varied by \$4.9, to bring us to \$72.216 to the Service Commissions. And I see tremendous pressure being put on our Service Commissions with respect to the JLSC, but that is for another forum. Statutory Authorities, \$5 million first, added 770 to bring us to \$5.872. At the end of all of these increases nothing has changed in terms of what was the allocated expenditure, the appropriated amounts in total at the end of the mid-term review. The numbers will remain the same as appropriated by Act 3 of 2016, and the total appropriation with respect to the statute we are seeking to vary, which took us at a total under all Heads of about, I think it was about \$45 billion, being appropriated there and we are back to that \$45 billion.

*Finance Bill, 2017*  
[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR SC]

*Thursday, May 11, 2017*

So, my question—and we will not get that answer—is where are we going to get the revenue given what the Minister has said, we are never allowed in the Finance Committee, which rightfully so, through Standing Orders, to raise issues of revenue. But, in order to spend this, we first have to make it, and we have heard nothing about where the revenue is coming from.

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

**The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert):** Madam Speaker, I just want to thank you. I did not want to precipitate a protest by the Opposition that we were muzzling them and they cannot speak. [*Interruption*] You know, Madam Speaker, they like to say these things. [*Interruption*]

**Madam Speaker:** Members, remember I had indicated it might be that it is late so I am getting a bit difficulty in hearing, so I will ask Members to comply with Standing Order 53. Minister of Finance, if you could kindly speak into your mike.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Oh, certainly, Madam Speaker. What I was saying, I did not want to precipitate a protest by Members opposite. They like to protest, and scream, and shout that they are being muzzled, so that is why I took a little while to stand up. [*Interruption*] Now that I have been given the opportunity to wind up and nobody on the other side has jumped up, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a second time.*

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 87(2), I now beg to move that the Bill be read a third time and passed.

*Question put and agreed to:* That the Bill be read a third time.

*Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.*

#### ADJOURNMENT

**The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):** Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday, the 19<sup>th</sup> day of May, 2017, at 1.30 p.m., at which time we will do the Bail (Access to Bail) (Amdt.) Bill, 2017.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 12.48 a.m.*