



REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Debates of the House of Representatives

4th Session – 10th Parliament (Rep.) – Volume 21 – Number 6

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)**

THE HONOURABLE WADE MARK
SPEAKER

THE HONOURABLE NELA KHAN
DEPUTY SPEAKER

Tuesday 17th September, 2013

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

SESSION 2013—2014

VOLUME 21

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 17, 2013

The House met at 10.30 a.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from Mr. Jack Warner, Member of Parliament for Chaguanas West, who has asked to be excused from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Member seeks is granted.

STANDING ORDERS

(REFERRAL TO STANDING ORDERS COMMITTEE)

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion:

Be it resolved that the Standing Orders of the House of Representatives be referred to the Standing Orders Committee for consideration and report within the current session.

Question put and agreed to.

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2014)

BILL, 2013

[Fourth Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [September 09, 2013]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Mrs. Paula Gopee-Scoon (*Point Fortin*): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good morning to all. Firstly, let me congratulate the Leader of the Opposition and Member for Diego Martin West for an excellent contribution on the budget and one that is certainly befitting of a leader.

Mr. Speaker, whilst I have a tendency to be kind and certainly will thank the Ministry of Finance and the Economy and the staff of the Ministry for the great effort they must have exercised in the preparation of this year's budget, I will be frank. The statement was, at best, anecdotal, lacking specifics, repeating previous

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years' achievements and forever conceptualizing and low on fertilizing, and mind you, not at all an Immaculate Conception. [*Desk thumping*] I therefore do not find favour with the budget.

Within the presentation, the Minister of Finance and the Economy gave very high accolades to the hon. Prime Minister and her team for what he called, responsible economic leadership, the Prime Minister being distinguished for public affairs and creating conditions for higher levels of confidence.

Mr. Speaker, this is the very Member, the hon. Prime Minister herself, who in her reply to the Appropriation Bill of 2008—she was standing in for her guru, the hon. Basdeo Panday—the Prime Minister quoted Arthur Newcomb:

“Show me the leader and I will know his men. Show me the men and I will know the leader.”

And I do not think I need to comment any further because the people spoke about this team in the Tobago election; they did so in the Chaguanas West by-election; they will follow suit, if necessary, in St. Joseph, and the local government election, certainly to come. [*Desk thumping*]

I again quote the hon. Prime Minister on that occasion:

“And the *Bible* tells us, when the blind lead the blind, they shall all fall into a ditch.”

And all I have to say about that is, how prophetic, Mr. Speaker.

Miss Hospedales: Yes! [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Again, I make reference to the *Hansard* of September 26, 2008, when the Member spoke to the, and I quote:

“...Government's ongoing deliberate ignorance of people's needs, and the indifference to their plight of living in a country overtaken by scourges of high cost of living, crime and social disorder...”

Ever so current, Mr. Speaker, and this is the state of play as it is. So Member for Siparia, I believe you should eat your own words. And the PM went on to say, and I quote again:

“Regrettably, this Government is lacking in all precious things, gentleness, frugality and humility, and so they do not have the capacity to translate intention into reality and sustain it.”

Now, I think this is what seems to fit well with this Government. [*Desk thumping*] Gentleness? Not with the unjustifiable manhandling of the citizens of east Port of Spain during the sham state of emergency called by you. Frugality? Spending \$200 billion over three years with little to show for it.

Miss Hospedales: Little.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Humility? Not with the imposition of the proportional representation legislation on the people of Trinidad and Tobago without consultation and their understanding of the proposal and how it affects them; total contemptuous behaviour by this Government towards the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And they are hoping to have us sanction the spending of almost \$0.17 billion per day. That is the spree that they are on. That is what it is. It is almost \$170 million a day, and this is what is being framed as, “Sustaining Growth, Securing Prosperity”. And I say, prosperity for whom?

Miss Hospedales: That is right, for whom?

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Mr. Speaker, I want to use the Member for Siparia’s own words in 2008: “It’s a hoax.” It is a hoax, Mr. Speaker, not when people are living in poverty, not when businessmen and investors are nervous about doing business here, not when people are scared for their lives. That is the position of the reality of today, Mr. Speaker.

I will just glance a bit at the economy because I think it has been dealt with quite much by the Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Diego Martin North/East and all of my colleagues as well, and I think that the Chief Whip will do some great justice to the economy in her winding up.

But let me look at some comparables. The hon. Minister, in his presentation, drew attention to the World Bank Group’s Annual Analysis—Doing Business Report, selecting the fact that our world ranking has improved from 76 in 2011 to 69 in 2013, a jump of about seven points.

Now, that sounds more sensational, I would admit but, really, he should have compared 2012 to 2013, which was but a one-point change in rank, just a minimal shift upward. [*Interruption*] But still, I looked within and the concerns which remain would be, for a fact, the five-point drop in starting a business, and the three-point drop in dealing with construction permits, et cetera. The thing is, if we are going to be realistic and to give the public assurances that we want to improve, we have to look at the negatives. If we are serious about improving, that is where we start. It is not about selling Brownie points.

Now, the Minister did not choose to speak to the World Economic Forum’s Global Competitive Index, which has been addressed in the local press lately and which, in my view, is the more trumpeted report dealing with competitiveness.

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So that the Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development, within the week preceding the budget, sought to justify this country's deterioration to a ranking of 92 out of 148 countries—a drop of eight from the previous year—by reason of a reclassification as an innovation-driven economy, which, I agree, that there might be some merit in but, certainly, it does not by any means, negate the fact that in many areas, the country's position has been unfavourable. So that we move from 81 in 2011—2012, to 84 the following year and to 92 now. Anybody can tell that that is a downward slide. However you wish to analyze it, things have worsened and we are less competitive.

What stands out is the performance of the macroeconomic environment because whilst you sing the blues, this has fallen more than 30 spaces, from 19 to 52, and this is not a typo. If it is, the Minister can correct me when he is winding up. And, indeed, the hon. Leader of the Opposition and my other colleagues dealt with the true situations, as I said, and you have more to come on it.

But, again, I looked within that report as to what are the most problematic factors for doing business, and it is that all of the top four indices had really remained the same and, in fact, crime has shifted upwards to the number one position. And I ask myself: Are these not the very reasons that you campaigned and you were given office?

The reality is that you never really got a grip on any of the issues of crime and theft, inefficient government bureaucracy, corruption and poor work ethic in the labour force—no bang at all, Mr. Speaker. They just have not been able to shape, to transform or to positively influence the way business is done in this country. And if anything else, Mr. Speaker, that is an example of poor leadership. [*Desk thumping*]

Miss Hospedales: Very poor.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: So I went within that report to look at the 12 pillars, and those aspects which will concern us most. I really do believe the devil is in the details, so let me look at some of it.

Intellectual property protection dropped from 81 to 91; diversion of public funds remained at 89 but pretty low when you are considering out of 148 countries, public trust in politicians dropped from 104 to 111; irregular payments and bribes dropped from 85 to 95; favouritism in decisions of Government officials dropped from 109 to 125, out of the 148 countries; wastefulness of Government spending dropped from 78 to 96; business cost of crime and violence from 139 to 145—almost last; reliability of police services from 117 to 121;

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ethical behaviour of firms, 104 to 118; strength of auditing and reporting statistics, 91 to 95; efficacy of corporate boards, 114 to 116; available airline seats, 91 to 95.

And when you look at the pillar under “Macroeconomic environment”, Mr. Speaker, from 28 to 51: Government budget balance percentage GDP, from 28 to 51; growth national savings from 15 to 43; inflation from 77 to 129; general Government debt percentage of GDP, from 48 to 68—not at all good. And it goes on to address health and primary education and so on, goods and market efficiency and so on; number of days to start a business, 123 to 127. This is out of 148 countries; agricultural policy costs, 104 to 113—not at all good; imports as a percentage of GDP, 93 to 111.

Looking at “Labour market efficiency”, cooperation in labour employer relations, down at 134; women in labour force ratio to men, 91 down to 94. Looking at “Financial market development”: ease of access to loans, 77 to 93; venture capital availability, 87 to 81.

And I could go on and on and on: capacity for innovation at 123. All the hype from the Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development, no improvement at all. Company spending on research and development, 100 to 117—very, very poor leadership, Mr. Speaker. I could say not at all respectable of our country under the PP governance, Mr. Speaker.

10.45 a.m.

I look now at the growth rate—real GDP growth rate—and the Government seems to be comfortable with its positive economic growth rate over the last four quarters which it is touting at 1.7—which the Member for Diego Martin North/East is already questioning—and you wish, it seems to me, to compare your progress with the rest of the Caribbean and the EU and Japan and so on, and other non-energy and non-commodity producing countries. Respectfully, I find that you should compare yourself with energy and commodity producing countries, and within there you would find how you are really performing.

Within the Caribbean, 2012/2013—I am talking about real GDP growth within the Caribbean—Guyana, 4.8 and 3.3; Suriname, I only have the figure for 2012, 4 per cent; Trinidad and Tobago, the best that we could muster and I am giving you this year’s projected of 1.6. So really, we are underachievers. When you look at the other energy producing countries: Venezuela, 5.5; Russia, 3.4; Saudi Arabia, 6.8 and 4.4; Qatar, 6.6 and 5.2; China, 7.8 and 8.0; well the United States, 2.2 and 1.9, but you know of their very burdensome debt situation; Iraq, 8.4; Mexico, 3.9

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and 3.4. Really, Mr. Speaker, we are the lowest in terms of real GDP growth, and this Government wants to congratulate themselves as being under quality stewardship of the economy. That cannot be so. What have they done with our oil and gas revenues?

I do not doubt the Minister of Finance and the Economy's capability because the record of his success in FCB is there, but just look at the comparisons, Minister of Finance and the Economy—through you, Mr. Speaker—not at all good. So for 2012, looking at all the countries in the world in terms of real GDP growth, we are at position 172 out of 220 nations under this PP Government. That is World Bank data. And when you look at the many African countries, Mr. Speaker, late in the game in terms of energy, but certainly ahead of us in terms of growth. Ghana in 2012, 7 per cent; Tanzania, 6.9 per cent; Mozambique, 7.5 per cent. Now, I am not an economist, but my sense tells me that you just have not established your economic priorities and managed these effectively. [*Desk thumping*]

The kind of priorities that are necessary for all countries, given the global economic scenario, priorities which will improve the fundamentals of Trinidad and Tobago's economy and society in the long-term and boost its longer-term growth prospects. What you have been doing is really surviving on oil and gas prices. That is it. But in terms of reforms that are market-oriented, which is the key to reinvigorating the private sector—non-existent. It is either that you know or you do not think it is politically expedient to do so. But really and truly, you have failed us in your diversification process, and whilst there is a lot of hype about the creation of a sophisticated non-energy sector, the fact is a well-developed workable plan has not been mapped out with timeliness, et cetera.

You do not have a fair and equitable development agenda as well. You failed to develop revenue and expenditure reforms; you have failed the business sector: large, medium, small and micro; [*Desk thumping*] and there is every indication of a stymied private sector. Because while there is an accumulation of excess liquidity in the system, there is still a weakness in credit expansion by commercial banks to the private sector, and those are your words.

The balance of visible trade has declined, both exports and imports. There is also a drop in the all-items productivity index and this, of course, is evidenced by no growth in the manufacturing sector except for chemical and non-metallic minerals. Just look at it. Very, very irresponsible behaviour when it comes to the economy. You are bringing back the property tax. No problem, but the point about it is, you are phasing it in and leaving it to us to deal with when we resume office [*Laughter*] to institute it at the level of the homeowners.

Mr. Partap: Wishful thinking.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: You are leaving all your burdens for the PNM. [Crosstalk] Mr. Speaker, just look at the ultra-low sulphur diesel plant which they are aware comes on stream at the end of this year. There is an expectation that you will have two grades of fuel, two grades of diesel available to this country. Obviously, one is going to be at a higher cost. I would think so. Well if that is the case, well say so. You do not want to say it because you have a local government election coming, but you do not want to speak to that. But the idea is if you have made an investment, if an investment has been made behind a plant and you are going to be producing two qualities of diesel, there must be some price differential. I would have expected that something would have been said about that in the budget, but I guess it is not politically expedient, again. But I term that irresponsible governance.

Mr. Speaker, I am concerned about the level of unemployment which you talked about being full, but I can tell you, in Point Fortin and La Brea, it is 25 clocking 30 per cent and I want to suggest, with the expansion of the highway to Point Fortin, that the e TecK park in Point Fortin be placed on the front burner and that there be some kind of consideration of incentives to have particular labour incentives, businesses as well, placed in this park.

The south growth pole, my colleague spoke about that yesterday and I just want to add that it is both scandalous and indecent that within the *Public Sector Investment Programme 2014*, key initiatives for 2014, there is little or no worthy mentionables for the south-western peninsula. It seems as though south has now become east of the south-western peninsula. When I looked at the PSIP 2014—2016, the focus is on port development—it is there in writing—fishing industry, manufacturing, support services and agriculture. Therefore, we need strategic steps for the development of these, not just lip service, not just glib remarks, and then more than that, we want to hear what you have to say about industrialization. We are awaiting that. Millions of dollars have been spent on infrastructure and it is sitting there and it is wasting away. We have to move on.

Minister of Foreign Affairs: Generally, the Minister had little to say about the Ministry of Foreign Affairs because little has been done, and I hoped that he would have been here to hear this, but they seem to always speak of the Arms Trade Treaty. The Minister clearly enunciated, clearly said on this occasion, that the Prime Minister spoke at the United Nations General Assembly three years ago, and there it is the Prime Minister of this country initiated the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), and that is on the *Hansard*.

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We are pleased that Trinidad and Tobago has signed on, we are more than pleased that we have ratified the ATT at all, but we find it ironic that you would boast of being responsible for this treaty and say that you had this great hand in it, when ironically you really have no control over the arms and ammunition. There is certainly an unregulated trade in arms and ammunition that has grown under you and, as I said, you have no control. You have not been able to stem the flow.

Nevertheless, if you had not halted the OPV contracts, we know that we would have been in a better position. Yet still, you have bought all the six FPCs and only three are running right now. Three are not working and that is because you have not signed any maintenance contracts. Maybe your friends are not interested in maintenance contracts. Of the three, one is involved in running up and down to Carrera, so only two FPCs are working. So you are not in control of arms and ammunition which enter your country, but let me speak to the arms treaty.

You would know, of course, that in Trinidad and Tobago the Preparatory Regional Workshop on the Negotiation of the Arms Trade Treaty was held right here in Trinidad in 2010, July 5-6. If she had introduced it in August at the General Assembly, what would we be doing with a workshop here on negotiation of the treaty in July 2010? So let me for the record, inform the public that it is in 2006, the UN General Assembly requested the UN Secretary General to establish a group of governmental experts to look into the feasibility, scope and draft parameters for a comprehensive legally binding instrument establishing a common international standard for the import/export and transport of conventional arms. There is where it started.

The report of that group was concluded in 2008 and prompted the General Assembly to start discussions focused on the possible Arms Trade Treaty open to all member states. By the end of 2009, 153 states had agreed on a timeline to establish this strong and robust Arms Trade Treaty. That is the history, Member for Tunapuna—I hope you are hearing me—on the Arms Trade Treaty that we have just signed. Very early, there were preparatory committee meetings and they were planned from 2010 to 2012, leading up to this diplomatic conference. I find it very, very, very poor that you would come to this House and actually mouth an untruth about this. Very, very, very unsatisfactory.

I looked at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and I first looked at the expenditure and really, with regard to acquisition of physical assets, plans to purchase properties in Miami and Toronto and upgrade several missions, none of it materialized, but they did admit that implementation was slow. I want to tell you under the last administration, two and half years we were there, we were able to—

and I am only talking about the physical assets because I am comparing your expenditure here—renovate Knowsley in three months and construct extensive offices at the back; purchase properties in Washington, Canada and New York; we were planning the diplomatic academy. I looked in the estimates as well, you had it last year. This was to facilitate staff training. That is an entirely PNM conceptualized project. It did not take place. You have put it back in there. Well, I am looking forward to that diplomatic academy coming on stream.

I noted the listing of all staff positions and, again, I think there are a number of vacancies. You need to attend to the contract officers. We brought in a number of contract officers to fill outstanding positions and they are being called upon to fulfil duties a lot earlier than anticipated. So, I am saying that these contracts officers need to be converted to foreign service officers and the necessary promotions done. I would really like some attention to that so that you can improve the morale in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

A lot of extensive trips took place and considerable expense has been incurred by the Ministry, the Office of the Prime Minister and other Ministries to Brazil, India, Washington and so on, under the disguise of business trips. The taxpayers of this country need to know of a return on these investments. What has come about of all of these grand business trips?

To other projects coming out of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Minister has said nothing about waiver of the Schengen Visa for travel to Europe which was a PNM proposal under the last administration and which has been approved by the EU already. When will it take effect? The public wants to know about that. What is the delay in the establishment of the Trinidad and Tobago mission in China? And again, an agreement signed under the last PNM administration. There has been an array of protocol gaffes and, again, I want to enquire, during the last year, particularly during the visit of the Chinese, what steps have been taken to avoid these? It is our image that is being affected.

There have been particular appointments to Ministries—Ministers added; a Minister, that is—and that has attracted international attention, not of the best kind. And again, our image has to be worked on and I want to know what you are doing to improve that as well. The effectiveness of the missions is in question. There have been complaints of service, particularly in the New York Consulate, and the view out there is that the offices have adopted a posture of party political spaces with an absence of a national agenda.

So it is imperative that these missions function effectively to achieve what is a positive image of Trinidad and Tobago as a small country with major

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achievements, distinguishing ourselves at multilateral forums as well. Generally, there has been an absence of achievements coming out from our missions, in particular, in terms of our economic including our energy, tourism and trade interests and our security interest. The missions are not addressing our country's development agenda.

Overall, the lack of policy in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, except for travel under the disguise of showing the country, is most transparent, and I only could assume that the status quo remains, that the foreign policy articulated by the PNM remains, but it is not executed. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I wish the PP to portray and I wish the world comes to know Trinidad and Tobago as a model for other small developing states, committed to the transparent management of its economic and social resources, because it is a principal member of the global community, because it is an effective regional leader and because it conducts its relations not only on the basis of respect for the rule of law, but the sovereign equality of nations, the non-use of force and the dignity and fundamental human rights of all peoples, but also the awareness of the humanitarian responsibilities of the global community. That is a foreign policy vision PNM style. [*Desk thumping*]

11.00 a.m.

Now that brings me to our neighbours, Caricom. Let me start by saying that there is an expectation of Trinidad and Tobago to work with Caricom nations to strengthen the movement institutionally, and certainly, successive PNM Governments have served to strengthen this relationship with Caricom, leaving us in a position, Trinidad and Tobago, where we are regarded as leaders in the region. In the last three years since this Government has been in power, there has been a crippling of this relationship leaving a wedge between us and gaps which altogether have not benefited us as a nation, and I am not going to go over these. But obviously, your Government is bereft of policies and we are just treated to clichés.

I looked on particularly at the 40th Anniversary of Caricom and, of course, the appointment of our Prime Minister as Chair of Caricom as well, and I heard the usual clichés: strength in unity, continued dialogue and collaboration in regional security, fresh initiatives in fighting crime and drug trade, developing regional mechanisms to combat mutual threats to security and so and so and so on; all of the above, Mr. Speaker, when we know that this Government has failed in these various responsibilities locally [*Desk thumping*] and these are matters over which they have no control.

Miss Hospedales: True!

Miss Ramdial: Says who?

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: But with regard to Caricom, the budget documents were very silent on policies or plans except to recite the dreadful state of the economies of the Caribbean and, of course, the trade figures, with no suggestions as to how we may shore up or bolster the trade imbalance given their grim economic scenario.

I was able to glean from the Minister of Foreign Affairs' presentation at an ECLAC meeting in Chile and, indeed, the Minister came here and spoke a lot about a convergence policy. Nice paper you presented, Minister; interesting reading, very academic, speaking to integration based on a new development paradigm, making reference to this new economic space and a converging strategy: a new economic model based on resource clustering strategy. So he came here and gave all this rhetoric this time, a very textbook approach, but Minister, this really—Mr. Speaker, through you, this needs to be translated to policy. I am sure this has not gone to Cabinet because they are not interested. There is no real strategic plan with key deliverables as to how to jump-start the process to reinvigorate Caricom.

Miss Hospedales: Hmmm!

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Then, of course, the Minister, when he came to the House yesterday, spoke of a new model of convergence without integration which I do not have a problem with, if that is the model that you want to put forward, but the point is, we must address the integration issue, at least from a standpoint of governance so that there is a change in the nature of governance arrangements and the decision-making process. And I expect this country to play a pioneering role here, developing solutions for the integration, developing on a cooperation platform, in other words, an effective integration of planning and decision-making in respect of these economic spaces. So that at the end of the day, there is a greater yield of significant economies of scale and greater efficiencies in operations, but at the same time, moving ahead with a few projects.

Now you have talked about this Guyana initiative. This Guyana initiative, honestly, Mr. Speaker, I do not think it is really beneficial to Trinidad and Tobago. The farmers have been saying that. So that the announcement—you would think that the announcement was speaking to something to come but, in fact, Trinidad and Tobago has had private sector investment in agriculture in Guyana already and they have already been working with the Government of Guyana and so on. So that when the Minister came here, I was quite surprised,

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and he did not even speak to the investment which we already have here, which is one—which occurred from as far as 2009, where The Co-operative Citrus Growers' Association of Trinidad and Tobago, through arrangements with the Guyanese Government, they now have 175 acres under cultivation. I believe they have access to about 1,000 acres and so on, but they have 175 under cultivation.

So the Minister of Finance and the Economy should have told us how this is progressing, but of course, he could not say so, because the Minister of Food Production really has not lifted a finger to provide any assistance to this Co-operative Citrus Growers' Association of Trinidad and Tobago. I understand that they tried under their Guyana Citrus Company to meet with the Minister of Food Production when he was in Guyana but they were ignored. I do not know if it is because the CCGA has their headquarters in Laventille, but they were ignored. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, I am also informed that the CCGA wrote to this very Minister of Finance and the Economy seeking an audience in Trinidad and when he wrote to the Minister of Finance and the Economy, they were referred to the Minister of Food Production, Mr. Speaker, and I am informed that they wrote to the Minister of Food Production since November last year and they are yet to have an audience with him. Despite all of the pleadings, they have actually failed to hold a single meeting with the CCGA.

So, Mr. Speaker, all of this talk about these expeditions and so on in Guyana, really I think you should be trying to help the more impoverished economies like Grenada, St Kitts, St Vincent, Jamaica.

Miss Ramdial: What?

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: For instance, moving full speed ahead on the Grenada monetization of hydrocarbons in waters which we share; I think that there must be an identification of these economic spaces, there must be a review of the structures of production, and there must be an examination of the macroeconomic performance of the economies that need urgent assistance. So we are thinking almost immediate action, immediate implementation, but I expect Trinidad and Tobago to get the ball rolling as Trinidad and Tobago is in the Chair of Caricom as it is, looking really at long-term commitments to assist these fledgling Caricom economies out of their desperate situations.

Let me move from economic spaces to legal and judicial spaces and the subject of the CCJ, and I am going to just touch on it very briefly. Government—

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because there is a Motion on the agenda put on by the Member for Diego Martin West, and it will be dealt with there comprehensively. But clearly you have absolutely resisted the adoption of the CCJ as the final court in this country to replace the council. I am not going to rehash all of this.

Miss Ramdial: Please do not.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: But at least it deserves a little place in this debate—
[*Interruption*]

Miss Hospedales: It deserves a place!

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon:—and I will simply inform you as to how well the court has been doing. I say, in terms of the appellate jurisdiction and the original jurisdiction, there have been a number of judgments already delivered by the court, 80 in number. In terms of the appellate jurisdiction judgments, 65; in terms of the original jurisdiction judgments, 15. All of these are in the West Indian Law Reports; they are documented there so that you can see the quality of judgments that have been laid.

There are some very interesting judgment highlights, landmark judgments, that have really impacted positively in terms of the development of Caribbean jurisprudence. If time permits, I could just quote one. This is a case of the *Attorney General, Superintendent of Prisons and Chief Marshal v Jeffrey Joseph and Lennox Ricardo Boyce*, and in that ruling, the CCJ was very assertive in expressing its departure from reasonings of the JCPC in the prior case of *Lewis v Attorney General*.

What it is really coming down to it—and the leader will deal with these things in the Motion—but the case sent a strong message that presumptions in certain quarters of the *raison d'être* of the CCJ being a hanging court, to ensure the application of the death penalty, are now to be rebutted. This is a quotation from Cheryl Thompson-Barrow: “*Bringing Justice Home*”. She is from the Commonwealth Secretariat in 2008. So much to say about the CCJ, but we will deal with that at a later date.

But the point is that they have been having court sittings right throughout the Caribbean so that it is very efficient and there is tremendous cost savings. There is videoconferencing; there is a seamless network now existing throughout the Caribbean as well, so really the people of Trinidad and Tobago are demanding that the CCJ, with its exceptional standards and its performance to date, be instituted as the country’s final court [*Desk thumping*] and we expect your good

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judgment on this issue.

LIAT: yes, I am happy—yes, now that the subsidy has been removed, they are a bit on an uneven keel as regards fuel cost, but again, that does not give comfort to the intra-regional traveller because LIAT still remains a beleaguered airline that needs assistance. There is still no great assistance to the Caribbean investor, so both airlines have their own issues. Long and short, I expect that the new Minister of Transport will be dealing with these matters to ensure that regional transportation is sorted out in the best interest of the people of the Caribbean, tourism in the Caribbean and also the economies of the most dependent Caricom countries.

Now, I will just do a little bit on energy. Mr. Speaker, I do not know how my time is going.

Dr. Rambachan: You have plenty time.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Very good! I have plenty time, I have more to say.
[*Laughter*]

Miss Ramdial: Oh Lord.

Miss Hospedales: And you should; you have the right to.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Energy—[*Interruption*]
Sorry?

Dr. Gopeesingh: You talk, we will deliver. [*Laughter*]

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Oh, talking about delivery, let us go to that. Mr. Speaker, a bit on energy; much has been said already by the Leader of the Opposition, and I believe also the Member for Diego Martin North/East, but I must mention a couple of things which are near and dear to me, certainly Petrotrin, because it impacts the constituency of Point Fortin. But before I go there—an explanation.

Much has been said in the last week and indeed when the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs was here yesterday, there was talk and clarification about this historic agreement signed for the Loran Manatee Cross-border Gas Field. I checked on the Internet on the website last night, and all I saw was the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs shaking hands with his Venezuelan counterpart and the description was—the shaking of the hands upon the signing of the—

“...Historic Agreement to Develop the Giant Loran Manatee Cross-border

Gas Field.”

So that the release by the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs was very short and I believe it was short because they wish to put a political spin on it to give the impression that finally the Government has done what the PNM took 10 years to do, and that is not so. [*Crosstalk*]

What has been signed—as I know it, as I have come to understand it—is an agreement which builds on the unitization agreement which was signed in 2010, and these agreements have been built on earlier agreements which were signed in 2003 and 2007—2003, I believe was the initial Memorandum of Understanding and in 2007, it would have been the framework agreement. This current agreement—this last agreement which was signed, what it does is that it provides for a unit operator to prepare the development plan for what is to come. The agreement is for just that: a unit operator, which is a joint venture of Chevron Global, Chevron Trinidad and Tobago and PDVSA as well. It merely sets up a structure. So as I understand it, several committees are to be established and this is what it says: an oversight committee, a directing committee, which is made up of the two Governments, and also an investment company which is made up of those companies which have the licences for the project. So you are talking again companies like British Gas, Chevron TT, Chevron Global and PDVSA. Out of these arrangements, an executing entity is to emerge to work towards this development plan.

So there is no monetization agreement at all that is signed as yet, right, and I feel that is the impression that you wanted to give. So that we really need a proper release from the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs as really there is some way to go still with this. We are all anxious as well for this exercise to be completed, but the fact is it is a huge exercise involving millions, maybe billions, of dollars and it is a great and huge investment. So there is still a long way to go, and the Minister needs to put out there what the true facts are. The country is interested in the whole development process.

But really nothing has changed in terms of negotiations with regard to monetization. We are still on the same page with Trinidad and Tobago’s position being that we want to bring the gas up, we want to monetize because we have the infrastructure, and we were thinking in terms of, as the Minister said, a Train X. Venezuela’s position, however, is that they would develop their own gas for their own use to satisfy their gas shortage, and perhaps also for liquefaction in Guaira, putting up a new plant there. So that both proposals are still on the table, and it is expected only when the development plan is done that there would be a clearer

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way forward between Venezuela and Trinidad and Tobago.

11.15 a.m.

So that is the case of monetization as it is now, right. It is still as it was pre the PP Government. We have gone a step further, certainly an advance has been made, that is all well and good but you have to recognize that when you do large projects, it transcends governments; so you cannot be political about it. “Yuh cyar” seek to take credit for it. It is going to transcend many governments. What has happened is an essential step and we are happy about that.

Mr. Indarsingh: “All yuh didn” say that about the Biche High School.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: To me there is a change in posture by the Venezuelans, and we are happy about that; but we are not yet ready to go into implementation at all. This thing speaks about marine development and so on and we have not even gone there right. So obviously we will continue when we go to office, but this is all in the nation’s interest. When we go back to office, we will deal this. Right. [*Desk thumping*] As I said, this transcends governments.

Dr. Rambachan: Just a wish list.

Miss Hospedales: That is not a wish list. That is the reality.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: I really felt it necessary to bring to the public what really is happening with regard to this agreement which was signed but I will always say that I found it somewhat disingenuous in not putting the full picture forward, making full disclosure to the public, Mr. Speaker, choosing of course, to put the usual political spin on it.

As I said, I was speaking about energy, and indeed the Member for Diego Martin West spoke about it, but the fact remains, and I am speaking in the interest of Point Fortin, the Government simply has not been able to arrest the decline in oil production. And all of this Jubilee find, the big brouhaha that they have been raising, all of this, Mr. Speaker, amounts to 500 barrels per day but the Minister said 600, I give him that, 600 to 800. But beyond politics, Mr. Speaker, and in the interest of the nation’s patrimony, it is imperative, it is imperative that a conversation and a policy and an action plan so desperately needed, be given for Petrotrin.

I say so in the interest of the low employee morale at Petrotrin in terms of the skills shortages, in terms of the trade union activity that has impeded production, in terms of the general refinery and other operational challenges; but this whole

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question of skill shortages is a major one, Mr. Speaker, and it affects the people of Point Fortin. The shortages are at every level and the Minister spoke about the introduction of the apprentice programme; if that has to be done, that has to be done.

The point is, I do not think that we have been building an energy workforce at a fast enough rate and therefore we have to be serious about manpower planning and so on, a study needs to be done. So we need generally to extend the talk of competitive industries to a competitive workforce; and it is that workers must become more competitive. And I have drilled it down to the secondary schools in Point Fortin and I brought it to the attention of the Minister of Education that the secondary schools in Point Fortin have been turning out poor results. The math and English deficiencies are abysmally low—[*Interruption*—]—and of course your Government has taken away the remedial teachers.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Not at all.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: And this is in fact serious and you have not spoken about it, you have not addressed it at all. [*Crosstalk*] I suggested as well to the Minister that the curriculum be looked at. Perhaps it needs overhauling to better prepare our students in Point Fortin for the energy industry.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: You may continue, hon. Member.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have drilled this down to the level of the secondary schools and I am not going to repeat it, but what I am saying is, it needs attention in Point Fortin, you have to look at the curriculum. It needs overhauling to better prepare our students for the energy industry. “Yuh building” a highway down there where you are going to build industry as well; our students have to be prepared for that, and again, because of the unemployment situation, it is an urgent matter.

The Ministers came here—and you know I was very disappointed in the posture of the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, because this is a Minister

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who grew up on the industry, knew of the value of the industry, he was excited when he entered the Ministry; he learned so much from those who went before him, and yet still he came here and he gave—there was a posture coming out in his reporting—of arrogance—[*Interruption*]

Mr. De Coteau: Not at all.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon:—and of course—[*Interruption*]

Miss Ramdial: What!

Hon. Members: “Nooo.”

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon:—not of the—I am talking about in the reporting. I am not talking about the Minister’s personality—in the reporting. And you see, highlighting all of the benefits of the private companies, and so on—this is just an aside—as though they are benefits of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs and that is not so.

We have some companies in Trinidad and Tobago of the highest international standard and what the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs was seeking to do was to take credit for all of their achievements, and he needs to be more realistic, and I expect, when he comes to the House, a more guiding way forward for improving the level of energy business in this country.

But I go back to the question of Petrotrin; I should have expected that he would speak on Petrotrin’s model, whether it should remain the same as an integrated model, whether it should change—and I am not talking about all the businesses in the energy sector, I am speaking about Petrotrin, but I am saying I am not satisfied with what he brought to the House. I am not satisfied with the progress of the south-west Soldado reactivation programme and that project is just outside of Point Fortin.

And there is a particular incident that came to my attention over a barge and let me tell you about that, Mr. Speaker. I think the name of it might have been the eagle or something, but there was this barge being leased from a long-standing company in Marabella, I would not call the name, a company of good reputation. So that when this Government came in they were not satisfied, for whatever reasons, and they wanted the contract re-tendered. They wanted to level the playing field, so they sent out these tenders far and wide and at the end of the process, they ended up with a barge in Mexico.

They left Trinidad, with no problems, and went out and tendered for a barge in Mexico. Anyway, after the contract had been signed, the principals in Mexico requested, for whatever reason, that moneys be paid up front. This was a departure from the terms and conditions of the contract. Notwithstanding, the board gave the approval—as I said it is a departure from the contract—for moneys to be paid up front.

The next thing is that the board was advised that the barge had gone to Turkey. So moneys have been paid up front, the barge is now in Turkey. So the board decided that they will send their members, Ram and Khan, Khan and Ram—I think Ram is the one who really tried to get me out of the house in Point Fortin—but of course they sent Ram and Khan, first class of course, best hotels, maybe they had a stopover in Greece, but they sent them to check on the barge in Turkey; this is under this Government.

So they got to Turkey and guess what? No barge was found; so contract signed, they sent money outside of the contract, spent a lot of money, go to Turkey and there is no barge. So after all this wastage they wound up right in the position that they were in, which is using barge services from Trinidad and my information has it that they are probably going to get involved with the same company but of course the arrangements are becoming a little more twisted and a little bit more convoluted. And the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs really should have come to the House and reported on this. It does not sound right.

One more thing about Petrotrin, I am not happy about their corporate social responsibility policy; there is none. Donations do not amount to a corporate social responsibility and I expect better delivery from them to the people of Point Fortin. The Member again, the Opposition Leader spoke about NGC and so on, but I just have to add my bit; that I am concerned, yes a number of the company's risk profile has changed so that they are in fact earning very phenomenally high returns and they have been engaging in a lot of substantial transactions, and I am not being critical of the transactions at all.

My concern is for where my country's money is going and who is making the decisions. That is my concern. Just who are the persons involved in the decision-making of how such large sums are to be invested because, as we know, the skills shortage which I spoke of, the skills shortage is just not at varying levels within the workforce; the skill shortage is also at the board level. And there are many persons on boards who lack the requisite qualifications to be managing very large and specialized and intricate state enterprises.

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And we know, many of the appointments have been inappropriate and costly to the State. So we want to ensure that any large transactions—of course, there will be a debate on whether or not NGC should remain with the same profile or whether or not these funds should come back to the Consolidated Fund or so; but we want, in the meantime, to know that these large transactions are subject to competent boards and a competent Cabinet and a competent energy committee.

From the way I understand it, the energy committee has not been operating in the way in which it should. When we were in office, the way we did it was every Tuesday we met, the Prime Minister, several stakeholder Ministries, energy, public utilities, finance, foreign affairs, planning and so on; all of the senior—large energy stakeholders and giants, all of the ministries’ teams from the various ministries as well. I am talking about 50 persons, competence of the highest order, sifting through all the large projects and decisions before they even got to Cabinet; back and forth; but sifting through carefully before giving the blessings before going to Cabinet. That is the way the PNM dealt with the country’s business.

This is not how it is happening now. In fact, I know that the industry has been stripped of its energy expertise by this Government. I just want to say that we must have the assurance that all of these large investments and transactions are above board, Mr. Speaker.

I speak now to a couple Point Fortin matters. The San Fernando to Point Fortin Highway, Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: “All yuh like da one.”

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon:—and I do not know when we will ever get our segment of the highway done. That is the burning issue; and I am talking about Dumfries Road to the Dunlop Roundabout segment. Now you have talked about the cost of this highway, \$7.2 billion. I think you have broken it down \$5 billion—about five or thereabouts—for the cost of the highway, \$2 billion with regard to relocation and acquisitions and so on.

Now Golconda to Debe is complete but I believe that is only five kilometres. [*Desk thumping*] Five kilometres out of a highway which is 47 kilometres and you are rapping “yuh desk for dat”? Just over 10 per cent of the highway is complete and really you all came here with no details of expenditure to date. No details at all. And Minister of Finance and the Economy, can you tell me 10 per cent complete. Have you spent 10 per cent of the projected sums? Have you spent \$700 million to date? I am sure not; it is way more than that, Mr. Speaker. We really want transparency.

I believe that this statement about starting this project in November from Point Fortin, is really an election gimmick, just like this budget. And I want to tell you that the people of Point Fortin are not dunderheads and they will definitely not accept this. The point about it, to satisfy the Dumfries Road to the Dunlop Roundabout segment of this highway, you have five segments to satisfy; Dumfries Road to Paria Suites, 3.1 kilometres; Paria Suites to St. Mary's Junction, five kilometres; St. Mary's Junction to Mon Desir Interchange, 3.7 kilometres—and I do not even know if that interchange will ever be built because that Mon Desir Interchange falls into the contentious area as well.

And then of course there is the Fyzabad/Mon Desir Interchange to La Brea connector, 10 kilometres; La Brea connector to the Dunlop Roundabout, 6 kilometres; 27.8 kilometres to satisfy the people of Point Fortin that we have a highway from San Fernando to Point Fortin. You all have no track record you know, you have only done 5 kilometres; right? My concern is that we will be starting from Point Fortin and with nowhere to go so unless you could satisfy us that you have the money, that the path is clear, that everything is in place to finish 27.8 kilometres of road then we will not be satisfied; but we need full disclosure on this as well.

11.30 a.m.

I am not going to talk—I wish I could have said something about the Armstrong Report but I believe that is a matter that is sub judice and all I want to say is that I feel that the Government is being particularly strong-armed about this Armstrong Report and that you have not satisfied the public. You spent the public's money. The work was completed you—look, it never even went to Cabinet to consider the recommendations but you react in a very high-handed way and you are proceeding. You are being reckless and when the Prime Minister is asked, she does not know, she does not know. “Hum naa jaane.” What does she know? “Hum naa jaane”, Mr. Speaker. [*Crosstalk*] “Yuh like dat. Yuh like dat. Hum naa jaane.” [*Laughter*] What do you know? The Prime Minister does not know anything.

Anyway, the Point Fortin Hospital—[*Interruption*] “yuh have it right, Gopee”. Listen, Point Fortin Hospital—how much time do I have?

Miss Hospedales: About 19 minutes.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Oh, lots of time. I have to come to the Member for Couva North.

Miss Ramdial: Oh Lord!

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: The Point Fortin Hospital, I really approached this

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thing from all angles “eh”—the Minister of—where is he, the Minister of Health? And he knows that and I have already taken responsibility for not doing it but I came into office, met nothing on the table and I know after two years, when I left office, it was designed, it was tendered, it was a turnkey operation, equipment to be supplied by China Railway. This included the temporary facilities. It is all there in detail for the Minister of Health, \$675 million. Mr. Speaker, China Railway is a good company, “eh”. They did the Scarborough Hospital. People in Tobago are saying that it is looking like a hotel.

Mr. Peters: “After so much years?”

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: This Government has gone ahead—and I am not begrudging anybody who benefits from a health facility, any community at all, but they have gone ahead—and I am looking at the cost, the amount of money projected to be spent on health and the fact that Point Fortin is not getting theirs.

The Oncology Centre, it has reached one point—what is the cost?—\$1.5 billion. Now, the average cost per square metre when you are doing a project like that is US \$1,200. They have reached \$1.5 billion.

Then we are talking about the new Sangre Grande Hospital. I expect that would be \$1 billion. The Couva Children’s Hospital, what is the cost for that one; that hospital which is located close to the earthquake-prone Central Range fault line? Look at that, you have to build it to suit the earthquake that is expected of 7.5 magnitude. That is costing you \$1.5 billion. The new Arima Hospital, \$1 billion. [*Interruption*] No, no, no, I said I am not begrudging these communities; the controversial Penal Hospital, \$1 billion; the Chaguanas Health Centre promised on the hustings, that is, let us say, another half a billion. All told you are spending \$6.5 billion; a lot of money on health. I have no problem with the communities benefiting, but you cannot spend 10 per cent of that on building the Point Fortin Hospital.

Miss Hospedales: Shame on them. Shame on them.

And the Minister of Health came here and said—he said—well he did not have any records at all. He did not speak from any documents. He was just talking, plain talk but that is what it was; plain talk. He said that it had gone to Cabinet last month and—imagine it went to Cabinet and you could give me no details? I could find details on the Internet about all of these other facilities and not Point Fortin and that is the one that was listed in your manifesto turn policy by your Cabinet decision. Listed there, but you decided you are never going to get Point Fortin and you are not going to build it. All it got was an honourable

mention in the budget statement.

I researched the Social Sector Investment Programme, the PSIP 2014. The PSIP 2014/2016 which is a tall tale of fiction, no details. All they have done is they have fixed the X-ray room in Point Fortin Hospital and they are talking about upgrading the health centre and upgrading the hospital. Not good enough! And that leaves the people of Point Fortin at risk. It leaves mothers at risk, children at risk. It leaves the taxpayers of Point Fortin with negative returns on their contributions. It leaves employees of industries in the peninsula, contributing to the coffers in the country, but yet still blood given to the country but blood taken from them because you are not there to look at their health needs; really, victims of an irrational and groundless Government and you try to disguise it. You try to disguise it, but what it means is that you are not representative of all of the people all of the time and you know that.

Miss Hospedales: That is true. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: You list all these projects for us to complete when we leave office but you are not—politics for you trumps even health. That is your game. So there is no society in transition in Trinidad and Tobago or constituencies in transition. Your constituencies in your party heartland are in transition. You are not seeking the nation's interest.

While we are talking about health, the Minister came here and talked about this e-health card. He ought to have known that the pilot project was already done under us. The pilot project was in the District Health Facility in Siparia, [*Desk thumping*] in St. Joseph, in St James and you stopped it when you came in and now you are announcing it as your own.

Miss Hospedales: Deception!

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Donna Cox, the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, she had one of the pilot e-health cards. So those things are national policy of the PNM. [*Desk thumping*] I sat in Cabinet. I saw those Notes. They went to F&GP. I know about them but that is your style. It is not yours but it is yours.

Miss Hospedales: Plagiarism.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: The National Health Insurance, all that as well. We left that there for you but that is okay. I want to see you put it in the nation's best interest.

All this talk about the sea ambulance for Cedros; a sea ambulance. Now there

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is no price to be attached to health. But it is really an irrational proposal, because you have to ensure that there is a service to keep this sea ambulance in the water, with staff on board, et cetera, et cetera, in the sea waiting for an accident to happen from Cedros. It makes no sense! Foolishness! We need longer hours in the health centres and we need 24-hour service for the ambulances. That is all that it takes. [*Desk thumping*]

Member for Couva South—

Miss Ramdial: North!

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: North.

Miss Ramdial: Yes.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: How much time do I have, 10 minutes? Member for Couva North, all of this razzmatazz here last night when you spoke, you did not want to give way to me. You were talking about the desal plant.

Miss Ramdial: Yes.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: You were talking about the desal plant and I asked you to give way because you were taking all the kudos for it and so on and— [*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: Of course.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: The Member for Fyzabad is saying of course. The few words that he knows. You were talking about the desal plant and what I wanted you to know is that, really, you did not do anything. Your Government, sort of— you took over the project but it is not like you built a plant. This was done on a BOO basis; build, own, operate. We do not own the plant. Seven Seas owns the plant. They built the plant. No capital expenditure took place.

Miss Ramdial: But it is under our stewardship.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: It is under your stewardship but I am saying you must understand the scenario. It was an excellent public/private partnership done by the PNM, signed off by the PNM. [*Desk thumping*] The drought was coming. This had nothing to do with the five desalination plants. There was a drought coming in 2009, I think it is 2009. The drought never came but we then decided look, we will still do this to alleviate the problems. A lot of groundwork went into it and decided that we will not use surface water. There is a problem, in terms of quantity, and that we will go to the sea and begin to do this and again, do this reverse osmosis programme.

So we entered into this contract, signed it with Seven Seas Company or so. They built it. It is their own. It will become our own in the next 10 years, I

believe. I have not looked at the terms and conditions of it. Look, you should have said both administrations have worked well to ensure that water has improved, in terms of the south-western community and that this has had a knock-on effect right through the rest of Trinidad and Tobago because you can then push water through other sources and so on. That is what I wanted to tell you but you were not listening.

But really, we signed that contract. We did all of the—WASA did the infrastructural work. You will remember that there was a big protest in September 2009. I remember, I was in Grenada putting my child in university and the people of Point Fortin were very upset about the state of the roads. The PNM had done all the infrastructural work, because you had to change the size of the mains and so on, and the Ministry of Works and Transport refused to resurface the main road and there was a huge protest. That was all the Member for Chaguanas West ever did for the people of Point Fortin, under protest came and paved the road.

Generally, what I am saying is a lot of this work, most of it, was done by us but it is an excellent project. I am very happy that your Government chose to continue this one but you should have done also the Alutrint Smelter Plant.

Miss Ramdial: No way!

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: You should have also—[*Interruption*]

Miss Ramdial: Smelter? No way.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon:—kept the OPVs and this country's crime situation would have been in another place if we had had those OPVs with us, generally.

Then, again, I want to seek—I asked again, a second time—clarification on the La Fortune Water Treatment Plant and all you told me was done. You told me it was done. Three weeks ago I spoke to your reporting Minister, Minister Ganga Singh, he told me it was not done; that there were problems with the filter system or filter whatever and that is why I wanted clarification. You said it was done. He said it was not done. I “doh even know.”

Miss Ramdial: It is just not operational right now.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: It is not operational? Well you should have said that but you did not say that. You said it was done.

Miss Ramdial: Well, it was completed. It is completed but not operational.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Then again the PCS lab—I mean, you came here as

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if—again just looking for credits where you could get credits. That lab is all PCS Nitrogen. That is a gift to the nation, in particular to the people of Couva. It is called CSR, corporate social responsibility. “Why you feel you must hook it on as yuh own?” I mean, we are pleased for it. It belongs—it is a gift by a company—
[*Interruption*]

Dr. Khan: Rubbish!

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon:—and you must say so and you must acknowledge. It was done and paid for by PCS Nitrogen. That is what my—and it is a sustainable project.

Miss Ramdial: It is not a gift! We had to pay for it.

Mr. Indarsingh: “Why alyuh ain do something?”

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Do your research. Do your research on them. In fact, let me put on record my congratulations to PCS Nitrogen for that lab.

Miss Ramdial: And the Ministry.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: I do not believe—I said it is non-political. That is what I said; non-political. But I say thank you to the board and the staff as well.

Mr. Speaker, there are other projects in Point Fortin, that have been left undone and I speak to the Cap-de-Ville Coastal Erosion Project, which had been—I spoke to the Minister of Works recently about it. I also sent you a letter on it.

The Member for Chaguanas West, when he was Minister of Works and Transport, came to Point. Remember he spoke about this trip that he made to Point? It was really a tour “eh”. He said he came, organized the hospital, said there was going to be a hospital starting in three months. Remember he said that in this debate? Well, none of that took place. He was on a tour. He went to see where the water taxi will be berthed and then we went to see the eTeck site, then he wanted to go to the hospital site and then he spoke on behalf of all of you, without going to Cabinet and said: “You will have a hospital in three months.” Let him say that on the platform, I will deal with him. [*Laughter*]

What he did approve—and that is what you should be talking about—is the Cap-de-Ville Coastal Erosion Project. A lot of jazz, “yuh know” plenty people down there, Ministry engineers, big kind of tent and not ordinary tents you know. Do you know the marquee tents? Big tents, and so on, coastal erosion project down in Cap-de-Ville, big money being spent with completion date, et cetera,

explanation of the scientific studies and so on, Phase 1, Phase 2, Phase 3; nothing done to date. So I pass it on to the Member for Tabaquite. Minister, I want you to look at this project. Let me know if it is still on board and what can be done about it. It is a very, very serious and urgent problem.

We have had—I am seeing steps now, steps of homes now in the water. We have relocated three of those persons already. Obviously, now it is eroding at such a fast rate we have to look at relocating some more as well. But it is a serious, serious problem as I said.

Mr. Ramadhar: Where is that?

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: In Cap-de-Ville. There is a house where the people had to actually deconstruct their kitchen so that at least the rest of the house can stay standing.

Schools: Minister, Member for Caroni, you came here and of course, if I gave you a chance you will recite all the names of the schools in Trinidad and Tobago. The fact is—[*Interruption*] you were just reciting them—but the fact is, the Cap-de-Ville Government School—you came into office, that school has been under construction three and a half years, not complete and you are now telling me you have to change the contractor. I knew you had to change—[*Interruption*] Fannie Village.

Dr. Gopeesingh: “Yuh doh even know wey yuh saying.”

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: I knew you had to change a contractor from the time you came in but you took—[*Continuous interruption and crosstalk*]

Miss Mc Donald: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 40, please.

11.45 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: Please. Please. There is something called freedom of speech in this House, and the Member is being frustrated in exercising that right because of the constant commentary of interjections. I would ask Members to allow the Member of Parliament for Point Fortin—she has four more minutes. So allow the Member to speak in complete silence. Continue, hon. Member. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, Fanny Village: you have not got that going. Cap-de-Ville Government: you gave out a contract—you said you are building that, you gave out a contract—I do not know what has gone wrong with the relationship with the contractor. You are going back to give another contact again. This is the second contract you are doing for Cap-de-

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Ville.Government School. Egypt Government: it cannot happen. The next one, Chatham Government School: you said that the children would have been put in other locations over the summer holidays, and that when they come back work would start; nothing like that—nothing like that happened. [*Crosstalk*] Nothing like that happened, right? So you are talking about nine schools really have not been given the attention they deserve. You have not completed any; that is the end result of it.

Dr. Gopeesingh: [*Inaudible*]

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: You have not completed any schools in Point Fortin, okay?

Community centres: the Chatham Government School—sorry, the Chatham Community Centre, Member for Mayaro—at the stage when you came in, that was 30 per cent complete. After three and a half years you want to tell me that that cannot be finished as yet? And you have not given a report on it; that is the Chatham Community Centre.

The Point Fortin Civic Centre: when you came in again that had started. We were doing infrastructural work that has moved nowhere or moved about 5 or 10 per cent; that is where the Point Fortin Civic Centre has moved, and you are not reporting on these things. The Coronation Park Regional Sports Complex: no work done by the Ministry of Sport and no talk on it. But I am looking forward, Member for Couva North.

Miss Ramdial: Uh-humm.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: The sewer system in Techier: I know it is very antiquated and it really poses a very serious health hazard. Your Minister—I am grateful he has promised to repair it within three mounths. He has given me a point person, a Mr. Benny, and I am looking to that being done as well.

Housing: Member for Oropouche East, what is happening to the houses in Point Fortin? Three and a half years and you cannot do the waste treatment plant as yet and the sewer system? That is all you had to do to release at least 100 of the houses. You have not attended to that—waiting to give them out as gifts at election time. None of that would happen at all. You are not going to get any votes based on those houses which are due to the people of Point Fortin, and which you are taking so long to do.

So generally, Mr. Speaker, that is where I am at. I am wrapping up now. I do not believe, despite some of the negative things I have said, I do not believe that

all is lost. I am indeed a very—I am an eternal optimist and I am very optimistic about my country and its future. We remain the most successful country in the Caribbean. The country built by the people of Trinidad and Tobago over the last 51 years—

Miss Hospedales: Under the PNM.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon:—under the most astute leadership of the PNM for most of the periods. We are not a perfectly oiled machine [*Desk thumping*] but we always knew where we were going, and it is under you, and your differently-labelled political organizations that Trinidad and Tobago regressed. I am sure as a country—we have learned a lot of lessons and what I am certain about is that we are a great country. We are a very resilient people and after all has settled, the PNM will pick up the pieces and correct our wrongs and once again take our country upwards as we are used to. But the concern is, what will the country remember this Government for? What does the region think of them? What does the world think of them, Mr. Speaker? The answers are not good, because you simply have—

Mr. Speaker: Time is up.

Miss Hospedales: Time is up.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Okay, I am just wrapping up—not performed, they have not conducted their affairs with any amount of integrity.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Tabaquite, Minister of Works and Infrastructure. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Works and Infrastructure (Hon. Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very delighted to join this debate. Let me begin by warmly congratulating my colleague, the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy for presenting a budget that is—not a budget that is intended to waste the money of the country, but a budget that is economical in terms of value for money.

And also let me join my colleague, the Minister of Transport, hon. Stephen Cadiz in the comments he made yesterday on behalf—reading on behalf of the business community, in terms of their endorsement of the approach of the Government, and particularly the Minister of Finance and the Economy, with respect to the budget.

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Mr. Speaker, it is very interesting that Members of the Opposition have been very critical—as is expected of the Opposition—and they want to take credit for all the good things the Government has been able to do, especially projects which they had abandoned or projects which they failed to implement. But it is also interesting that they do not want to take any blame for the things that they are responsible for and which brought immense pain and suffering to people when they were there in office.

I would like to refer to a couple of them. I wonder if the Member for Point Fortin remembers the time that babies were wrapped in brown paper. I wonder if she remembers the state of the Mount Hope Women's Hospital, and whether she has visited there recently. I wonder if the hon. Member visited recently to see the works that have been done there, so that women in the women's hospital do not have to sit in incomplete areas or on hard areas, but the work that is being done there has made life very much more comfortable for them.

I wonder if the hon. Member remembers the state of the Carenage Health Centre which they refused to build or did not build. We have now knocked down the old building and by December of this year—

Dr. Khan: Or January.

Dr. S. Rambachan:—or January, the building is going to be built.

Dr. Khan: Start.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: The Member spoke about the Point Fortin Hospital, the Arima Hospital, the Oncology Centre and what have you. You know, it is really appalling that for 10 years they sat in office and none of these things were done and yet they are complaining, but this Government has moved to deal with the Oncology Centre. We are getting it off the ground. Something is happening. The Couva Children's Hospital is going up and a lot of things with respect to hospitals are going on in the country. So it is obvious that there is a bit of “tabanca, yuh know” about this whole matter of performance. When you see real performance, it really irks you that you did not do all of this.

Just a quick point on schools. Member of Parliament for Point Fortin, you talked about the Minister of Education not building schools. You will recall that under the previous administration you had a contractor you hired to build the Fanny Village School, and that contractor has failed to perform and we have had to fire that contractor and are now, in the process of hiring a new contractor.

You talked about the Chatham school. A contract has been awarded for that school. What is interesting is that you talked about the Cap-de-Ville school. Now, if I remember on my recent visit to Cap-de-Ville it seems—I am not the Member of Parliament for that seat, but I am there more often than the Member of Parliament herself. [*Desk thumping*] It seems to me that I saw the steel structure up on the Cap-de-Ville school. Minister of Education, you might confirm that. I wonder whether the Member really visits her constituency or whether the Member is unwelcome in her constituency [*Laughter*] and just refuses to go to certain areas, but that is a discussion I am sure for another place and another time as we will see.

Dr. Gopeesingh: “Yuh geh three schools and yuh complaining.”

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, yesterday in this House, the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas West made an accusation against me, and said that I said somewhere on Pierre Road that there will be nothing for Felicity. I want to put the record straight. Since coming into office in the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, when we visited at the request of the people of Bejucal and in particular the request of the Member of Parliament for Couva North and the president and members of the Bejucal Village Council, I visited that area, Mr. Speaker, and from the time that I came into office to now, I want to tell you of what has been completed in Chaguanas West at the request of the people of Chaguanas West. And though they may have voted out of emotion for the Member for Chaguanas West, when I am finished you will see what is true representation that knows no barriers, and representation that responds to the needs of people. [*Desk thumping*]

In the Bejucal area we completed there 13 drainage projects [*Desk thumping*] to the value of \$21.7 million. Drainage works at Bejucal:

- from light pole No. 66 to Ramatally Trace;
- and then drainage from light pole No. 66 to Adjoha Road;
- drainage works, Monroe Road from light pole No.100 to 119;
- road works on Sumaria Branch Trace off Sumaria Trace;
- Warren/Monroe Road, road works;
- drainage works, again, from Ajodha Road proceeding west, north side;
- from Ajodha Road proceeding west, south side;

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- drainage works Warren Road irrigation, canal proceeding west;
- drainage works Rampoo Trace to light pole No. 48;
- drainage works again, in Warren Road, from light pole No. 92 to light pole No. 86, and that is on the left hand side; and

These are the projects for road works in that area.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of the paving of roads, between July 26 and somewhere about the end of August, we completed 34 roads—paved, [*Desk thumping*] in the constituency of Chaguanas West; 34. I say this to you because this accusation is very, very vicious; it is meant to turn people's minds against this Minister. But this Minister is a performing Minister, a Minister who is fair to everyone and is doing work throughout this country. [*Desk thumping*] And I would not have the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas West create any image of this Minister as someone who is against any particular group or any particular area in the country. The records are here to show.

When he left, Ajodha Road in a mess

- Durga Trace in a mess;
- Moore Trace Extension;
- Ramlal Trace Extension;
- John Peter Road East;
- Bejucal Road;
- Lime Trace off Warren Road;
- Ramatalie Trace;
- Rangoo Trace;
- Mineola Boulevard;
- Fourth Avenue, in Orchard Gardens;
- Ramkissoon Trace;
- Chaitee Trace;
- Manny Dave Trace;
- Ramsaran Trace;

- Rasheed Avenue;
- Ramjohn Trace;
- Warren Extension;
- Warren Road;
- Mohanlal Street in Felicity;
- Serenity Drive off Pierre Road;
- Bolandsingh Street;
- Boodoo Trace off Pierre Road.

When he left all of these in a dilapidated state and was claiming that he represented, it was this Minister and the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, under the guidance of the Prime Minister, that went in there and did all of these works on behalf of the people. Where is the discrimination that the Member for Chaguanas West therefore talks about?

Then finally, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the URP programme. Since I took over this programme in Chaguanas West, there are 23 projects that have been either completed or approved or tendered for Chaguanas West.

So what is interesting, though, is that when the Member of Parliament was there and was asking for these jobs, you will see in the contractor's list only one particular set of contractors, who are relatives of a certain member in his office, were getting those works. But now the work has been spread to contractors across the constituency of Chaguanas West on a more equitable basis. So I wanted to debunk this idea that we are somehow against—that we are somehow discriminating when, in fact, the records are there to show something completely different. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, further to that, when we went into the constituency of Chaguanas West for the campaign, a church by the name of the Families for Jesus Church came to me and said: Minister we need some help with poverty and poor families and children who are living in very dilapidated homes. We vowed that we would build several of those homes under the self-help programme. Right now five of those homes are being constructed in Felicity for poor people, indigent people and children [*Desk thumping*] so that they can have a better place.

All the promises that we made are being kept to the people of Chaguanas West, and I would not have the Member for Chaguanas West come here and cry

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discrimination. It is something that he is doing all over the place, in order to boost his own fortunes, but the records will prove otherwise as I am showing here. The truth will always triumph and I say to you, Mr. Speaker, you will know the statement: Evil can always only travel so far, but truth will eventually prevail in one day to come. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I wish therefore to begin my contribution—

Hon. Member: “Preach dat.”

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:—by reflecting on some important statistics that were presented in the presentation of my colleague, the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy. It is important to go back to those statistics because they tell a story of competent management of the economy, and competence in the way this country’s finances and the economy are being pursued.

12.00 noon

There was positive economic growth in the last four consecutive quarters—and I want to repeat that: four consecutive quarters—driven in the main by the non-energy sector and that, too, is very important—1.6 per cent growth in 2013, following an overall growth of 1.2 per cent in 2012. This follows three successive years of decline, from 2009—2011, so there is no doubt. You can treat the statistics and twist it how you want and go back to what indices and so on, like the Member for Diego Martin North/East was saying. You can use real prices or contrived prices or what, the reality is that the economy grew by 1.6 per cent and grew over the last four quarters and grew also 1.2 per cent in 2012 following three successive years of decline. This Government must be complimented for turning around the fortunes of the economy. [*Desk thumping*]

Secondly, we need to bring foreign investment into Trinidad and Tobago. What has happened is that there has been significant inward flows of private direct investment, which rose substantially in 2012 from US \$1.8 billion, which is TT \$11.5 billion to US \$2,527 million, about TT \$17 billion—an increase of about 45 per cent.

We must be doing something right in order to be attracting, in that one period, an increase of 45 per cent in private direct investment flows into Trinidad, which means that the international investment community, as well as the local investment community, has confidence in the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Despite what the naysayers have to say, despite all the comments that

have been made in order to show a different picture of this Government, this Government has been able to attract foreign investment to Trinidad and Tobago and that is to the credit of the People's Partnership. [*Desk thumping*]

If people were not seeing stability, political stability; if they were not seeing the opportunity for economic growth propelled by the kinds of policies we are putting into place, they would take their money somewhere else. But they are seeing it here in Trinidad and Tobago and they are coming to put their money here in Trinidad and Tobago. That is a vote of confidence in the economy of Trinidad and Tobago and in the current Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Official reserves are now US \$9.4 billion, 12 months' import cover; and the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, US \$5 billion—US \$14.4 billion in gross official reserves—or, as Dr. Gopeesingh calculated, TT \$94 billion.

Dr. Gopeesingh: “In reserve, eh.”

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: In reserves.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Highest ever reserve.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Now, Mr. Speaker, I would really like those who brought this document to the Parliament and read from it, *Review of the Economy*, not to just come and read sections of it. Read it properly! Read it; do not just read sections! I would particularly refer them to pages 17—19 of this document. There are some important things in there. For example, it says there:

“At the end of March 2013, the year-on-year increase in lending by the commercial banks was up 4.5 percent...Consumer credit granted by the consolidated banking system has continued to expand, increasing on a twelve-month basis by 4.1 percent in March 2013, up from 2.9 percent in October 2012...Real estate mortgage lending remained robust throughout the fiscal year 2013, up 15 per cent in March 2013.”

What does that tell you? It means that with the construction industries on the move, people are building houses, people are investing in their houses. A person would not invest—which is part of the largest investment an ordinary householder makes—in a home or a property unless they are sure where their income streams are going to come from over the next 25 to 30 years.

So, even the citizen of Trinidad and Tobago is beginning to show that he or she has confidence in the economy and would have a job, would have a stream of income in order to pay back for that house in the future. So we must read from the document the real things and not just what appears and what you can twist into something that appears negative.

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Mr. Speaker, these statistics reinforce, therefore, the objectives of the administration of achieving a financially stable economy, as well as an economy with its signs of growth in GDP that is now, as I said, attractive to the national and international investment community. So, to have created such stability, economic and financial, and to bolster investor confidence in three years of office, Member for St. Augustine—three years of office—speaks to the sound management of the economy and the growth-oriented policies of the People’s Partnership administration.

Hon. Member: In 2010, there was no hope until we took over.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: That is right. People voted in 2010 because they saw no hope and the hope that they voted for is now coming to manifest in terms of all of these advantages at a personal and household level because this is what this Government is interested in. While this Government is interested in investments and what have you, this Government is interested in what happens to the person. How does the person improve? How does the family improve? How does the household improve? And we are adding value, as I will show you—to the experiences of the household and families—as I go along.

In the process of achieving this financial and economic stability, the citizen of this country has not been left out. For example, the recent offering of shares in First Citizens Bank is a clear indication of the desire of this Government to give to all citizens the opportunity to own a part of a profitable public asset.

I was trying to recall whether, in my living history, the PNM ever gave the small man such an opportunity to own part of a profitable asset of the country because I do not remember NEL either being set up by the PNM. I remember NEL to be a creation of when we were in office at a different time. Just to remind that the IPO First Citizens offering was oversubscribed by 3.6 times. It tells you something of the confidence people have.

My dear colleague, the hon. Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development will tell you that there is a famous statement that says, “Let labour also own part of the country; let them be part of sharing in the wealth of the country.” I am sure as a member of the Government, he would have been a very proud Minister and person to know that during his time he was also able to be part of this offering so that today the workers of this country had an opportunity to buy these shares when they worked at FCB, at a discounted price in fact.

Mr. Ramadhar: Workers as owners.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: So today, Mr. Mc Leod, the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development's dream of workers as owners is becoming a reality and that is a fundamental shift in terms of our philosophy—not only sharing the wealth, but sharing the ownership of the assets and patrimony of the country, which is the word.

That creates belonging. That creates a new commitment. That creates real citizenship in this Trinidad and Tobago, and citizenship is something that we are building—the concept and principle of citizenship—through strategies by that which we are operating.

Mr. Speaker, the empowerment of the citizen under the PP's administration will continue, and there are numerous examples which support citizen empowerment. For example, we have set as one of our goals, food security. Security of the nation also depends on your ability to feed your citizens, and the programmes and the policies of this Government have led to a situation where agriculture is now making a positive contribution to GDP and for that the Minister of Food Production and the then Minister in the Ministry, Mr. Seemungal, the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, and the previous Minister, Sen. The Hon. Vasant Bharath, they must all be complimented for what they did in order to turn around this situation.

Agriculture, which has been the whipping horse of administration after administration, is becoming a blue-eyed boy in this administration.

Miss Hospedales: “That is why the farmers crying”.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: The farmers in this country are going to continue to be given their rightful place and the respect they deserve and the support they need in order to feed the nation. Today, we pay tribute to the farmers and agriculturists of this country.

In the empowerment of the small man, the Land for Landless Programme, that is empowerment of the small man; the 2 per cent loan for individuals with income below \$8,000 wishing to acquire a house.

Hon. Member: Hope. Hope.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Hope. The expansion of the GATE Programme: they went and campaigned in 2010 saying we were going to close down the GATE Programme. We have expanded the GATE Programme; increase in national insurance retirement benefits; one thousand jobs back office processing, creating

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1,000 new jobs; the UWI South Campus; the nursing school in El Dorado, the La Brea Technology Centre. I heard my friend, the Member for La Brea speaking, but he did not speak about the La Brea Technology Centre—[*Interruption*]

Miss Hospedales: He did.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:—the Skills Technology Centre in Penal and Mayaro, the Caterpillar Automotive Centre at Woodford Lodge, Chaguanas—all of these—and I do not have time to go through the myriad of things we are doing, but I want to ask people to refer to this document, *Social Sector Investment Programme*. In this document, if you read it carefully, you will see the hundreds of programmes being implemented by this administration in the interest of empowering the citizens of this country.

Mr. Ramadhar: And they are spread throughout the country.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: That is right, Member. They are spread throughout the country. Read it! Read it and you will see what is in this development in terms of people-centred growth and people-centred development.

Mr. Speaker, the point I wish to make is that citizen empowerment is being facilitated by the People's Partnership Government and for those who ask where we have been using the moneys approved in the budget, let me say proudly that the Government is teaching its citizens to fish so that they can become empowered.

Criticism has been made—and it has to be noted—about the size of transfers and subsidies. The Government is aware of this, but with empowering persons through the programmes which we are facilitating, I am sure that this itself will be controlled.

Job relevant skills: increasing efficiency in public institutions; reducing poverty; this matter of the transfers will, of course, be addressed.

Mr. Speaker, in this regard, it is important for me to note that there has been no rise in personal taxes or corporate taxes.

Mr. Ramadhar: No new taxes.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: No new taxes—[*Desk thumping*] There are no new taxes, a point that seems to have escaped the population. No new taxes and the price of diesel did not go up and the price of super gas did not go up also, so we do not expect the price of taxi fares to go up because the Government is standing on behalf of the thousands of members of the public by controlling the cost of

travelling in this country. This is how we are on the side of the man who has to travel to work. This is why we are bringing in new buses. This is why we are bringing in the programme in order to convert into CNG—all in the interest of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, the ones who must be empowered.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Senior citizens and children travel free.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: No matter what the critics say or will have to say, the fact is that this administration has brought about a resolution to the Clico matter and the HCU matter. No matter what is said.

Again, Ernst & Young, in a document that they prepared, they said here, I want to just read from it:

“We are nearing the fifth anniversary of the collapse of the CL Financial empire. The impact of this event on the local economy cannot be underestimated. The total cost of Government’s bailout at the end of 2012 is reported to approach \$19.7 billion,”—Now we know it is more than that—“representing some 13.5% of...GDP. In this regard, the country’s public sector debt to GDP ratio increased from 24.4% in 2008 to 44.5% in 2012. Commenting on this increase in debt levels, Kester Thompson, Richard Cassie and Joseph Cotton conclude that:

‘Unlike the experience of most countries in the region, the main impetus for the rise in the debt was the Government’s bailout to Clico rather than borrowing for debt financing.’”

So, when they accuse us of borrowing and borrowing and borrowing for debt financing, here we have an explanation from the experts as to why the ratio increased.

“Whilst Government intervention helped to prevent a systematic crisis, the fiscal cost of the bailout was significant.”

So, we have to understand why this happened and with the strategies that are being put in place and with the recovery of moneys that will certainly take place, this ratio will indeed go down.

But what I want to say to the Member for Point Fortin is that I would like her to go into this document, the *Draft Estimates: Details of Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* for this year and I would like her to look at the section from pages 90—102 and go through it line by line and see what the debt servicing in this country is and then go through line by line and ask, “Who created these debts and

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for what reason and how much of these debts were due to cost overruns, inefficient management of public projects in the country?

12.15 p.m.

Let me say proudly, as a Minister of Government in local government, I have done several projects, and not one of those projects has been over budgeted and gone over cost. [*Desk thumping*] They have all been within budget and on time too. So I want you to go it is here.

Dr. Moonilal: They talk.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: They talk, we deliver. But go through, do not just come and speak. Go through these documents, and you will find and you will see where the debts were created, and how this country has to pay these debts and support these debts today to the tune, in 2014, of about \$4.9 billion. So it is there for you to see.

Mr. Speaker, they keep asking the question: “Where de money gone? Where de money gone?” That is a question they keep asking all the time. But while the Government has been attending to the \$20 billion or \$24 billion Clico matter, the \$700 million HCU matter, it has not left those in need of help without response.

I am sure the Minister of the People and Social Development will speak to the policies of the Government and his achievements, in terms of poverty alleviation. Mr. Speaker, I wish to refer to one institution that has been bringing relief to hundreds of needy citizens. The Opposition has been making a lot of derisive comments about the food card, but every time they do that I squinch. Do you know why, Mr. Speaker? I squinch because, perhaps, they have not had to face children in homes without a breakfast; they probably have never had to face a single mother who has to feed her children on a morning because the father has abandoned them; they probably never had to face a mother who has terminal cancer with five children under 10 years old living in a broken down house, in my constituency, and depends on that food card to feed those children when the day comes. Maybe they never had to face that.

This is why we are a caring Government; a very caring Government. And if it costs us, as it does, \$208 million a year, in terms of a transfer from the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, in order to support this programme of ensuring that people have food on their tables—it is the responsibility of a Government to ensure that its people are well fed and well nourished. If they are not well fed and well nourished, then you cannot have a productive member of the society. We

accept that responsibility, and we will sacrifice in other areas to ensure that no one goes hungry in this country, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, maybe when they talk about where the money is spent, they have not had to go to a home where there is a sick person without a pension, or where that sick person does not have a family to help—living as they do now in their posh apartments, in their high-style homes, wearing the best clothes, putting on the best jewelry—maybe they are the ones who have lost touch with the needy; and they are the ones who have lost touch with the poor. We have not.

We have the policies in place that we are dealing with the poverty and the differently abled. That is the difference! [*Desk thumping*] So when they try to accuse us of losing touch, they are the ones who have lost touch, and that is why you keep on saying, “food card this, food card that” and so on, and yet you are not able to bring the evidence of the corruption that you speak about. Mr. Speaker, let them say whether they are going to take away the food cards if they come back into office.

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Yes.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Why do you keep falling short of that? Say what you want to say. Tell the people that your real intention is to disband the food cards, and to leave people in hunger and poverty in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] That is what you say. [*Crosstalk*] Why do you not go the whole hog and say what you have to say? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, the National Commission for Self Help in 2012 was given support of \$40 million. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, with that \$40 million, do you know what the National Commission for Self Help did in Trinidad? [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, they gave 1,146 minor repair and reconstruction grants up to \$15,000; they gave emergency relief grants, 448 of those. So in terms of grants, they gave 1,594 grants in this country.

Every time a roof blows off somewhere—as yesterday it blew off in La Horquetta/Talparo—

Mr. Seemungal: Yes, Las Lomas.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:—and my colleague turned to me and said: “Can you give me the number for Mr. Surujdeo Mungroo, the Chairman of Self Help?” I gave him and he came back inside five minutes and said: “Matters have been organized, the chairman is on his way, tomorrow they are going to have a purchase order in order to get the material to put back on the roof.” [*Desk*

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thumping] That is the way we respond [*Desk thumping*] in this country, and they have done that for 1,594 households in Trinidad and Tobago over the last year. They have also done 223 development projects—roads, drainage and so on—giving you a total of 1,827 projects; interventions in the lives of citizens through the National Commission for Self Help.

Mr. Speaker, in the budget of 2012/2013, the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy, on the urging of the hon. Prime Minister, and in order to make an intervention in the lives of poor people, indigent people, differently abled people, allowed the National Commission for Self Help to build 100 starter houses. I want to say to date that 76 of those houses are completed; 14 are in progress and, by the end of the fiscal year, we would finish at least 90 of those houses out of the 100. [*Desk thumping*] A 90 per cent record is a good record, in this regard. So 90 families, their lives have been improved.

Mr. Speaker, in parts of this country where there are no community centres, the National Commission for Self Help has built five activity centres: in Caura, St. John's Trace, Avocat, La Costena Sou Sou Lands in Penal, Carlsen Field and Jacob Hill in Wallerfield. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Seemungal: Yes.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: So, today, 60 to 70 persons can go into those buildings and they can have meetings; they can have training programmes.

Mr. Seemungal: Tell them about the people in Jacob Village.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: There is a room there where computers are being placed where the children can go there and do homework, and where teachers are being provided, and where YTEPP programmes are going to be held. All of this is about the empowerment of communities and taking people away from the dependency syndrome [*Desk thumping*] into self-sustenance, and we are going to do more of that this year, as we go along.

Mr. Speaker, another area where the needs of the small man have been facilitated is through the URP programme. There has been a hue and cry for the closing down of the URP. Every imaginable negative has been said about the URP programme—from the days of special works to DEWD to whatever—everything negative has been said about the programme. But my colleague, the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, said URP could work, and I will show you today how URP could work.

People have said it is a den of corruption, a source of wastage, especially

when you tell them that URP costs the country \$420 million per year—that is a lot of money—and the country, therefore, deserves value from the URP programme; it deserves value. Mr. Speaker, there is a view that the URP programme cannot be changed, this Minister disagrees because the URP programme has been changed. So that even Mr. Jehue Gordon whom the Member for Diego Martin North/East comes to me every day in the corridor and berates me about—even there in Diego Martin North/East—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Would the Member give way?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Even there, Mr. Speaker—

Hon. Member: Do not give way. Do not give him no way.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:—he has seen the design of a wall to save the home of Mr. Jehue Gordon. Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you, the URP is an important social programme, but it is more than that—important social programme. With this country experiencing a serious problem of males, fathers, abandoning their responsibility for their children and for their upbringing and, consequently, an increase in the population of single mothers across the nation, there is something going wrong with the way males in this society are not taking responsibility for the children whom they have fathered and brought into this world, and we need to deal with that. Males in this country need to become more responsible. You just cannot go and have a good night out and not take responsibility for the child that you fathered and bring into this country.

It is the height of the kind of domestic and social irresponsibility that must be eradicated from the face of this country, and we have to do something to reintegrate important parenting values and the values for human life, as it were, when you come to bringing children into this world. That must change. Single mothers are suffering too much in this country, and thank God for the URP, it provides a fillip in order to help these mothers transcend some of these programmes. Mr. Speaker, \$700 per fortnight to put food on the table might not be much for someone who spends \$5,000 with his or her family for one night out in a posh restaurant in Port of Spain.

Mr. Imbert: Who did that? [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Dr. S Rambachan: The average meal in Port of Spain, if someone goes for dinner, is between \$250 to \$300.

Dr. Gopeesingh: What a family!

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: So \$700 might be nothing for such people, but for the person, the single mother, who has nothing to feed her children, that is plenty; that is plenty. Mr. Speaker, thousands of persons benefit from this programme. But what has happened to this programme in the last year? What has happened to this programme in the last year? Mr. Speaker, there was always an issue about ghosting; that people have these teams—I do not want to call them gangs—of workers between 8 and 10. They come to work, they do no work and they go away. Mr. Speaker, that cost the country a lot of money, of that \$420 million.

In 2010/2011, the wages paid to people working in URP was \$269 million, salaries was \$44 million; in 2011/2012, the wages paid went down by \$20 million to \$249 million, salaries stayed at \$44 million; in 2012/2013, this programme, the infrastructural side of it, came under the Ministry of Local Government, and the wages went down to \$157,446,000. In other words, \$92 million was saved, in my view, in terms of ghosting.

Hon. Member: Ghost Busting.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: That is ghost busting; \$92 million. It might be higher than that, but in my first calculation, it is \$92 million, and what happened to the money? How was the money used?

Mr. Speaker, you will be very happy when I tell you that 381 community projects were done under the URP programme and 129 core projects were done. Just to tell you, a core project is where URP hires the labour and provides the material, but these are projects under \$100,000 and for projects below \$500,000, you have community contractors who get the work—510 projects in a year, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, but that is not the statistics I really want to refer to. The statistics that I want to refer to is this, that they who said that the URP programme could not perform, Mr. Speaker—they who blamed the URP programme—Mr. Speaker, this is going to shock you; it is going to shock you, Mr. Speaker, because I want to tell you, I came into that Ministry at the end of June 2012, and in total, between the end of June 2012 and at the end of this fiscal year, it is a total of 738 projects; 738 projects in all.

Mr. Speaker, let me explain. Box drains for this fiscal year, under the URP—Mr. Speaker, if I tell you, that 34.7 kilometres of box drain was built under the URP, would you believe me? Mr. Speaker, 34.7 kilometres of box drain; 3.1 kilometres of footpath; 5.9 kilometres of curb and slipper drain; 1.3 kilometres of

retaining wall; 10 bridges; and seven box culverts.

The URP programme is capable of performance and the physical evidence of the URP programme is there to see. This is what this Government means by being more efficient and using the resources of the country and getting value for money [*Desk thumping*] and it is the same people who have done the work. Why? Because we have brought a new philosophy, a new purpose, into the lives of those people so they see the connection between what they are doing and the benefit that it is bringing to people. Mr. Speaker, that is quite an achievement.

In the URP agriculture, 289 projects have been done at a cost of \$116 million; 289. Mr. Speaker, just to let you know, that those 510 projects cost \$85,352,000. That is what it cost, Mr. Speaker.

12.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, and for the coming year, we already have in train another 191 projects that are ready and not tendered and 149 awaiting awards, which shows you that the capacity was always there in the URP programme but it needed to be mobilized, and I had to make that point. The further point I want to make is 306 community contractors got work under the URP programme [*Desk thumping*] and they hired the labour that would have been ghosting, and that labour got better paid under the contractors than the \$69 they would have gotten under the wages that they would have worked for. So a transformation is taking place in terms of this programme.

Mr. Speaker, just as the Minister of Local Government, I wish to take the opportunity, while I was there, to thank the staff at the Ministry of Local Government, and to thank in particular, the Permanent Secretary, Mr. Amroodeen Ali, for the tremendous support and respect he showed to me and gave to me while I was there at the Ministry. Without his help, his leadership of the staff, we could not have achieved what we achieved in local government, and his exemplary attitude to work and the way he worked with the politician is something I think that is deserving of the highest commendation, and it is an example of what the public service has been doing in terms of the cooperation with this Government throughout all the Ministries. And I want to say thanks to all the public servants who have been cooperating, not only with me but my colleague Ministers, in getting the work of the Government done.

Because, Mr. Speaker, in local government, this year in the 14 regional corporations, 35.7 kilometres of box drains was also built. So between the URP and local government, 72 kilometres of box drain was built in this country in one

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year, and you say this Government “ent” working, you say this Government “ent” providing. Mr. Speaker, if that is not good enough, the corporations by themselves paved and rehabilitated 66 kilometres of local roads—66 kilometres of local roads—and when you add that to the special road paving programme that the special purpose companies did on behalf of the Ministry of Local Government and the corporations, in total, approximately 237 kilometres of local roads were rehabilitated and paved.

I want to honestly thank the Prime Minister who when I approached her as Minister of Local Government, she held a meeting with the Minister of Finance and the Economy and saw the need to do these roads in order to improve the quality of life of citizens everywhere, and notice, Mr. Speaker, this was not done for the basis of any election. This was done as a duty of care and as a duty and responsibility to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, there are 924 bridges in this country under local government, and for the first time in the history of local government, 63 of these bridges were being rebuilt and when I left the Ministry we had already completed 30 of them, and 33 were at different stages of completion. They talk, we deliver. That is the difference. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: “We building bridges with the people.”

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: And as we build bridges, we are building bridges with the people.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to go further because they seem not to believe that this really happened in one year in local government: 32 pavilions are under construction in the constituency of my colleague, Mr. McLeod; there are two being built right now in Marabella and in Fernandez ground.

Miss Cox: How many in Laventille?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: In St. Augustine, the Hardial Park Recreation Ground, the pavilion was in a poor state, it has been rebuilt. Mr. Speaker, 32 across the country.

Miss Cox: How many in Laventille?

Mr. De Coteau: “Laventille bandit ain want [*Inaudible*]”

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, all of these speak of a Government at work.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Before you continue, hon. Member, may I—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Lunch.

Mr. Speaker: No. No. No. Please. Please. I am in charge. [*Laughter*]

Hon. Members: Ooooooh!

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from Miss Stacy Roonarine, Member of Parliament for Oropouche West, who has asked to be excused from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Member seeks is granted.

VISITOR

(HON. DR. ROBERT LEWIS)

Mr. Speaker: May I also take the opportunity on your behalf to warmly welcome to our House, Dr. The Hon. Robert Lewis, Minister of Education, Human Resource Development and Labour of St. Lucia, who is currently seated in the Speaker's gallery. Could we warmly welcome [*Continuous Desk thumping*] the hon. Member. You may continue hon. Minister. [*Interruption*] We shall leave at 1.04.

Hon. Members: Ooooooh!

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Mr. Speaker: Continue, hon. Member, please.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, earlier in my contribution, I referred to the fact that people are asking, "Where the money gone?" The Member for Point Fortin, the hon. Member, also asked that question and spoke about \$220 billion.

Mr. Speaker, maybe the hon. Member needs to go into this document, *Draft Estimates of Expenditure*, and to go into this document in the first few pages of this document and to really read it in detail, and to see how much money has been spent on personnel, goods and services, minor equipment purchases, transfers and subsidies, debt servicing, development programme, et cetera, and she will get an answer to where the money gone.

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But, Mr. Speaker, let me just say that the personnel expenditure for the Government at the moment is \$8,490,270,000; \$8.5 billion is what it is costing now for personnel expenditure in the public service, and goods and services is \$8.2 billion. The current transfers and subsidies is \$29.7 billion. So, Mr. Speaker, if you look at it carefully, of the \$220 billion the Member for Point Fortin spoke about—and I will only go to 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, because that is all I want to refer to and not 2014 as yet, because, Mr. Speaker, in my calculations that I have been doing, when I add through the figures, the amount that has been spent in the budget outside of the PSIP and development expenditure is \$139 billion.

Look at it: average of \$8 billion per year for three years, three budgets, \$24 billion; average of \$8 billion for three years, \$24 billion, \$48 billion of that has gone: goods and services and wages, but did we get value for money? Yes! And how did we get value for money? If you look at the transfers and subsidies in this document where you will get it, and then you go to the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and you look at it, you will see where the money has been transferred.

So if you go on to Finance and the Economy, you will see there that the current transfers and subsidies is \$7.1 billion. Well, \$4.1 billion of that is going into the IDF, \$650 million into GATE. You want me close down GATE? You want to ask where the money is, you want us spend less on GATE? You want to disempower citizens? You want the fella who is getting \$3,500 a month in a job, or \$4,000, or the CEPEP worker who is getting \$89 a day but has to have a child in university doing medicine—as happens right now with a child of a CEPEP worker in my constituency who has gone to do medicine; you want to take away the GATE from them?

Hon. Member: No way.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: “Go ahead and take it away.” That is what you are saying? That is the criticisms you are making? Then go and tell that child that. Mr. Speaker, go and tell that child that. Today this Government is able through the GATE Programme to make that child a doctor, that child who without the GATE Programme may never have that opportunity.

Hon. Member: No hope.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: No hope. We have brought hope to that child and that child will come and be a good doctor.

Hon. Member: “Who we?”

Mr. Imbert: “Doh try that, is I introduce the GATE. Doh try that.” [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: And that child will be able—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members. Hon. Members, especially on the Opposition Benches, I know that the Member for Diego Martin North/East has already exhausted his time.

Mr. Imbert: Unfortunately.

Mr. Speaker: Fortunately.

Mr. Imbert: Unfortunately.

Mr. Speaker: Or unfortunately. [*Laughter*] But please, allow the Member for Tabaquite, and the hon. Minister of Works and Infrastructure to speak in complete silence. Continue hon. Member, please.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, maybe they did not want us to transfer \$158 million to the Accident Victims Compensation Fund, which is there in terms of the transfer. Maybe under Ministry of Health where the transfer subsidy is \$3 billion, maybe they want us to stop this CDAP programme so that the \$596,480,000 of drugs now that are received by the poor people in this country, they would not receive it again. Maybe they really want us to do that. Tell us if that is what you want us to do.

You want us to close down CDAP so those people cannot get a Cafenol or a Panadol. That is what you want us to do? That is what you were going to do. You see, you do not realize what you are signalling to the population. You are signalling to the population that you are not interested in their health care.

Hon. Member: Ah!

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: That is what you are signalling. [*Desk thumping*] So what is there as a programme to help them, you want to destroy it, or maybe you want us not to spend the \$68.9 million in medical treatment on nationals in hospitals and institutions. Maybe you do not want us to spend that.

Dr. Khan: Maybe that is what they want.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Maybe you need to tell us that. You know, we need to know and the quicker you tell us, the better, because I will tell you something; transfers to regional health authorities in the 2014 estimates is \$397 million. You want to hear where it is going? Emergency ambulance service, \$91.7 million;

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community HIV programme, \$2 million; private institutions, \$57 million; legal settlements, \$20 million; paediatric cardiac surgery, \$2 million.

Dr. Khan: We need that.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: You want me to stop that? Minister of Health, they want you to stop that? This is what they are criticizing. You are asking, “Where the money gone?” Do you read your documents? Do you read them?

So it is all here, all here for you to see. Or maybe in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs, you want us to take off all the subsidies on diesel and super gas. So when in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs, the transfer this year is \$7,002,778,000 under the category, “Shortfall in subsidy resale of petroleum products”, you go and tell the people that you are taking off the subsidy on gas and diesel, and then see what they will have to pay for transport, and see what will happen to inflation in the country.

No one says that we are very happy with this level of subsidy, but we must take things at it comes and deal with things at a particular point in time in the life of our society. We are a “small man Government”, as much as we are business oriented and we want to get investments, but we are a “small man Government”, and I am telling you—and I hope that the small man is listening—that we have not touched the gas prices or the diesel prices. Mr. Speaker, or maybe under the Ministry of the People and Social Development, and I am sure my colleague, Dr. Ramadharsingh who has built one of the most beautiful disability centres in this country—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: I thought was a house.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:—State-of-the-art in Carlsen Field—state-of-the-art. Maybe they want us to cut down the pension, \$2,436,000,000 right now for senior citizens grant, what you called the pension. Or maybe they want the Minister to come to Cabinet and say that disability grant should go back down from the \$1,500. Maybe they want the \$371 million to be cut back. Maybe they want the Social Assistance Grant of \$288 million to be cut back. What then do we do about our people who need these things in the society? Responsible governance is not just about building buildings and so on, it is taking care of your people.

Hon. Member: You cannot wish it away.

Hon. Member: You doing that very good.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: And that is what we are doing in this country,

taking care of the people.

Hon. Member: Your people.

Hon. Member: That is why they are rejecting you.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Just to let you know, there are 82,509 senior citizens getting pension in the country, “eh”. And do you know what? Because the Minister has speeded it up, this year there was an additional 6,756. There are 24,312 persons with disability grants and bus passes, 1,674 recipients of public assistance and 1,106 to disabled persons.

12.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, maybe they want us to take away the utilities assistance programme under the Minister of Public Utilities. I do not know. So when you ask, “Where the money gone?” I can go on for two or three hours telling you where the money “gone” and how the money is being used.

So we are building investments, we are building industry and creating jobs, but at the same time you cannot ignore the poor people in your country. You cannot ignore the differently-abled in your country. You also have to take care of them. You have a responsibility. That is a duty of care as a government to do that, and we are going to continue to do that to the best of our abilities.

I had a whole list here to tell them where the money “gone”. [*Member displays document*] The Member for San Fernando West, as Minister of Public Administration, has 989 new and continuing students on scholarship. This year, the Minister recommended 424 for scholarships. [*Desk thumping*] That is serious business. So when they ask these questions, I am providing the answers.

They talk about our not doing anything, 32—I want to repeat, 32 early childhood centres completed in 2013 by the Minister of Education.

Hon. Member: Not one in Port of Spain!

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Fourteen primary schools completed; five secondary schools completed and he has ongoing right now 20 ECCE centres, 26 to start in one month, 17 primary schools under construction and nine secondary schools under construction. Libraries—Rio Claro, Mayaro, Couva, Chaguanas. I can go on and on.

You know, people like a nice place to shop. Go to the San Juan market; go to the Siparia market; go to the refurbished Marabella market; go to the refurbished Penal market, and you would see where the money going. We are trying to uplift

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the environment and the experience of our citizens. We just do not talk First World, we move to First World by what we do. [*Desk thumping*] We move. I could have gone on and on in telling you where the money gone, and with support, but I am sure my other ministerial colleagues will do that.

Before I go to my constituency and to speak of my constituency for a moment, we are into the season of elections. I was talking to some colleagues from the media, and I must tell you I was very shocked when I discovered that a political party has already paid \$5 million to the local media to book space for the local government election, to lock down space for the local government election. I understand that this political party has also pledged \$1 billion for the election campaign to remove this Government from office. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: You cannot be talking about the PNM.

Hon. Members: What? What?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: I really wonder, Mr. Speaker, whether this money has been pledged from five Cayman Islands accounts of 25 firms that are owned by members of the family of this political party; startling news, very startling news.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: That is startling news.

Mr. Hypolite: One million or \$1 billion?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: I wonder whether all of these companies and directorships have been declared to the Integrity Commission.

Mrs. Seepersad-Bachan: Repeat the figure; they did not hear the figure.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: One billion dollars pledged to remove this Government, from 25 firms—[*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: What party is that?

Mrs. Seepersad-Bachan: Is that the PNM?

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: It is not the PNM.

Hon. Seepersad-Bachan: You sure it is not the PNM?

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Absolutely not.

Hon. Member: “Dat sounding like de PNM.”

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:—where family members are directors. “PNM

distancing themselves from that, boy.” [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, that is why we need to have legislation coming to this Parliament to deal with campaign financing. [*Laughter*]

Hon. Member: “Ooor”, [*Laughter*] so allyuh want it now.

Hon. Member: “When you pumped money, allyuh did not want it.” [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Port of Spain South.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, you see, some people have very, very interesting subterfuge objectives why they get into politics. I want to read from the *Hansard* of Saturday, March 03, 2012, a contribution by the then Minister of Works and Infrastructure, hon. Jack Warner. In this contribution he speaks about how he removed me as mayor of Chaguanas and what have you. [*Laughter*]

Miss Mc Donald: “Dat hurting yuh.”

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: That does not hurt me, ma’am. [*Laughter*] That does not hurt me. It does not hurt me at all; you are very, very wrong; very, very wrong. You know, you must always know that when God closes a door, he has better doors opening for you and all you have to do is to climb. Within months of that, where am I? I am a Minister of Government, getting the opportunity to serve people with resources and do it on a better basis. [*Desk thumping*] No, no, no, no. You have to learn that what is called grace in religion does not always come sweet, but the grace of God must always be accepted. You know what? When you pray to God you must pray unconditionally. An unconditional prayer is true prayer, where you may wish for something, but what God gives you, you accept as his grace, and “Lord, it is your will, not my will. Thy will be done”, as we say. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Nice words.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: And I live by that, that is why I have no malice, I have no hate in my heart, none whatsoever.

Miss Mc Donald: Hallelujah! [*Laughter*]

Mr. Seemungal: I hope you all learn from it.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: In this contribution on the debate on this motion of no confidence in the Prime Minister by the Leader of the Opposition, the Member

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of Parliament for Chaguanas West said as follows:

“Therefore, I am making the point that we—all of us here—had an investment in Mrs. Persad-Bissessar, her future and where she is.”

He had an investment.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Maybe it was emotional.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Point Fortin, please.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you, Mrs. Persad-Bissessar as the leader of the UNC and the People’s Partnership, cannot be bought, cannot be traded, cannot be sold. She is in no one’s pocket—front pocket, back pocket. [*Desk thumping*] She is an independent leader, a woman with a mind of her own. She is incorruptible and stands on the platform of the highest levels of integrity, and no one can buy and sell her as indicated here. Maybe the Member for Chaguanas West is accustomed to buying and selling people; maybe he is accustomed to that, and maybe that is what the problem was. He thought that he could have control. You know, there was no cabal. There was no cabal.

Miss Mc Donald: There is, not was.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: There was none when he acted as Prime Minister on five occasions; there was none, but suddenly he is not there and there is a cabal and this and that.

Mrs. Thomas: “De Cabinet throw him out.”

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: All there is, is a group of people who are working in the interest of Trinidad and Tobago and the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Member: He is getting no support.

Hon. Member: Cabal!

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, today in talking about my constituency, in the last few minutes I have, I want first to thank my wife and my family for their support and their sacrifice. For the last week, I have gone home every night after 1.30 in the morning—every night because we are doing something—

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: All of us.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:—whether it is in this Parliament or outside of this Parliament, and family is heavily sacrificed, as much as their spouse is sacrificed

in the interest of Trinidad and Tobago. Let us recognize spouses and families here today because they are making an equal contribution. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to thank my staff at the Office of the Member of Parliament in Gasparillo, in Guaracara, in Macaulay and in Tabaquite. I want to thank my colleague Ministers for their support. I say this because without the support of my colleagues I could not have achieved in my constituency what I have achieved.

Mr. Speaker, when I went to the constituency of Tabaquite I said it was a constituency that required intensive care, and I had to put it in intensive care. Such was the dilapidation of roads and drains and infrastructure; such were the needs in that constituency that I myself did not know where to start. I decided that I would do two things: firstly, I would look at youth development and particularly at programmes that facilitated the empowerment of youths, took them away from activities that were unhealthy for them and bring them to activities that could contribute to their mental, social and intellectual development. I concentrated on sporting facilities. Secondly, I looked at community empowerment through the empowerment of the people.

For those of you who know the constituency of Tabaquite, I want to just take you on an imaginary journey. If you start at Gasparillo junction at Petrotrin, there is a recreation ground there called the Charles Street South Recreation Ground. There is a girl by the name of Simone Panther, and I pay tribute to Simone Panther today. Simone Panther for 10 years has been training young people under the age of 17 in rugby. They do not even have the poles on that ground, but she has nine members of her rugby team on the national team. [*Desk thumping*]

Recently, through the National Commission for Self-Help we built a little home, as we say, to house the Exile Rugby Club. The morning that club was being opened, when I arrived there I thought there were only about 40 children she was training, 70 children turned up to the opening of that, from seven years old to 17 years old. People like Simone Panther have to be supported, and I support people like her across my constituency, because she is doing a job that maybe even we as a government cannot do, because Simone Panther is giving hope to the potential of all those students. Out of her own pocket she even pays to have them transported and provides a snack for them when they come for training. That is the kind of involvement I have in my constituency.

You go to Surprise Recreation Ground where there is a new pavilion, upgraded cricket facilities and lights. You go to Lightbourne Ground where there is a jogging track. A small pavilion is to be built right now and lights have been placed there, thanks to Minister Nizam Baksh, and before that Sen. The Hon.

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Emmanuel George.

Poona Recreation Ground in my constituency, lights and a new \$2 million pavilion going up; Springland in my constituency, lights have gone up on that ground; Springvale, off the Mount Pleasant Road, which is now being paved at a cost of \$14.6 million, right down into the constituency of my colleague, the Member for Couva South. Springvale, lights and upgraded recreation ground, and we are now going to be putting a jogging track and a small pavilion. Brothers Road, to the extreme end of my constituency, a new pavilion, and it borders with MP Nela Khan, the Member for Princes Town—lights, jogging track, pavilion. In Tabaquite proper, with the help of the councillor Henry Awong, a promenade has been created—a promenade in Tabaquite, beautiful with chairs. People relax there at night time because there are now lights on the ground and there is night time football and cricket and a refurbished pavilion.

Mr. Speaker, we go to Guaracara in the constituency where lights have been placed on that ground. For the very first time, the temple there was able to conduct their Krishna Leela under lights in the constituency. You go to Gran Couva, where a motion to acquire the ground for the construction of a pavilion and development of the ground is taking place. Eleven areas of the constituency where the youth has been affected and sports have been affected, and therefore communities have been affected because of that.

There are two projects of which I am very proud. When I became Minister responsible for URP, I discovered three buildings in the country. They were built in the year 2000 and they were abandoned. Each one of those buildings value about half a million dollars. One was in the constituency of Couva North, in Waterloo, Bank Village; one in the constituency of Couva South, Dow Village and one in my constituency. They were just standing there.

I asked the residents of the area where mine was. I said, “What is this building?” and no one could tell me. Then one fellow came and he said that building was built, but it was supposed to disappear. I say, “What you mean that it is supposed to disappear?” He said, “It is lucky in 10 years nobody occupied that building”, and nobody occupied it. Then I discovered that that building was built by the URP 10 years ago, as were those two.

Mr. Speaker, I should have gotten your permission to bring pictures of before and after to show you those buildings. They are today first class buildings being renovated. You know what? In those buildings certain activities are going to go on. In the Whiteland Empowerment Centre in my constituency, Pastor Mansingh

of the Open Bible Church has joined with me and seven other religious organizations in order to begin sensitization of youths to their health. So a couple weeks ago 34 young persons went in there and we spoke to them about HIV and their responsibility to themselves.

YTEPP programmes are going in there. Domestic violence cases are being consulted; an alternative dispute resolution centre has been set up in there. Why? Because we are about building communities. We are about bringing back neighbourly relations. I am very proud to say that there were some neighbours who had problems in court. They decided to come to us with those matters and we resolved them, and they went back to the court and said their matters were resolved. That is what we are about.

When my colleague, Mr. Ramadhar, the MP for St. Augustine said family is what we are about, this is what he was talking about. Not just individual families, the broader family in the community. [*Laughter*]

If you go to Corosal where there are no water lines and where there are tanks that WASA has to fill all the time, the children had nowhere to study. You will find a proper homework centre built there with computers, chairs and tables in it which we are opening in two weeks.

We talk about crime or we talk about attracting people away from crime, I want to thank Inspector Subhas Ramkhelawan from the Corosal community and Whiteland. He has assisted me through the URP programme in refurbishing a building where we are going to start a police youth club and reintroduce the scouting movement in that particular area. This is what we are doing.

You cannot talk about young people are the future and you do not make interventions in the lives of young people. All my colleagues here on this side, if I may speak for them, each one of them is doing something for young people somewhere, somehow in their constituencies. As a government we are committed to that and we are going to go through with that.

1.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, with religious institutions, we work. Religious institutions are very important. If we need to resuscitate human values in this society then we must work with the religious institutions.

The Presbyterian Church in Gasparillo, we have been able—I am talking about in my constituency—to expand their building so there is a place for the children now to come on Sundays for their Sunday school.

The Whiteland Hindu Temple is being repaired. The Caratal Anglican Church,

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the retaining wall has been fixed. Flanagin RC School—my hon. colleague, the Minister of Education has told me now that the designs are completed for the school because you know why, for I “doh” know for how many years they have been going to school in a church. Today, for the first time they know that the designs are completed and is soon to be tendered. At Riverdale, a whole brand new school was built for the children of Riverdale. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, this is what we are doing in our constituencies. We are taking care of the people in our constituencies. This is a Government that is intent upon transforming, not just the economy, but transforming the lives of people. To this we are committed. This is our duty. This is our responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, no matter what criticisms are levelled at you as a Minister, a Member of Parliament, you must never take it in a way that is negative. You must never respond to it in a way that you think is disrespectful. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: “Build de wall.”

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: It is only because people have a need that sometimes they speak out critically. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: “Build de wall.”

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: This Government accepts feedback, and we work on the feedback. This is why so many people are now finding that their problems are being resolved. Let me hasten to say that you cannot resolve all the problems at one shot [*Crosstalk*] but the people of Fishing Pond will have their road paved by next week and they will be able to move. [*Crosstalk*] The people of Cumuto are having their roads paved in the Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Miss Hospedales: What happen to the people in Diego Martin?

Hon. Member: Mamoral.

Hon. Member: Mission Road.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: In Mamoral the road is being fixed. In Esmeralda, where 67 years the road has not been fixed, it [*Desk thumping*] is being fixed for the first time. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, on another occasion I will bring the number of URP programmes that have been done in the constituency of Point Fortin, [*Crosstalk*] and the Member of Parliament would be very shocked because the Member of Parliament for Point Fortin does not even know what is going on in her constituency; [*Crosstalk*] does not even know what is going on in her constituency.

They say we discriminate, the Member for La Brea came to me and said,

Minister I need help, Vance River to Vessigny, the road needs paving. The road has been paved in Vance River to Vessigny. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: “He didn’t even know. He didn’t know.”

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: So, Mr. Speaker, this is a Government that cares. This is a Government that is compassionate. This is a Government that has shown you today, through my contribution, that we are for the little man in the society—

Hon. Member: “Awwwh.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:—the small man in the society; the small man who needs to be cared for. But while we care for him, we are also holding his hand through organizations like the Ministry of the People and Social Development in order to lift him so that he can become self-sustaining [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: That is right.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:—and he can do that.

Hon. Member: Empowerment.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, one of the greatest assets that you can get in life is to be a Member of Parliament because it reminds you—[*Interruption*]

Miss Cox: Yeah, we know that!

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:—of your duty as a human being to society. I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this sitting is now suspended for lunch and we shall resume at five minutes past two.

1.03 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

2.05 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Speaker: We need three more Members, please. The hon. Member for St. Augustine and Minister of Legal Affairs. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Prakash Ramadhar): Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, let me thank you for the opportunity to enter into this debate, and I promise I shall not be very long. Let me begin by indicating—[*Crosstalk*] gentlemen, please—that the property tax that has been so demonized and misrepresented in this House has been axed by this Government. [*Desk thumping*] It is the wish of the—I almost said prosecution—[*Laughter*] but it is really the

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wish of the PNM—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: “Yuh feel you in de court”.

Hon. P. Ramadhar:—to bring back this thing called the property tax.

Hon. Member: Quite true.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Let me just cast, if you will permit me, the minds of those who are listening, back a bit. But before we get to that let me just say as long as this Government holds office, as long as the COP is in this partnership, the citizens will pay not a dollar more on their homes in tax. [*Desk thumping*] Not one dollar more. Let me tell you why I will say these things. When the PNM introduced the property tax in 2009 [*Crosstalk*] we, that is the people of Trinidad and Tobago, said there must be no taxation without representation. We in the COP—I led a campaign called “axe the tax” that spoke to this very issue—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. P. Ramadhar:—because we have started to forget that in that period of time the country was seeing the absolute wastage, the bankruptcy of our nation coming at the hands of the PNM, where they were taking God’s given wealth of this nation and wasting it ad nauseam and with great dereliction to the responsibility to future generations on matters—remember when they were to spend \$200 million on vehicles for use at two summits. We have forgotten these things. When our babies were dying for want of medical attention, when lifesaving surgery would have been available internationally, but the Government at the time would have only afforded TT \$60,000 in help, when millions were required.

For those who went and met with the parents, for those who live in the nation and understood the pain of a father, mother, uncle, aunt, brother, sister to see one of their loved ones dying when they could be saved, but an uncaring, unrelentingly people-hating Government of the time, did nothing to help.

I stood outside the Red House together with Dr. Navi Muradali, now the mayor of San Fernando, together with the Member for Arima, Rodger Samuel, Kathryn Stollmeyer Wight and a group, having written to the then Speaker, to the Prime Minister and to the Leader of the Opposition, asking that a life fund, a Children’s Life Fund be created, put \$100 million into this thing and allow the interest alone to save the lives of our children. We were met with deafening silence.

So when the property tax reared its ugly and hideous head we said, no! You will not jeopardize my home, tax it, and not help our people. Therefore, the axe the tax campaign began. It is not just axe the tax, you know, there is the other line of it, “leave my home alone”. Our citizens and those who really live here, not in the multimillion dollar facades, away and disconnected from the people; know, that the pride of place in families is their home. Every citizen wants to have a home, and those who obtain a home, in the large part, do everything they can to enhance it. Whenever they get money they put—they invest their very life blood into their homes. They get a little extra money, they tile an area. They get more money, they put another toilet. They get more money, they put a little extension for the son so that when he marries he could stay here. *[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: That is right.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: When they get a little more money, they put a little air condition, and they paint, and they upkeep and beautify their homes.

Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: But what was happening? This new PNM-style tax was going to put a valuation on their homes and they were to be taxed that would have raised what they were paying, the land and building taxes, by sometimes a thousand and several thousand per cent increase. That struck a fear and I looked into the eyes of many, my neighbours, my friends, my citizens, and they were afraid because of the high level of inflation, the uncertainty of the economy under the PNM, whether they will be able to afford, not just to live comfortably, but whether this new tax whether they would be able to afford this thing, and they were in fear that they would lose their homes.

There was another aspect of it. There was no provision in that new tax for the moneys raised in communities to be used to the benefit of the community. It would have gone into the Consolidated Fund for total wastage and abandonment of responsibility.

We stood, and we opened our hands, the COP started it but we did not brand it as COP because we said this is a national movement. This was people power. It was revolutionary. This was an issue that went across the political landscape, whether “yuh” PNM, UNC, COP, TOP, NJAC or whether you belonged to no political party, it affected everyone.

We took that campaign from street to street, town to town, city to city, financed sometimes from my own pocket, but we knew then that it was something

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critical in that because when you interfere with the confidence and stability of a person's home, you diminish many, many things, not just life as we know it, but family life itself, and we fought that demon.

One of the sacred promises that we made was that the Government that will come in the future—we did not know then that the election would be called in 2010, but we knew that the population had had enough of the PNM. The corruption was rampant, the wastage was unending, there was no response to the needs and the calls of the people, and we had said—that is when I say we, all of us on this side—had said, we shall band together, work together in the interests of this nation—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Same thing we said.

Hon. P. Ramadhar:—and we shall fight [*Crosstalk*] and you will remain silent, please. I know it is difficult for you to hear it—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Aye, aye.

Hon. P. Ramadhar:—with all due respect. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, we shall band together and a people's revolution was created as the circumstances created itself, a by—sorry, I almost said a by-election, a snap election was called, we came together in the People's Partnership one of the foundations of that coming together, was the axe the tax campaign.

2.15 p.m.

Many have forgotten, Mr. Speaker, December 18, 2009, when many of us put our lives on the line not expecting it to be so, when democracy itself was attacked, when we the people of Trinidad and Tobago across all political and nonaligned persons came and we marched around the Red House, “Our home of Democracy”.

Hon. Member: “What that have to do with the budget?”

Hon. P. Ramadhar: It has everything to do with the budget and I will tell you why. Mr. Speaker, a photograph I found at my operation centre tells everything. [*Picture shown to hon. Members*] Mr. Speaker, can you see it from there? I think we got your permission to use it. It tells everything—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Hypolite: That is the state of emergency? That is the SoE?

Miss Cox: Is that the SoE?

Hon. Member: “Axe the tax; axe the tax”.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: This is an attack by the forces of State under a PNM Government on the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Crosstalk*] They will say all sorts of things to defend the people's voice and that marked a turning point. Mr. Speaker, could we—I never disrespect them.

Mr. Speaker: Members, please. Could I ask you to allow the Member to speak in silence? Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, I think your turn is next. So please take notes, right, take notes, and allow the Member to speak in silence. Continue, hon. Member.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Thank you most graciously, Mr. Speaker. As painful as it is for my friends to absorb the inheritance—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Mc Intosh: No friends.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Of course, do not be my friend—the inheritance that they have given to this nation—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Ramadharsingh: They forget their days.

Hon. P. Ramadhar:—these are the things that characterize the PNM. [*Crosstalk*] And I thought come 2010 with some of the faces—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Please Members, please.

Hon. P. Ramadhar:—a new face that they have changed, I am realizing more than ever that there has been no change on the other side. I will ask the Leader of the Opposition, is it his policy if he should ever come into power, where if he should ever lead a Government, whether it is his intention to return the property tax of 2009? He must say so, and not come here and distort the reality. There has been great confusion in the public space about this property tax. It came on the weekend before the budget was read. But this is not the first time. It happened more than a year ago, when somehow or the other, I as Chairman of the LRC sitting with colleagues, there were three options put before the LRC as to how we should proceed. The decision of the Cabinet was that we shall return to the land and building taxes of old and that the citizens in their homes will pay not a dollar more on their property taxes.

I, unfortunately, left the jurisdiction. Somehow or the other legislation came into the Parliament that reflected something very different from what the Cabinet had decided and what we at the LRC—and up till today I have no answers for it—what came here. But the first person to have made any comment about it was of course whom? The Member for Diego Martin West. He seems somehow or the

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other to have an advanced notice of these things. Just like he did, in this new attack, this dagger at the heart of the partnership, if it were true that we were to return the property tax of 2009 we will not do so. [*Desk thumping*] Because it is, as far as I am concerned a sacred promise to the people; they voted on that. And this Government of which I am a part, and as I continue to be a part, will not betray the promise that we made.

Mr. Speaker, many will say that a fair tax should be paid. The COP, my party, of which I am the leader—[*Interruption*]

Miss Cox: Which party is that? You have on green.

Mr. Speaker: Please, please.

Hon. P. Ramadhar:—yes, said then and say now, we do not have a problem with fair taxes. There must be a proper assessment—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Members: Ohhh!

Mr. Hypolite: You all said “Axe the tax” man!

Mr. Speaker: Member, just take your seat. Members, let me just quote for Members, because it seems as if my words are falling on deaf ears. Let me just remind Members if you are not aware that Standing Order 43(5) states:

“If a Member shows disregard for the authority of the Chair, or abuses the rule, of the House by persistently and wilfully obstructing the business of the House...the Speaker shall direct the attention of the House...” to that Member and call the Member by name.

I do not want to go there. I do not want to go there. I ask the Members to observe Standing Order 40(b) and (c), respectively. If you do not want to hear the Member for St. Augustine then retire to the Members’ Lounge. But you cannot be there disrupting the Member when he is making his contribution. He has the freedom of speech and he has the right to speak, in silence. Continue, hon. Minister.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I was making the point that we have no problem with fair taxes, but that must come from a proper assessment and whatever tax is to be charged should be affordable to the citizens. And more important is that any taxes raised in a community should be used for the benefit of the community.

However, having regard to the mischief put out into the public space, I want to make it abundantly clear—and I am grateful to the Prime Minister for having made it abundantly clear after the budget was read here on Monday that we shall

return to the land and building taxes and no citizen will pay more than they had paid historically.

And the reason, I think it is important for us to underline and re-emphasize that is this: that the fear factor and the propaganda of the PNM are unrelenting. They come and they open the innings, “We cannot trust you, we cannot trust you”, as a mantra they put on to this Government from the very beginning. I ask, which of the promises that we have made that we have breached? Ask, instead of just saying, and making blanket statements: we cannot trust you, “We cannot trust you. So to put that beyond doubt so that there would be no misunderstanding and misdirection of the people’s will, we shall return to the land and building taxes because the population wishes to pay what they paid. You see it is not just a right or a duty to pay tax, but it a form to them, to many, a form of ownership that they own property and they can pay on that. So, I shall move on from that.

I heard something here, Mr. Speaker, that has left me troubled but not confused. On the programme of do not trust this Government, do not trust this Government, do not trust this Government, you cannot trust this Government, you cannot trust this Government, you repeat it long enough, often enough—*[Interruption]*

Miss Hospedales: It stuck.

Hon. P. Ramadhar:—it will start to stick. But what will not unstick is the failure of the PNM past. What will not be relieved is their history. Very often we hear commentators say let us not go back into the history. But I say it is important because I have learnt, those who forget history are doomed to repeat it. And I shall repeat it for those who did not listen. Those who forget our history are doomed to repeat it.

The Leader of the Opposition said, a stunning statement here, and I ask him this: “You were told”—you see what it said here is on *Hansard* I imagine—“of information that a Minister, a former Minister stole \$1 billion of the people’s money.” He said that.

I ask, as a responsible citizen first, as a responsible Member of Parliament secondly, and thirdly, as a responsible Leader of the Opposition, what did you do with that information? Did you make any enquiry first of all, as to who this Minister is or was? When was it that this billion dollars was stolen? Did you make any enquiry at all? But you come and throw it into the public space that a billion dollars has been stolen by a former Minister. So we may believe it, some may not know that they heard it, but subconsciously it sticks. A billion dollars

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stolen! Is that the sort of Parliament we want where we come and we throw into the public space all sorts of things? I say, with all due respect, put up or—I will leave the blanks because too often we hear things in this Parliament.

Recently we heard a former Minister standing under the glare of the parliamentary lights and say, that a widow he had attempted to help, her husband having died in the course of duty, had come to the Cabinet to build a wall for \$350,000, but that two Ministers shut it down. That sounds awful, callous, uncaring, until of course the truth is told. And permit me to speak the truth. I said, “\$350,000”. And of course the Minister had brought contractors and everything ready to go. I say “For a wall?”

Dr. Rambachan: “He own tenders.”

Hon. P. Ramadhar: I said, you know what: “Give to the good lady who is in grief, who is suffering unimaginable pain now, the \$350,000. Let her get her own contractor and if she has any savings from that, to keep it.” And more so, that all officers of state, defence officers—since I came into Government I have been asking for this and I think the work has been done on it, to at least have an insurance put in place so that any of our soldiers, any of our police officers, any of our firemen, those who have sworn to protect us should fall in the line of duty, the very least their family should get is \$1 million. But you see how deceptive to give one part of a story is. I have described this new politics that we are seeing, whatever colour you want to clothe it in, as being nothing other than “negligence politics”. They show you a little bit, right, and leave the rest to your imagination. “I eh going dey.”

Dr. Rambachan: “I ent going there.”

Hon. P. Ramadhar: “I ent going there.” I have seen and heard in this Parliament statements that have nothing to do with the reality of things, but pass here in our highest House as debate. Allegations are thrown left and right. I am confused sometimes, as I am sure many citizens are, when Ministers on this side produce evidence, they produce documentation, they produce facts and on the other side, “not true, lie, sell-out”—this. Where is the truth in all of these things? Is the population enhanced by listening to our debates? Do we not take for granted—if you have evidence of something wrong please bring it, but do not just shoot down other persons: And that is across the board, “eh”, both ways. If there is a fact, if there is a merit in an allegation it should be dealt with so that we will know what the truth is, at least in this House. This is where the nation looks for guidance and leadership and we have to set that example.

So I ask, if there is evidence of corruption which we have continued to hear about against Ministers or against any organization or a department of Government, take it to the institutions that have the responsibility and duty to deal with those things. But do not just flippantly throw it out there, because I have given you the story as I learnt from my father of the “boy who cried wolf.” [Crosstalk] Yes, the “boy who cried wolf.”

Mr. Speaker: Please, Member, Member.

Mr. Sharma: Shameless.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: And for many young people who I am sure might be listening and they might be more familiar, and I reach to their hearts, this story of the young shepherd boy who cried wolf. He cried wolf and the villagers came to help. When they arrived he was just joking, there was no wolf. They left disappointed, and you know, how could you do this. But he was so excited, this young fella, that he cried wolf again at another point in time. They came running again; when they came, no wolf. He was quite happy with the excitement he created. The third time when a wolf turned up and he cried wolf, no one came. And then he enquired of them after the wolf ate his sheep, “Why is it you did not come? They said first we did not believe you, and an old man told him that this message you must never forget, that when you do these things sometimes when you speak the truth nobody will believe you.

2.30 p.m.

That is why the population is confused with the politics and we see a sort of remonstrance, a sort of resistance to politicians across the board because they now feel a sense of disconnect that we are not serving their interests. And I make this observation that if we do not realize this—and that is not just for those in Government, you know, we talking about all politicians, we shall pay a very dear price.

You see what has happened in other societies. We have seen the people’s revolution sometimes going too far when they revolt against the power structure and the order of the day, and destroy the very things that had given them a society; had given them law and order. We must be very, very careful about that.

Mr. Speaker, I want to move a little bit now to the environment, and I want to wholeheartedly congratulate the Minister of Food Production for taking a bold step, but a necessary one, in the banning of trawling in our oceans. [Desk thumping] It may cause a lot of discomfort and I sympathize with those who earn

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their livelihood from that industry, but sometimes leadership takes the responsibility of decisions that may be unpopular in the moment, but for the long-term, good.

Many of our citizens may not appreciate that trawling—the classic form of trawling, destroys the very seabed. It destroys everything. It is like a bomb going off; it is like a bulldozer on the ocean's floor. As they trawl and they take some of the fish they want and other life forms they do not, and cast those aside back into death and decay; they destroy the very life force that will give the fish of tomorrow.

I remember as a child, born in Freeport, my daddy used to take us on Tuesday mornings generally, down to Waterloo at the fishing depot there, and I remember the sort of fish that you would see coming, and they were huge fish, and now I understand all you get are basically fingerlings, or at least quarter the size. The fishing stock is depleting dramatically. So that decision had to be taken, not just for today, but to ensure the survivability of all the fishermen and all those who are in the business, into the future.

Another thing I want to congratulate—and the COP is extraordinarily happy to participate in this thing—this thing called the People's Partnership because nobody else had the intestinal fortitude to do these things, to look at a moratorium on hunting, to save the wildlife in this country from overkill, where I understand our hunters—and, you know, we appreciate the need for sport, but there is something called Nintendo PS3. If you want to shoot something, shoot it on the TV. Right?

Wild meat—give the animals a chance. As one of my colleagues, Mr. Steven Greenleaf has said—I “doh” know how many would laugh at this. He said that every animal in this country is a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. They were born here and they have a right to live. This is a truth. Therefore, that this Government is considering doing these things, I am extremely proud to participate in that.

Indeed, in my Ministry, we launched months ago, before the birth of another party, something called the Go Green initiative, and you would observe I have worn green today. And the reason I do this is that green is a wonderful colour. It is owned by every single one of us and no citizen must ever feel compelled to wear something, or to not wear something, because it represents something in the political space. Green belongs to each and every one of us.

Hon. Member: That is right.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: So, Mr. Speaker, while we are on the issue of the environment, while we are on the issue of green, while we are on the issue of governmental responsibility, a wonderful speech was delivered at the opening of the law term by one of our leading citizens, Sen. Drayton. She had a profound statement to make, having uttered it, it was so simple and so obvious, but so well delivered, when she said words to the effect that this country is as lawless as much as we do not enforce with our laws.

We have laws that cover almost every sphere of life, but then you ask yourself: How did this country arrive at a position where we see rampant flooding in Diego Martin? It is such a painful thing to observe. And we hear MPs coming and complaining year after year about these matters. I sympathize and I know this Government will do all it can to help, as it has in the past and it will do now.

But you look to the hills of Diego Martin and you see wonderful structures, and sometimes not so wonderful structures; huge housing developments that you only wish you could afford to live in, until you know the truth. In the floods of last year, I visited areas, townhouses—\$2 million and \$3 million for one—perched at an angle that is almost an engineering impossibility, you would think, with a mountain now threatening, with the waters having taken the greenery off, the mountains coming down. And, indeed, I visited one home where the mud went through from the back door through the front door, and this lady—I thank God and I am sure the entire community thanked God that her baby that was sleeping right there in the path, she had just taken that baby one minute before from that space.

And you ask: who gave the permission to build on those angles of those hills? I asked the Leader of the Opposition, Member for Diego Martin West, under his ministerial portfolio, did he approve these things, without the common sense that every school child knows that if you destroy the hills you will destroy the mountains, you will destroy the greenery, you will destroy the floodplains? Because all that will come is a gush that we inherit—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: That is right.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: We saw it in St. Augustine. Many have suffered again—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Samuel: These are the consequences.

Hon. P. Ramadhar:—notwithstanding all of the efforts we have made to fix the drainage—and I shall deal with that later. But who gave the permission to do

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these things? And if no permission was given, why did you allow it without permission? And then come to complain and blame the homeowners. People want a nice place to live; they want a good view, but a government has a responsibility to balance development with protecting the environment.

This is the Government that will be bringing the Beverage Containers legislation here.

Mr. Samuel: So long needed.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: It is at hand. Everybody talks about it. This Government is doing. You talk—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Samuel: We deliver.

Hon. P. Ramadhar:—and we deliver. And these are the things that I think the country must know and be reminded of, simple things but critically important things.

Mr. Speaker, it is about time that this country demands more, demands truth, demands true justice from those they have given the authority to lead. I have heard the Leader of the Opposition speak here, condemning this budget, when the facts and numbers speak for themselves. Four quarters of growth, they call it lies. They call it deceit. Is it real? Is it true? The Minister of Finance and the Economy, would he manipulate figures and come before this Parliament when, indeed, the entire world would be able to look at them and say, bogus or untrue? But they spew these things forth and expect it to stick, that you cannot trust this Government. That is their mantra from day one to the end. But the truth, as my friend from Tabaguite has said, will outlast any lie. The truth will outshine any effort to cover it.

Mr. Speaker, as the leader of the Congress of the People, I want to compliment the Minister of Finance and the Economy on this budget, but I want to recognize where we were in 2010 and where we are today. I heard the Member for Diego Martin West speak that the former Minister of Finance basically scared off investors by speaking the truth, by giving a reflection of where the economy was and where it would go if it had continued along the path they had set it. But I ask this question: What damages investor confidence more than an unstable government?

You know what their mantra was? From since the time this Government was elected, within weeks they said this Government will not last a month; it will not

last two months; it will not last six months; it will not last a year; it will not last two years; it will not last three years, and they keep with this thing, putting it out in the public space.

What is more destabilizing than threats of marches to bring down a government? What is more destabilizing than threats to shut down a country? Does that enhance investor confidence? But in the face of all of that, this economy has grown and will continue to grow, and as it grows, employment increases, and not just make-work programmes. I want to say the COP's position is quite clear, that we want an economy where there is less reliance on Government work, and that the working population are afforded opportunities for meaningful employment in private industry so that the people will not be dependent on Government; and a government changes and there is this feeling that you are reliant on keeping a government in power to keep your job, and if that government should go out, you would lose it and somebody else comes in.

That has got to end. We believe also in the need to reduce the deficit. I do not believe in spending more than you earn. As necessary as it would have been, we are grateful and encouraged that the deficit is declining, and we look forward to a more robust economy where natural taxations of what we already know—not property tax—will be able to take us out of deficit financing altogether.

To hear that our reserves are, I imagine—and I am sure the Member for Diego Martin North/East will tell me if I am wrong, please—that—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: “I jes come back.”

Hon. P. Ramadhar:—the reserves are the highest in the history of this nation.

Mr. Imbert: “Yuh talking about foreign reserves?”

Dr. Gopeesingh: TT \$93 billion.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Ninety-three billion dollars. That, as a poor student of economics, as I recall, is one of the significant factors to determine the health of your economy. And if your reserves are that high and it covers your balance of trade for several periods over, then you know that you are in good stead.

So I feel quite confident in this economy. I feel quite confident in this partnership. I feel quite confident in the people of Trinidad and Tobago, but we do not take things for granted, and therefore we have to work every single day to ensure that this thing called the People’s Partnership—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Thing?

Hon. P. Ramadhar:—is preserved. Yes. This new dynamic political force of coalition government is preserved and enhanced because the age of the old maximum leadership must end, and it has been put to end from December 2010 as we go forward.

Mr. Speaker, lest I forget, I want to pose questions to Members on the other side. I want to ask, as I have already asked in relation to the property tax: What would be their position and policy on the property tax if they should ever, ever, return into government? I also want to ask, as we have been hearing, boldly, unashamedly, the issue of the return of the rapid rail—and others have joked, calling it the “racket rail”—*[Interruption]*

Dr. Gopeesingh: Oh my God.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: I ask this question—and yes, I do believe that there is a need for an enhanced public transit system, but when, once again, the COP rose and joined forces with my friend from Caroni East and the Member for Chaguanas West and others, against the rapid rail, these were the things we fought: One, for the public space it was to cost \$25,000 million—\$25 billion, half of the GDP, with a recurrent expenditure of \$3,000 million to \$4,000 million. And listen to this, my friends. The alignment which we saw was not aligned along the Priority Bus Route, above it; it was not aligned over the Churchill/Roosevelt Highway; it was aligned through the densest parts of population along the East-West Corridor.

Hon. Member: All the agricultural land.

Dr. Gopeesingh: And central.

2.45 p.m.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Hold on. Let me pause there for a moment. Along the most densely populated—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Imbert: Make up your mind, it is either—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Please, Member for Diego Martin North/East, we have heard you already.

Mr. Imbert: I am sorry.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Too much, I imagine.

Mr. Imbert: I apologize.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Mr. Speaker, thank you. The alignment was along the most densely populated of—let me make this abundantly clear. Listen, please, Mr. Diego Martin North/East, you were part of this.

Mr. Imbert: But you are causing me problems with the Speaker. “Whey you calling meh name for?” [*Laughter*]

Hon. P. Ramadhar: So that you will pay attention, and if you want to deny it—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*] “Don’t call meh name.”

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Well your leader has said we perpetrated a bait and are baiting. I want to bait you a bit. Mr. Speaker, the alignment of the rapid rail was along the most densely populated space along the East-West Corridor. Why did they do that when they could have aligned it above or together with the Priority Bus Route, or above or together with the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway?

The alignment to south was not along the Sir Solomon as one would naturally and normally expect common sense to dictate, but they ran it through like a dagger, through the most densely populated parts of central Trinidad, destroying where there was no population, the best farming lands of the country at a cost of \$500 million plus for a pre-feasibility study to tell them, to tell the PNM, that you could run it through and destroy homes. This came—hear this one—at the same time they wanted to bring the property tax. So they were going to tax the people, use that money to put a rapid rail and destroy them.

Dr. Moonilal: That was the plan. Shame! [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. P. Ramadhar: What a poison pill. They took the money to destroy the communities—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: What a shame.

Hon. P. Ramadhar:—and we stood and we fought against that. And I want to know again, so we will know what to trust, what to believe: Is it that a PNM administration, if ever they should come back, will return that rapid rail because they have already paid for it with our money, \$500 million plus dollars, for a pre-feasibility study to run it through the East-West Corridor and destroy all these thousands of homes and then pass it through central and destroy all those thousands of homes—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: And agriculture.

Hon. P. Ramadhar:—and destroy agriculture? Let them answer that and then we could talk.

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I want them to say, as many have forgotten already, the history that they want us to close our eyes to, the issue of smelter. Is it—because they have gone silent. Where is the Member for La Brea today?—if there should be a return of a PNM Government, that we will return to smelter in Trinidad and Tobago, when all of the environmentalists, all of those who love this land, water and air say that this nation's size cannot sustain smelter? Their former leader told us we shall have three. Is it the policy—and to build an island out, so that there will be—you remember this?

Dr. Moonilal: Yeh, yeh.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: How many billion, Member for Oropouche West?

Dr. Moonilal: About 25.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: About \$25 billion for an island off Otaheite.

Mr. Seemungal: Wake up the fish in that one.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Destroy the fishing that we are trying to protect. Destroy the water flow—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Where to put it?

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Where to put it? You hearing the Member for Diego Martin North/East, where to put it? So in other words, they want to put it somewhere. They want to bring it back.

Hon. Member: Arrogant.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: I want the PNM to answer truthfully: Is it their intent if they should return to power to return smelter to Trinidad and Tobago? [*Crosstalk*] We fought against that, blood, sweat and tears. This is one photograph. There are many of the COP engaged with our colleagues here, and that is why we have a bond for the protection of the people. [*Desk thumping*] We are the People's Partnership.

Mr. Imbert: What?

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Nothing lasts forever, I agree, and it must be preserved and protected and there must be mutual respect from within, but we are committed to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The COP stands firm as a protector of the people. As this photograph—[*Interruption*]

Miss Hospedales: Yes?

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Yes, you want to watch it again?

Miss Hospedales: Yeah right,

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Let me show you. With your leave, let me show you again. Look at this. [*Member displays photograph*] Do not forget this. [*Crosstalk*] This is the COP. They want to say we dead. We will never die. They want to say that we do not have support. We have all the support we need, Sir. In or out of Government, the COP was able to do more than you all were able to do in Government in terms of policy change.

Mr. Imbert: Buried alive.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Buried alive, of course. Mr. Speaker, the children are behaving badly again.

Mr. Imbert: Is you encouraging it.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: And you are taking bait. [*Laughter*] Mr. Speaker, whilst I showed that photograph, let me remind the population a bit more, because in my practice as a lawyer over the years, I had to defend people—[*Interruption*]

Miss Hospedales: We are not convinced, you know.

Hon. P. Ramadhar:—who were charged for, you know what? Peaceful protest in Barrackpore and in Fyzabad. The PNM administration unleashed the army, a military force, on the simple law-abiding, peace-loving citizens of Barrackpore and Fyzabad.

Dr. Ramadharsingh: And with a backhoe too.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: And hurt them, physically hurt them, and adding salt to their injury, prosecuted them. Our present Prime Minister and I defended those persons. We are forgetting these things. The unleashing of the arms of State against peaceful protest is an abomination to democracy. And that is why I am not surprised, the resistance this Government got when—I do not know that I am breaching any rules, but we got a resistance to the last bit of legislation we passed for proportional representation. They do not believe in empowering the people.

Hon. Member: They sleep away for it to pass.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Thank God, literally—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Who is they?

Hon. P. Ramadhar:—that they dosed off and goodness was allowed to prevail.

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Mr. Speaker, let this country never forget these things. It is easy; it is almost intoxicating in the passage of time to make the past seem nostalgic and better than today.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for St. Augustine and Minister of Legal Affairs has expired.

Motion made: That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Hon. R. Samuel*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: You may continue, hon. Member.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: I am most grateful to you, Mr. Speaker, and to my noble friends on this side and, of course, on the other side.

Mrs. Seepersad-Bachan: "Doh worry, dey supporting yuh."

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Yes, I appreciate that. Mr. Speaker, we were on the point that we must never forget these things. You know, there is a mushroom of something new in the society, in the population, in the politics, that talks about liberal party and so. Some have described it as a one bulb party. If that one bulb blows, that is the end of it, everything goes dark in that party.

My friend is not here, but the reason I want to raise these things, that we are hearing on the platforms, issues of high democracy and the need to protect the democracy, and the need to ensure there is no overwhelming interference by the State on the rights of the population, but I remember too, waking up and into the day getting news that one of the first acts of that gentleman, as the Minister of National Security, was to re-route the re-route.

Mr. Imbert: "But all yuh supported him."

Hon. P. Ramadhar: "Ah", little would the population know—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: You supported it.

Hon. P. Ramadhar:—the battles that are within for the preservation of what is right and proper in the society. Mr. Speaker, we must never forget these things and more, because as we have been reminded, the road to hell—

[*Cell phone vibrates*]

Mr. Speaker: Just a second. Some Member's telephone is not on silent mode. May I ask the Member to ensure it is on silent mode and remove it completely from the mike. Put it in your bag or in the desk, please. Continue, hon. Minister.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: I am most grateful, My Lord—Mr. Speaker. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, we were on the point of democracy, and it would be remiss of me if I did not remind the population that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. That might be so, but many on the other side do not also know that the road to hell is certainly paved with bad intentions. [*Desk thumping*] And when we come to this Parliament and we debate matters that empower the population and the people—because the revolution has started and it will not end; it is either you embrace it or become a victim of it.

Constitutional reform: this Government in its embryonic state agreed, that is, the partners came together and agreed that we shall have in our manifesto of 2010, matters of great national importance: the reform of the society, the reform of the systems that we operate the society by, and one of the most important of those reforms will be constitutional reform.

The COP in its manifesto of 2007 spoke to it, our partners embraced it and replicated it, and we are part of that. To that end, I want to congratulate again, the People's Partnership and the Prime Minister, for not just promising things on paper, but promising things and fulfilling those promises. For more than a generation, from the Sir Hugh Wooding Report on Constitution Reform, shelved, and I go through right up to 2009 constitutional reform, shelved, but this Government has said in its manifesto that the Constitution that the population wants must come from the people. We promise in the manifesto these things: the right of recall; fixed election dates; fixed terms for Prime Minister; referenda; proportional representation; and some other things.

I am pleased to announce that the budget that was given by the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, I want to thank the Minister for ensuring that we got our budget. We were able to have achieved 17 consultations throughout the nation and the report is being worked on for delivery in a very short period of time [*Desk thumping*] and certainly this population will know what the population itself has been asking for, for all the years reflected in our manifesto, and within this term, this country—and we expect the support of the PNM on this—would see a new Constitution that fixes many of the problems of the past and anticipates many problems of the future, because as a friend has told me and I have repeated it, “If you do not change the system, over time as we go forward into the future, you will only be changing the faces with the same old problems.” This Government has taken the bold step, has committed publicly to fixing that system. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Sharma: Well said. Well said.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: You know, Mr. Speaker, I have so much to say that I will now have to put it into another gear and move quickly forward, because to speak about the national issues without speaking about my Ministry's achievements, would really be unfair and unkind to the great souls that occupy that space under the leadership of the Registrar General's Department, the leadership of the Intellectual Property Department and other departments.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that electronic registration and births which we engaged in from 2010, to date, there have been by electronic registration 50,519 births—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Registered.

Hon. P. Ramadhar:—registered electronically. On the sadder side of things, but important as it is, we have had 23,563 deaths. But do you know what we are doing also, Mr. Speaker? To ensure that Government serves the people, makes every effort to make their lives better, less difficult, these are the things that we are doing. We are now partnering with the Central Statistical Office, [*Crosstalk*] so that whenever a death or a birth—please—is registered into our database, we will connect with the CSO so there will be real time updates—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: Excellent idea.

Hon. Member: Very good.

Hon. P. Ramadhar:—of the population by birth and by death.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Very good.

3.00 p.m.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: We do not stop there. We are partnering with the National Insurance Board. I cannot believe in the year 2013 the indignity of some of our more mature citizens that they have to produce documentary evidence that they are alive. A Certificate of Life they call this thing. I mean, really? So I do not imagine the dead producing it. [*Crosstalk*] But that every person will have to get somebody to sign and say, "Yes, this man is alive; this woman is alive", I find that a great indignity to endure. [*Continuous crosstalk*]

To that end, my Ministry is also partnering with the National Insurance Board—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker—so that once a death is registered, as it is legally required, then it would be reflected, and if you are not registered as dead, you are deemed to be alive, so you do not need a Certificate of Life. [*Desk thumping*] To take away that burden from the people, simple but important changes.

Mr. Speaker, we had announced a year ago that our effort—once again, from the Registrar General’s Department—to establish virtual offices in Toronto, Miami, London and New York, so that our citizens who live abroad need not return to Trinidad to access documents that they require. Little did we imagine how many people would have used that facility. To date, Mr. Speaker, 5,181 of our citizens have made use of that effort.

As you know, the Ministry of Legal Affairs is computerizing almost all of our facilities, and to that end, we have gone online for the approval of names for companies and registration of companies online. From October 13, we have had 635 applications for names online—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: It is a lot, boy!

Hon. P. Ramadhar:—and registered companies, 278 online. Now moving from a period of where, I think, it was 42 days—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rambachan: Forty-three.

Hon. P. Ramadhar:—43, so now, you can do all of the work, and we congratulate the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Development who partnered with us, that within two days you could form a company and start doing business in this country. I think that is—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: Very good! [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Somebody described a lot of the things happening in the Government as Mandrake, “yuh ha to be Mandrake the Magician”. Well, when “yuh doh understand it”, it is magic, when you understand it, it is work.

We hear of a contracting economy but I do not know what to make of these figures. Mr. Speaker, do you know for the year thus far, 2013, there have been 9,775 new companies formed in this country?

Hon. Member: What?

Mr. Sharma: Congrats, man! [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Mr. Speaker, 9,775 companies formed in this country. Is

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that a sign of a contracting economy? They are opening business to shut it down?
[*Laughter*] These are facts, those are numbers, trust these things.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Ten thousand new businesses.

Dr. Rambachan: The real facts!

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Do you know, Mr. Speaker, that we have 30,000 names that have been reserved and approved for new companies as they go through the process? Thirty thousand?

Mr. Speaker, forgive me to express a disappointment I felt and still do feel a twinge of pain, having come to this very House to ask the permission of Members to allow my Ministry the authority to insert first names onto birth certificates, when the numbers had come to us that there were 30,000 of our citizens who did not have a first name on their birth certificates. We heard all sorts of reasons—and I want to thank and compliment the Member for Diego Martin North/East. He was the only one, although he criticized, that is a part of his nature.

Mr. Imbert: Leave me alone!

Hon. P. Ramadhar: But at the end of the day, he helped and he improved the legislation. But you know what the criticisms were? Voter padding, fraud and all sorts of things. I tell you, this was a thirst that was felt in the mouth of many, many citizens, 300,000, not having their names. Within a matter of a couple of weeks, Sir, 859 of our citizens have already come to the Ministry and have successfully [*Desk thumping*] obtained their new birth certificates with their first names for the first time in their lives.

Mr. Speaker, that day, that bitter day, I remember still, we had also asked for the authority to issue electronic marriage certificates. Just last week, we celebrated a wedding at the Ministry—it is a common thing, it is no big deal. We have civil weddings at the Ministry—and that young couple—we congratulate them, they were the first, just last week, “eh”—to receive the electronic marriage certificate. [*Desk thumping*] “Doh clap yet, doh bang the table yet.” Do you know how many in this last week we have already distributed? Eight hundred and nine-three! [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

So that things: [*Crosstalk*] listen, birth certificates, marriage certificates and all of these certificates are matters of great importance to the “small man” as my friend from Tabaguite spoke to, and we will do everything in our authority, use the resources of the State to help them make their lives simpler and easier. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, do you know that we opened an office in San Fernando, a full-fledged Ministry in San Fernando on August 06, 2012.

Mrs. Seepersad-Bachan: The one stop shop!

Hon. P. Ramadhar: We opened the—Member for San Fernando West, thank you for gracing us with that brilliant speech and your presence because it was your request and the Mayor of San Fernando's. We said, "No, we have to service all of Trinidad and Tobago, not just Port of Spain" and we put a full Ministry in San Fernando. I thank you for that encouragement, Member for San Fernando West. [*Desk thumping*]

Hear this, Mr. Speaker—"yuh boy have to boast a lil' bit about this, eh"—

Dr. Khan: "Dai yuh Chairman?"

Hon. P. Ramadhar: "Meh Chairman, yeah." August 06, 2012, we started companies; September 17, 2012, we started doing lands. Now, I had to call and reconfirm these figures. The number of companies registry transactions to date: 82,962. [*Desk thumping*] That includes registration of companies, businesses and issuance of certified companies. Land registry transactions to date: 18,554. What that meant, before we went electronic, before we opened in San Fernando, all of that crowd, all of that pain from those who live in the east, the west, the south, the central, Tobago, would have had to come and line up in Port of Spain.

Hon. Member: Fifty dollars transport to come to—

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Yes. Marriage certificates, minimum time frame that you apply for one—"because many people want to prove dey marry, others may want to disavow it" [*Laughter*]—it took a minimum of five days to have the handwritten ones. I am pleased to announce, and we did it in real time, from the time you entered the Ministry and you made the application to the time you paid for it and took it, five days to five minutes.

Hon. Member: Right! [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. P. Ramadhar: "That is what we talkin about."

Hon. Members: They talk, we deliver!

Hon. P. Ramadhar: We deliver! I almost forgot, a hero to the people, my friend from Diego—from Caroni Central. "Almost slip bad." Yeah, this new computerized system we have with the electronic births and deaths, we are hooking up with their system also, the Ministry of the People and Social

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Development, so that they too will know where the births are, how many there are, how many deaths there are, so that they will be able to reconcile many of their accounts, many of their efforts to help and streamline this whole thing so it becomes far more efficient and less subject to corruption and abuse.

Hon. Member: Well said!

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Mr. Speaker, the Cabinet has approved a loan from the IDB for the institutional strengthening of the Registrar General's Department. This is a process where negotiations are in progress to improve the security and access to records held with the Registrar General's Department, and will include the implementation of a secure vault management system, upgrade of the land registry hardware and software, preservation and conservation of land registry records and digitization of all land registry records. It will also help us in the improved identity records through the insertion of complete names on over 300,000 birth certificates.

Mr. Speaker, I know my time is running short and it would be wrong for me not to mention, because, you know, I became the Member of Parliament for St. Augustine which, with all due respect to my colleagues, I think is the greatest constituency in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Interruption*] Of course, after everybody else, they will say. But I was so pleased as the Member of Parliament to be able to represent them—of course, you will get the complaints that they do not see enough of you, but the work goes on. I apologize if I do not have the time that I wish I could to be everywhere at all times.

But let me just say the work of this Government with the different Ministries, I am extraordinarily proud. If you would permit me to read through some of the areas that work have been done. We deal with drainage for Jaffar Street, Temple Street; drainage and paving for Mohan Street, Rattan Street, Nabie Street, Hosein Circular, Pan Drive Bamboo, and “we coming down de road”.

We have box drains and pavements for Northern Avenue, Bamboo III, resheet is pending, and I am going to be on that. Drainage and paving for Orange Grove Road, St. Augustine south. Correction of drainage flow to Bedassie Street. Problems for flood every single year for a generation; that matter has been mitigated.

Drainage and paving for roads in Spring Village. Paving for Ramjohn Street, Centenary Street, Goulie Street, Belle Smythe Street. Paving for Maraj Street, Bharath Street, Abdool Lane, Wajid Lane, Lyndon Street, Knowles Street, Back Street, Wilkinson Street, Dinsley Main Road, Ramjit Street, Boodoo Street,

Streatham—*[Interruption]* Now, do not get jealous, please—Streatham Lodge Road, Factory Road, Trantrill Road, Dry River Road. Refurbishment of Freeman Road, Ignerie Road. Curb wall/driveways for Pasea Extension. Street lights for Bassie Street, Anoop Street, Macoya Extension. And I want to just say how proud I am for these grounds: Hardial Park, Knowles Street, NUGFW Grounds, Constantine Park.

One of the first things we did when we came in is that the grounds were unlit and therefore unusable after dark. The first ground we lit in St. Augustine was the NUGFW Ground. We lit Knowles Street, we lit Constantine Park, we lit, just this weekend gone, the new Hardial Park that had been left to a position where only goats had infested it.

Dr. Rambachan: Hot and cold water.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: We now have a pavilion and a tremendous upsurge in all those who participate in physical activity, whether it is jogging, walking, cricket, football and all these things.

At Knowles Street, I congratulate the Minister of Sport—well, let me congratulate for Hardial Park, the Minister of Local Government, the Member for Tabaquite. *[Desk thumping]* Knowles Street, it is a beauty to behold on any given day, especially after dark with the brilliant lights, to see the number of persons using the walking track. The aerobic exercises, in which hundreds participate from all over Trinidad. The cricket, the football, the new pavilion; Constantine Park, lights; Eddie Hart Grounds, where the PNM has all—*[Interruption]* hold on—of their family days and everything else. You should see what has happened there—the lights, the walking track and we are putting an aquatic centre. We have consultations, of course, ongoing with the community. The cricket grounds; and they are upgraded to almost international standards—these grounds!

Dr. Gopeesingh: There is little gym equipment there.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: There is gym equipment everywhere.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on and on, but I want to speak too about Oropune, one of the best housing developments, and I congratulate the Member for Oropouche West, Oropune. *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. Members: East.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: East, East, sorry—Oropouche East. The Oropune development I consider to be almost a model development. We have some

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problems, yes, but I have spoken with the Minister and a lot of those problems will shortly be dealt with.

Let me just say, simple things, this housing development that was started, to be fair, I think, under the last administration—they put thousands of persons in that environment with no public transport at all.

Dr. Moonilal: Nothing!

Hon. P. Ramadhar: So I congratulate the former Minister of Transport for having introduced for the first time to the people of Oropune, a regular bus service. [*Desk thumping*]

3.15 p.m.

That has mitigated so much difficulty. Imagine “yuh” put thousands of persons without public transport, most of the people do not own their own cars so they use taxis and so. And you know what they have to do? They have to cross the highway; visualize this, that piece of highway as you pass Trincity Mall, on the way to the airport; six lanes. Man, woman and child; old, young and in-between, they have to run across that.

Hon. Member: They have to build a walkover “dey?”

Hon Member: “Yeah, dey putting a walk over.”

Hon P. Ramadhar: Guess what? Under the People’s Partnership we promised a walkover and the walkover is being built as we speak. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Samuel: You talk, we deliver.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: These are the things, simple as they are, I am very proud to participate because long before I came into Government, you all know Seereeram Brothers in Carlsen Field there? How many people were dying on a monthly basis; and a friend of mine, Sahadeo Boondoo, recently deceased.

Hon. Member: “No shame to say [*Inaudible*]

Hon. P. Ramadhar: A hero in the politics; you know what he did? He said “listen, we have to deal with this thing,” and I said no problem and we organized and we shut down that highway two times.

Hon. Member: That is right.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: And the very minister at the time, Member for Diego Martin North/East, he may have forgotten, we issued a threat, a legal threat—
[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: He “dotish.”

Hon. P. Ramadhar:—that anybody else who get knock down there, either hurt or killed, we will sue him personally as the Minister, knowing the dangers and not doing anything about it. Well I thank you, Member for Diego Martin North/East, for having taken action then and there is a safe walkover for the children and the people of Carlsen Field.

So these are the things that we are proud of; simple but critically important and you wonder why it is that they have taken so long sometimes to get these simple matters on the go. There is so much more; I cannot read all of it—
[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rambachan: Read, read it, “yuh going good.”

Hon. P. Ramadhar:—but let me just congratulate again, the Member for Caroni East, the Minister of Education, for having given life to the ECCE centre at Oropune Gardens; the ECCE centre at Bamboo, I understand it is close to completion and ready for opening shortly; but not just that, we shall be putting another of those centres for the little children of Macoya, very soon. The land has already been identified—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yes.

Hon. P. Ramadhar:—and the Minister has shown me in “written writing” to quote “meh” friend from Chaguanas East, that there is commitment to build that and also one in Bamboo No. 3.

Dr. Gopeesingh: “Yeah.”

So some other day I will go through the full list of work that has been done—
[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Thomas: “Yuh eh done yet?”

Hon. P. Ramadhar:—but of significance—“yeah, yeah, plenty, plenty work.” What I must mention is the effort to regularize the land of all those thousands of our citizens who occupy homes, occupy the only homes they have ever known, maybe two generations, but they have no legal title to them. So there is a great deal of discomfort and uncertainty that if, for instance, the other side should come into power, they will be removed.

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This Government is taking the effort, and I congratulate and I look forward to the continued assistance of the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo who now has the remit for land, to continue the effort which we have started and have gone a long way in regularizing land in Bamboo No. 2 and also in St. Augustine south. That is critically important.

And whilst I am on that, as you know, the COP has a lot of support in Diego Martin and one of the cries we have heard from the citizens of the Diego Martin area throughout is the need to regularize land for them. The need to enhance some of the leases that they hold so that they have a greater sense of stability and ownership in their properties; and these are things that this Government would look towards to ensure that every citizen who occupies a space, could truly call it their home that they are comfortable in.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the question: How is it that there was a PNM administration in office from—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Samuel: Inception.

Hon. P. Ramadhar:—inception to 1986; and then from 1991 right on to 1995; and then from 2001—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Samuel: To 2010.

Hon. P. Ramadhar:—to 2010, and their hardcore support area like Diego Martin, all of the Diego Martins have been subject to such neglect? There are some areas that are beautiful and brilliant but there are many other areas, the less fortunate who have the indignity of almost no infrastructure or failed infrastructure and yet we hear the complaints now putting all blame on this partnership Government. We are committed to serving all of the people of Trinidad and Tobago but I ask, how could you have treated your traditional seats like that?

How could I hear a former Minister of Agriculture in that administration not having a fishing depot for the people of Carenage, but there is a call, a hue and a cry, bitterly complaining about this administration not putting a fishing depot in Carenage? Their hypocrisy is frightening; and the nation is awakening to the reality.

Mr. Samuel: Yes.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Mr. Speaker, let me just spend maybe two or three minutes on this.

Mr. Speaker: No. You only have one more minute.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Well, I shall do it in one. The issue of campaign finance reform, everybody talked about it. My party hosted a meeting where we started the ball rolling and this partnership Government has taken it on board and legislation is now being prepared for campaign finance reform.

Procurement legislation, everybody has spoken about it over the years. This administration, part of the COP's agenda in Government, is being done. The legislation has been prepared and is being vetted again.

Planning legislation: all of the ills that we see, the damage to the environment; the floods that we get; where noise-polluting businesses are put next to homes; this Government has done the legislation and it will be coming to Parliament. I congratulate Minister Tewarie and others for that; much needed to ensure the ills of the past are rectified in this period.

I say thank God for all of Trinidad and Tobago. I say that together there is nothing we will not achieve; together. The hypocrisy must end. I say that we must respect each other, the rights of everyone to be fair, to be free of fear and independent in a democracy that is ever growing.

Dr. Rambachan: Well said, well said.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Speaker: Before I call on the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, may I advise Members that I have received communication from Mr. Anil Roberts, MP and Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara, who has asked to be excused from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Member seeks is granted.

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2014) BILL, 2013

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Patricia Mc Intosh (*Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West*): Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to make a contribution to the Appropriation (Financial Year 2014) Bill 2013. Mr. Speaker, I am certain that the constituents of the Members on this side of this honourable House who listened to the Member for St. Augustine must be green, green with envy—[*Desk thumping*—green with envy. [*Desk thumping*] When we heard of all the roads, and the recreation

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grounds where they can play cricket and football and jog, et cetera—
[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Of course.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh:—and not one of our constituencies can enjoy that. Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Miss Cox: Shame, shame.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh:—I am at a loss for words. And he said this is not the whole package, he said there is more. And he is not the only one. This morning, the Member for Tabaquite; yesterday, the Member for Mayaro; the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla; they all have a long repertoire, a long list, Mr. Speaker, of all the development in their areas. Constituents, constituents, through you, Mr. Speaker, I am asking my constituents to take note, our constituents to take note, to be aware of what is going on here.

Miss Cox: Correct. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Mr. Speaker, the Member for St. Augustine, he said he hears us saying we cannot trust this Government—that is all that we cannot trust you all for—because you all promised to serve the people, serve the people, serve the people.

Dr. Rambachan: And we are serving the people.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: He said, Mr. Speaker, he implored, I thought he was going to cry, he implored us—[*Laughter*—to tell him why is it we keep saying that we cannot trust this Government. He asked to give one instance that would justify this statement. Mr. Speaker, I would love to indulge him: Resmi Ramnarine; senior citizens grant; section 34; the existence of the new flying squad; the fire truck issue; the high food prices when they promised inflation will be down; assistance to our constituents; what about the food cards? The cards for school supplies; the \$60,000 per month unqualified man at PTSC; and all those in the other state enterprises who are not qualified who are holding jobs; the gas contract with Venezuela—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: “Take care yuh get a heart attack.”

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh:—axe the tax. And he spoke about unleashing the power of the armed forces on the people, in—where is it he said? Penal?

Hon. Member: Barrackpore.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Mr. Speaker—Barrackpore. Mr. Speaker, what about the unleashing of the armed forces on the people in east Port of Spain, 8,000 people more—[*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]*—*who were detained without any evidence, only to be released a few hours after. What about that? “Do so eh like so.” That is all they know.

Mr. Speaker, this fiscal 2014 has seen the largest budget in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, \$61 billion. In addition, the economy continues to operate on a deficit, which means, Mr. Speaker, that we are spending more than we are earning. While one may appreciate that our debt to GDP ratio is still reasonable, under 50 per cent and that this Government has indeed embarked on, engaged in deficit financing as part of a recovery plan to rejuvenate the economy, it is hoped that this Government will maintain fiscal discipline so that this country would never find itself in a position of economic decline, especially given the still very fluid and uncertain nature of the global economy.

In his Budget Statement, the Minister of Finance and the Economy told this honourable House that and I quote:

“According to the *World Bank’s Annual Doing Business Report*, our world ranking has improved from 76 in 2011 to 69 in 2013.”

Mr. Speaker, I found the World Bank Report entitled *About Doing Business: Measuring for Impact* on www.doingbusiness.org and it tells us what *Doing Business* covers. And Mr. Speaker—

“*Doing Business* captures several important dimensions of the regulatory environment as they apply to local firms. It provides quantitative measures of regulations for starting a business, dealing with construction permits, getting electricity, registering property, getting credit, protecting investors, paying taxes, trading across borders, enforcing contracts and resolving insolvency.”

And, Mr. Speaker, our ranking of, what is it he said, 69? Our ranking really does not reflect the true picture, a holistic picture but my colleague, the Member for Point Fortin, pointed out the areas of deficiency in all the respective areas. Mr. Speaker, what does *Doing Business* not cover?

“The *Doing Business* indicators are limited in scope. In particular:

- *Doing Business* does not measure the full range of factors, policies and institutions that affect the quality of the business environment in an economy or its national competitiveness. It does not, for example, capture aspects of security, the prevalence of bribery and corruption, market size,

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macro-economic stability (including whether the government manages its public finances in a sustainable way), the state of the financial system or the level of training and skills of the labour force.”

So Mr. Speaker, while the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy came to tell us how well we are doing in terms of *Doing Business*, *Doing Business* does not cover a whole range of operations, Mr. Speaker; it is not a comprehensive report.

Mr. Speaker, I wondered why the Minister did not refer to the more comprehensive Global Competitiveness Index which takes all those aspects of a country’s governance and operation into consideration, and which he, himself, admitted, on page 24 of his Statement is the internationally well-established mechanism to assess the competitiveness of countries.

When the former Minister of Finance delivered his Budget Statement in 2011, he hastened to make reference to the Global Competitiveness Report, and I shall like to refer to the Budget Statement 2011 which was delivered by former Finance Minister, Winston Dookeran. He made reference to the ease of doing business but he also alluded, Mr. Speaker, to the Global Competitiveness Index and he said, and I quote:

“The global competitiveness index paints...” a bleak picture.

- “In 2006, we were 66
- In 2007 we dropped to 67
- In 2008 we dramatically fell to 84
- And finally, in 2009 we settled at the shockingly low point of 92”

And he added—

“Now is the time for action...”

I can see him, you know.

“Now is the time for action to reverse these trends.”

We settled at the shockingly low point of 92 in 2009.

3.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, lo and behold, when I opened the *Express* newspaper on Thursday, September 05, 2013, I read:

“T&T falls to 92 in the competitiveness index”

Ninety-two was the ranking for 2009, which the then Minister of Finance and the

Economy said:

Now is the time for action to reverse these trends. We have settled at the shockingly low point of 92.

And in 2013, three and a half years after this Government assumed the reins of power we are back at 92 and I should like to read from the *Express*:

“Trinidad and Tobago has been ranked 92 out of 148 countries in this year’s edition of the World Economic Forum’s Global Competitiveness Index (GCI).

This is an eight-position decline from last year’s 84 out of 144 ranking. It was T&T’s second consecutive fall after a high of 81 out of 142 in 2011.”

We must remember that in 2006, under the PNM, we were at a high of 67.

“Like last year, the biggest hindrances to conducting business in Trinidad and Tobago were crime and theft; inefficient government bureaucracy; corruption and poor national work ethic.”

Having read this, I could now understand, why the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy stayed shy of this GCI report, because it does not paint a pretty picture of Trinidad and Tobago. It does not project us in a good light. It does not paint a rosy picture and this reflects badly on his Government. It was not politically astute or expedient for him to mention this, so he stuck to the World Bank ratings.

Mr. Speaker, this budget is nothing but one of smoke and mirrors, deceptions and misrepresentations. [*Crosstalk*] Yes, I just showed you, misrepresentations. Furthermore, the document is little more than a cut and paste rehashing of the budgets of the previous years; same old, same old.

Ever since the budget of fiscal 2011, we have been hearing about the integrated campus of Tobago comprising UWI, UTT, COSTAATT. I thought it was a lovely idea. It is my understanding that this Government has not even approached the THA nor has it even responded to correspondence from the Chief Secretary in this regard. They have not even discussed with the THA, matters concerning curriculum, for example, areas of priority study like tourism, which will benefit the development of Tobago, nor has a site for the proposed campus been selected but every year we come here, every year, since this Government assumed office, we hear about the integrated campus in Tobago.

Since 2010, we have been hearing about growth poles in Laventille and in 2012, two new growth poles were established in Belmont and Gonzales in my

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constituency. To date, nothing has happened but the Prime Minister dares to go to the people in their distress, weeping with her crocodile tears and she has done nothing for them.

Since 2010, we have been hearing of the construction of the Point Fortin Hospital, which was to have been completed by 2013. To date not a single stone has been turned and the Minister does not tell us why. He does not account to the national community why these projects never got off the ground. We need to know why. Why come to this honourable House and insult the population for the fourth time making promises? That is why we cannot trust you all—you want to know—promises to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, to the people of Tobago in particular, Point Fortin and east Port of Spain and making promises to them; promises that are never kept. This budget is nothing but a deceptive wish list, fraught with exaggerations and replete with inaccuracies and misrepresentations; an insult to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, education and training received the largest allocation of this year's budget, \$9.820 billion, of which the Ministry of Education itself received \$4.85 billion. The Ministry of Education has always received a very sizeable portion of the budget allocation.

Mr. Speaker, since this UNC-dominated Government assumed office in 2010, the Ministry of Education has received a total of \$18.6 billion. The question is: Are our nation's children reaping the benefits of all this largesse, all this money; taxpayers' money? Are our nation's children receiving the quality of education they deserve and with which we are satisfied? That is the question we have to ask.

The Minister of Finance and the Economy in his budget statement, boasted that Trinidad and Tobago would be one of the few countries in the world to achieve universal early childhood education by 2015. The fact is, many countries throughout the world are progressing steadfastly towards the achievement of universal early childhood education in 2015.

I should like to refer to a report published by UNESCO entitled: *Early Childhood Care and Education, the Forgotten Link*. It says, *inter alia*.

“Participation in pre-school ranges from 62% in Latin America and the Caribbean.”

It is only in countries like South and West Asia the Arab states and Sub-Saharan Africa where this concept of universal early childhood education is lagging behind.

“Pre-school is universal in most Western European countries.”

And they provide a whole list: France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Italy, Malta, the United Kingdom, Germany, Estonia, Hungary, Sweden, Denmark, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Australia. Mr. Speaker, I could go on and on and on. All over Europe there have been universal free early childhood education. Most states in the United States of America: Los Angeles, Pennsylvania, Florida, Oklahoma, Georgia, New Jersey, Illinois, amongst others, already have universal early childhood education. And President Obama is moving strongly, advocating for this level of education to be obtained throughout the United States of America.

Mr. Speaker, most Caribbean countries also, Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, are striving towards early universal childhood education by 2015. So, to say that we are one of the few countries that will achieve early childhood education by 2015, is to paint a picture that is not true.

Mr. Imbert: They know nothing.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: In his budget statement, the Minister of Finance and the Economy claimed—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Imbert: “Hum naa jaane.”

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh:—and I quote again:

“This Government is very proud of our education system.”

We are all proud. We are proud of Trinidad and Tobago. But he goes on to say:

“It is the leader within the region and has international recognition.”

This is on page 44 of his budget statement. This is not a correct statement. We would all like to be the leaders of the region. We would like to be the leaders in the world in education, but it is not true. Why do we say things that are not true? Whether we like it or not, this boast belongs to Barbados as I am going to show just now. I am going to bring the proof just now.

Mr. Speaker, I should also like to make reference to an article published by the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on page 27 of the *Newsday* dated August 31, 2013. The article provided a long list of achievements and initiatives of this UNC-dominated Government to date in the area of education and training and it is entitled: Education Skills Training at its greatest in Trinidad and Tobago’s History.

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Then at the side: these are the facts. This is not true. It is not at the greatest in Trinidad and Tobago's history and they must not try to rewrite the history and they must not say this. This is not true and I am going to prove this and show this in a moment.

The Minister of Finance and the Economy also boasted that 59,476 students are now in the GATE Programme, that is the enrolment. By the way, the Member for Tabaquite, in his contribution—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Boldface!

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh:—kept shouting that the Members—oh he was shouting. He is terrible.

Mr. Imbert: Boldface.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh:—shouting that the Members on this side—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Boldface!

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh:—do not want GATE.

Mr. Imbert: Boldface!

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Why would we not want GATE?

Mr. Imbert: We started it.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: I am wondering if he is getting early Alzheimer's. Why do we not want GATE?

Mr. Imbert: We created it.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: I should like to remind the Member that it was the People's National Movement which introduced the GATE Programme in this country. [*Desk thumping*] And the Members on this side of this honourable House have been agitating very strongly for its retention.

Mr. Imbert: Exactly.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: While this Government has been tightening—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: And they want to close it down.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh:—the screws on the GATE—

Mr. Imbert: They want to close it.

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Mrs. P. Mc Intosh:—so that it will remain closed to many. They are tightening the screws on the GATE.

Mr. Imbert: Wicked!

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Mr. Speaker, I should now like—I said that I would prove—

Mr. Imbert: They are closing the gate.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh:—that all these statements are not true. And I should now like to refer to the global competitiveness index to see how this very reputable international agency has assessed the performance of education and training in Trinidad and Tobago over the past five years.

Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I would like to advise that in this ranking, a score less than 50 is considered a competitive advantage. A score less than 10 is considered quite notable. So let me go. I have from 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 and I have various categories. The first is: quality of primary education for Trinidad and Tobago: 2009, 39; 2010, 43; 2011, 38; 2012, 34; 2013, 45. The more we go up is the lower our ranking, because a score less than 50 is considered competitive advantage but we are still at competitive advantage. But Barbados, while we are 45, Barbados is 4. Any score less than 10 is considered quite notable. Barbados, in terms of quality of primary education, is 4. How come we are the leaders?

Let me go again: primary school enrolment 2009, 68; 2010, 81; 2011, 72; 2012, 64; 2013, 73. We are sliding and Barbados is 63; 10 points ahead of us. How come we are the leaders in the region?

Secondary school enrolment: 2009, 74; 2010, 65; 2011, 66; 2012, 66; 2013, 71. We are slipping again, declining and Barbados is 23. How many points? Almost 50-something points ahead of us.

Tertiary school enrolment: that is why I said they are boasting that we have an enrolment in GATE of 59,476. Tertiary school enrolment 101 in 2009; in 2010, 104; in 2011, 103; in 2012, 106; in 2013, 113; while Barbados is 33; 113 in tertiary school enrolment and Barbados is 33. They have a competitive advantage. We do not have any, in terms of tertiary school enrolment.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know how I am to reconcile what the hon. Minister said, that they are boasting that the enrolment in tertiary level is 59,476, because when the PNM demitted office in 2009, it was 53,000 and the global ranking was 101. Now that they are saying it is much higher, 6,476 higher, how come the global

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ranking is lower, 113? “Yuh see dah why we doh trust you all?” He wants to know—another reason why we do not trust you all. “We doh trust you all at all!”

Mr. Speaker, the quality of the education system: 2009, 35; 2010, 30; 2011, 37; 2012, 40; 2013, 45. Again, we are declining and while we are at 45, Barbados is at 6. That means a notable score; quite a notable advantage. The quality of maths and science education: 2009, when the PNM was in power, 27; 2010, 32; 2011, 33; 2012, 35. You see, we are going up. We are declining. It continues: 2013, 36 and Barbados again, a notable score of 9. Barbados has three notable scores less than 10 considered quite notable. Barbados does very well in the key areas and Trinidad and Tobago has declined in the quality of primary education, primary school enrolment, tertiary school enrolment, quality of the education system, quality of maths and science.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know what the boast is about. I do not know what the boast is about. We cannot trust you all; these people over there.

3.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, this Government seems to be playing smart with figures. This budget is a political document as the hon. Minister said; he knew what he was up against. He said it is a political document—also in the newspapers. They are arrogating unto themselves praises that are not theirs, that do not belong to them, that are not true, and this is what this budget is all about. And that is why I believe Anthony Garcia, former principal and former president of TTUTA where he charged in an article entitled: “Bogus Figures on Education” in the *Mirror* dated September 09, 2013 that this Government is hoodwinking the public. I believe him, and that is why I believe analyst Winford James when he claimed in an article in the *Guardian* newspaper dated September 11, 2013 that: “Budget wasn’t an honest statement”. That is why I believe economist Indera Sagewan-Alli when she summed up the budget in an article in the *Guardian* newspaper dated September 11, 2013 as nothing more than a political document.

Mr. Speaker, the budget as I have shown is filled with so many inaccuracies, so many misrepresentations designed to present a glossy and rosy picture, designed to mislead the citizens of this country, by giving a false impression that all is better than it actually is.

That is why I would like to endorse the sentiments expressed by the Police Social and Welfare Association, president Ag. Insp. Anand Ramesar, in an article in the *Express* newspaper dated August 31, 2013 when he said: “...Politicians should undergo random (polygraph) testing”, and I should like to respectfully

recommend that the Members opposite be the first in line.

Hon. Member: What about drug test? [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Year after year, the population has to endure the perennial problem of schools being unprepared for the opening of the new academic year, resulting in a loss in learning time.

Mr. Speaker, look, I have—to save time, I must give, you know, a slight perusal: “TTUTA fears delay”, even before in August, they fear delays; they are monitoring the situation. “Some schools not ready;” this is still in August; “150 schools need repairs”, this is in August, August 30, on the eve of the reopening of school. “NPTA, TTUTA blast inefficient school repair programme”; this is in the *Newsday*, page 18. Also in the *Newsday* Monday, September 02, when school has reopened, some schools stay closed today and they talk about a lot of schools. In the *Daily Express* on September 03: “New term begins, but... Thousands of children at home”. And TTUTA has a list of secondary schools; “11 primary schools still to be opened”; “...75 % of staff stay away at Pleasantville Secondary”.

On September 03, in the *Guardian*: “Pigeons and heat keep two schools closed”; “11 institutions in disarray”; and they gave the whole list. I cannot go through the list, Mr. Speaker, I will never end. Then on the *Newsday*, Tuesday, September 03: “Rats, bats, pigeons in class”. On Wednesday 04, September: “No school for a week”, Pleasantville Secondary. “Parents refuse to send children to classes”. *Newsday*, Wednesday, September 04, “Classes abandoned”, “Faulty air condition...”; “Diego Girls’ RC in state of disrepair”, this is Friday, 06 September. Again on Saturday, September 07, “Parents, students unsure of classes next week”; and, an inexhaustible number of schools here I cannot even name them. [*Mrs. Mc Intosh sifts through newspaper clippings*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: What PNM—[*Incredible*]

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Mr. Speaker, even when school reopened, you had schools that did not know when they were going to open. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: They built dive schools.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: What does the Minister do? He passes the buck. He blames the principals, he blames the PNM. This was such an irresponsible act, and it was so ludicrous that had I been the Prime Minister, I would have fired him outright.

Hon. Member: What!

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: I would have fired him outright. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: What! [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Look at how many schools and he is blaming [*Mrs. Mc Intosh lifts the sheaf of newspaper clippings*—he is only passing the blame. The Minister must take responsibility and stop the blame game. He has to come up with creative solutions to resolve the school repair problem. He has been doing the same thing for the past three and a half years and getting the same totally unacceptable results. In addition, his explanation that only 5 per cent of the schools remained unopened—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Five per cent?

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh:—some percentage like two or five remained—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: He mean 50.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh:—is a poor cop-out, which is [*Crosstalk*] not only—he said 2 per cent—it is not only unacceptable, it is downright callus. Is that the new yardstick we are using, Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: “He is a fella like dat.”

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh:—to measure student attendance at school? Mr. Speaker, that 5 per cent represents thousands of students, thousands who were unable through no fault of theirs to attend school, and who were therefore, through no fault of theirs, deprived of precious learning time. But he said it was only 2 per cent or 5 per cent or whatever he said; it is more like 50 per cent. But up to today, you have the Sangre Grande school and some other schools; they are protesting. They went to the newspapers and so.

Mr. Imbert: Wicked!

Dr. Gopeesingh: “Yeah, yuh PNM protest.”

Mr. Imbert: Wicked fella.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Mr. Speaker, the Minister must change his strategy—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Everybody who protesting is PNM.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh:—if he hopes to get different and better results. [*Crosstalk*] I should like to respectfully suggest that:

1. the school repair programme be decentralized and taken from under the

sole control and management of the Education Facilities Company Limited; and that

2. the programme be placed under the management of the respective regional corporations in collaboration with the respective regional PTA bodies.

This is provided, of course, that local government reform, that this Government is touting all over the place and talking about, ensures that regional corporations receive the required revenue streams which would allow them to manage their own finances, and undertake infrastructural works such as the maintenance and repair of schools in pretty much the same way as obtains in the case of the Tobago House of Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, and who else but the various PTAs would be best positioned to advise and assist the respective corporations with the maintenance needs of schools in their areas? Their children attend the schools; they will know. And who best to act as watchdogs to ensure that the repairs and the maintenance are efficiently and effectively expedited in a timely manner, so that teaching and learning time are not negatively affected?

Mr. Speaker, not only were schools unprepared for reopening, but students are yet to receive textbooks under the Text Book Rental Programme. Some 11 publishers have not been paid to date for services last year, and they have refused to print texts until they receive outstanding payments. In addition, the publishers have received no firm order from the Ministry of Education. They do not have any official go-ahead to proceed with the printing of texts, and they would not print the books if they do not have that approval. I think probably the students will get their books wrapped up in Christmas paper in those nice big hampers that the Prime Minister likes to give out—hand out at Christmas time. They will get the books then.

Mr. Speaker, what is hurtful is when proactive and responsible principals concerned about delivery of the curriculum to their students, and the negative impact that the absence of textbooks would have on student learning, when they requested that parents purchase the required texts, what does the Minister do? He publicly admonishes the principals.

The Minister must view principals and teachers as his allies not his adversaries; [*Desk thumping*] as important stakeholders. He must view them as important stakeholders in the education process and respect them. [*Desk thumping*] And he must see them as part of his support mechanism. They are not his adversaries.

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Mr. Speaker, the Minister of the People and Social Development also promised parents cards for the purchase of school supplies. Not one has so far been received, and this Government, I have to say does not know what it is doing. Parents and other stakeholders must question whether they are satisfied with the quality of education that is being offered to our nation's children, especially given the large allocations that have been given to the Ministry of Education over the past four fiscal years.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Read my contribution.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: When we examine the *Public Sector Investment Programme 2014*, Stimulating Growth and Generating Prosperity—and I read it. You all asked us to read it. I read it. I spent nights not sleeping and reading it.

Hon. Member: What!

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: We note that it is a veritable rehash, a veritable cut and paste of the previous years. It is. The Minister's plan to construct 50 more early childhood care and education centres remains the same. And the Minister is quick to inform about the number of ECCE centres he has opened, but he omits to say that 30 centres were constructed and commissioned under the People's National Movement, and that he inherited 20 more in various stages of completion when the PNM demitted office in 2010. Up to recently, four of these centres that were constructed under the PNM were waiting to be commissioned by the Minister.

Hon. Member: Five.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Five you are telling me? One in Morvant, two in Tunapuna, one in Goya and one in St. Augustine, but he is fixing them up and opening them and saying he built that and he built that. They were built by the PNM. The public has to know, Mr. Speaker, through you, the Minister is giving a false impression that all the centres that he has commissioned, were completely constructed post May 2010, under his Government's administration. This is not true. That is why we do not trust you all.

Miss Hospedales: That is right.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: “Ent” the Member for St Augustine wants to know? [Desk thumping] “Ah tellin him.” [Crosstalk]

Mr. Speaker, the programmes with respect to primary and secondary schools remain the same. The same schools mentioned in the PSIP 2011 in respect of infrastructural works, are the very same ones mentioned in the PSIP 2014. “Same ole, same ole.” But I noticed some of them in that batch with Shiva Boys' and Lakshmi Girls' and so, they were carded to cost \$10 million, I notice now in the

PSIP 2014 they are costing \$20 million; the price has doubled. You see, you held back these things over the years, you do nothing about them and now the price has doubled.

I was really hoping that the Minister, instead of using his contribution as a platform for politicking and misrepresenting facts, would have announced new ideas for curriculum reform at secondary school level; reforms that would address students' varying multiple intelligences in a truly meaningful manner. So that every child could find his or her place and no child would be left behind.

Mr. Speaker, our current secondary schools system fails to cater to the students multiple intelligences, to their innate competencies and interests, and that is why we lose so many of them. That is why so many of them fall through the cracks. Times are evolving and students' needs are constantly changing, so what was adequate yesterday is irrelevant to today's reality.

I have to acknowledge to the hon. Minister that he has tried to address this anomaly at the primary school level, with the expansion of the curriculum to include other non-traditional subjects and the introduction of a continuous assessment component. Again, we do not have a problem with the concept, but it is with the precipitous and poorly planned implementation, that we have a problem, the hasty and poorly planned implementation. But, Mr. Speaker, curriculum reform should not stop at the primary level. It should be continued at the secondary level so that in the not too distant future—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: We will. We will.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh:—we may be able to abolish the SEA examination and graduate students to secondary school based on their multiple intelligences.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Good point.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Mr. Speaker, irrelevant curricula do not excite students to want to participate in the learning process. In many instances, they are not interested in the diet of curriculum that is being offered to them. Besides, where are the remedial teachers in schools to address student literacy and numeracy deficiencies? There are so many special education UTT graduates in the system who are so underutilized and whose status has not been regularized; they are punishing.

Our secondary school system is breeding a feeling of inequality amongst students. The system is brutal to those who fail to find their niche, those who cannot cope and who drop out, because they do not feel a sense of purpose, so they begin to harbour feelings of inadequacy and resentment. For those students,

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the system is cold and calculating driven by raw scores and it puts a lie to the old adage: no child is left behind.

4.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I should have liked to have seen reform in respect of the creation of specialist or magnet schools that would cater to a wide range of student multiple intelligences; magnet schools with programmes heavily weighted in sports, let us say, for example—those magnet schools would attract students who are kinesthetically intelligent and assist them in developing their sporting competencies while at the same time progressing along academic lines. What you are doing is developing and training our future sportsmen, athletes and acrobats.

Mr. Speaker, magnet schools with programmes heavily weighted in the visual and performing arts would attract students who are artistically and spatially intelligent and assist them in developing their artistic competencies. At the same time, they would progress along academic lines and we would be developing and training our future performing artists, our actors, actresses, singers, musicians, composers, our dancers.

Magnet schools with programmes heavily weighted in information and communication technology would attract students who are technologically intelligent and assist them in developing these technological competencies. What will we be doing, Mr. Speaker? Developing and training our future information technologists and computer scientists.

Magnet schools with programmes heavily weighted in classical arts would attract students that are linguistically intelligent and assist them in developing these very linguistic competencies—developing and training our future linguists, writers, playwrights, poets, lawyers and historians.

Lastly, magnet schools heavily weighted in the sciences would attract students who are scientifically intelligent and help them in developing their scientific competencies and, at the same time, we would be developing and training our future scientists, medical practitioners and engineers, a holistic approach, giving every student a chance to excel. This is what I would like to see from the hon. Minister and this Government.

Mr. Speaker, all of this was part of the plan of the People's National Movement in its Vision 2020 and, of course, would be adopted in our Vision 2030 as we strive to develop society through education, the bedrock of national development. [*Desk thumping*]

What is needed is a comprehensive plan driven by an urgent need to cater to the holistic development of every single student, so that each and every one could make a meaningful contribution to the development of our society and none would become a menace to our beloved country.

We continue to experience a serious crime problem that concerns all citizens and while the law enforcement agencies do have their responsibilities, they cannot resolve the problem at home. The problem of crime must be addressed in the home and in the school where it has its genesis.

In this regard, there is no mention in this budget statement or in the contribution of the Minister of Education of any plan on the part of the Ministry of Education to institute a meaningful comprehensive programme that will bring home and school together in a truly meaningful collaboration to address crime in school and, indeed, in the wider community.

There is need, Mr. Speaker, for a holistic approach to strengthen the operations of the PTA. The need for a supportive mechanism such as a student outreach programme that will harness the collaborative efforts of a team comprising principal, teacher, PTA representatives, school social worker, school welfare officer, guidance officer, psychologist, medical practitioner, community police—a collaborative effort of key stakeholders in the education process, who would engage in monitoring student progress, diagnosing problems, prescribing solutions, visiting homes and lending psychological, emotional, social and financial support to students in need.

Mr. Speaker, in an effort to address student character development—address the way they develop in their personal and social lives—this Government paid millions of dollars for a commercially packaged piece of material, a programme that anyone can access via the Internet. This is the lack of consideration that this UNC-dominated Government has for the personal and social development of our nation's children.

This programme comes in the form of a DVD that students are required to view periodically. The programme lacks the human touch, the interpersonal, face-to-face communication with a flesh-and-blood facilitator with whom the students could readily identify. It is devoid of the elements of reciprocity since it does not facilitate spontaneous interaction with peers and facilitators whereby students may express their sentiments, then their emotions, and in turn receive the counsel and advice and support and empathy of their facilitators and peers.

Mr. Speaker, if the Minister were serious about student character

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development, he would implement a programme that uses local content with which students could readily identify—a programme that is delivered by your own local role models, our national icons, members of our society who have distinguished themselves in various fields of endeavour, members of the school's alumni, members of civil society, NGOs. Such a programme should utilize our very own local exemplars with whom our students could truly identify and who, as I said, could in turn empathize with their circumstances and their needs.

This is the type of character development programme that we need in our nation's schools—supportive, local content and supportive, certainly not a foreign, impersonal, pre-packaged programme on a DVD. We do not want that. The Minister has only to look at the model implemented at the St. Francois Girls College where it has been operating successfully for the past 12 years, producing fine young adults of whom our nation could be suitably proud.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Self praise. Self praise. Self praise.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Mr. Speaker, technology has been dominating progress globally, allowing us to access information at a speed faster than lightning. Information, Mr. Speaker, is the fastest wealth-generating currency in today's world. It is only natural, therefore, that we should place—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Mr. Speaker, technology has been dominating progress globally, allowing us to access information at a speed faster than lightning. Information is the fastest wealth-generating currency in today's world. It is only natural, therefore, that we should place technology at the very heart of student learning.

The People's National Movement had, as part of its vision, the creation of a highly technologically literate society that would take Trinidad and Tobago to First World status by the year 2020. My own personal track record as an educator would show that I was and am still an avid proponent of the use of information and communication technology as an integral part of smart pedagogical practice.

So, the PNM wholeheartedly supports the idea of the use of technology in

schools as part of the teaching and learning process. What we object to, Mr. Speaker, is how this UNC-dominated Government is treating with the whole process of implementation. Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's laptop programme is just another example of satisfying a political agenda.

The goal of this project was to integrate information and communication technology (ICT) into the curriculum as part of the pedagogical practice. This is not happening in reality. I see the Minister is boasting about St. Lucia coming and so. St. Lucia better go to Barbados where it is done correctly, if they know what is good for them.

Since this UNC-dominated Government assumed office, it has spent \$252 million on the purchase of laptop computers for Form 1 students—\$252 million, Mr. Speaker—and this does not include ongoing infrastructural costs such as physical, electrical and technical infrastructure. The public has, however, expressed its reservations with respect to the use of laptops in the teaching and learning process and has been calling on the Government to assess the impact of its laptop programme on students' learning.

Mr. Speaker, look I have here from the newspapers, the *Express*, Tuesday August 27, 2013, some students using machines for pornography and games and they told the Minister and he said there was nothing they could do about it. They will always get through.

Dr. Gopeesingh: When did I say that?

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: In the papers; in the papers here. He said he knows about it.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yes, that is not to say that I did not know about it.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: You know about it?

Dr. Gopeesingh: I know about it. Do not say that I did not know about it.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Mr. Speaker, I do not have to look for the quote, because it is right here on the *Express*, Tuesday August 27, 2013.

Dr. Gopeesingh: This is just not like you, man. Come on!

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Let me find it.

“We are finding they are using it to play games. Pornography is a serious problem. We are fed up, we have to call in the parents.”

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Let us not play semantics, “nah”, but we cannot do anything about it. We are fed up; we have to call in the parents. Parents rang me about this. He is giving the children laptops and admitting they are using it for pornography and games and he is saying we are fed up; we have to call in the parents.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Will you give way?

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: No, I am not giving way. “Laptops more harmful than good”. Monday, September 02 in the *Express* again: people expressing and the *Daily Express* called for, the editorial said, “Put free laptop policy to the test”. They want to test this free laptop policy. What is it doing for students? On September 02, 2013, in the *Guardian*, the editorial says: “Time to account for school laptop programme”.

In the wake of all this disenchantment, the Government recently launched a public relations blitz to promote its laptop programme with the Prime Minister visiting schools to personally hand out the laptops to Form 1 students, and the Minister of Education himself, using every opportunity to take advantage of the opportunity to speak glowingly about the programme—and the Minister of Finance and the Economy himself in his budget statement, paid special tribute to it.

What this UNC-dominated Government is promoting sounds very nice to the uninitiated and it looks very good on paper. People do not know what it is, Mr. Speaker. The parents do not know. Most of the teachers do not know what it is to use the technology as an integral part of smart pedagogical practice. They do not know about it.

What they are saying—[*Interruption*] To some people, not to all, it looks nice, but the use of the laptop in the education process so that learning takes place is not happening where the rubber meets the road, that is, in the schools. It is not happening. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, I am making my contribution under very difficult circumstances and I am not talking to anybody but you. I am talking to you alone and I ask for two minutes injury time. I am under a lot of stress with the Minister of Education only disturbing me.

The fact is that teachers continue to be trained to use application programmes—and he boasts Level 1, Level 2, Level 3 application programmes—I know the teachers, I know the people involved—in Microsoft Word and Excel. Mr. Speaker, these programmes cannot give them the competencies they need to

effectively integrate ICT in the curriculum. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, I am hearing something bawling “nonsense” because they do not know.

Mr. Speaker: Members, may I ask you to—I think one Member is to speak later on; another Member has already spoken, so would you allow the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West to speak with some degree of silence. Continue.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, please do not forget the two minutes’ injury time.

Mr. Speaker: No, no injury time for you. [*Laughter*]

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: You see. You see. Okay, Mr. Speaker, I shall handle my own battles. I thank you.

It cannot give them the competencies they need to effectively integrate ICT in the curriculum. Teachers need much more intensive and specialist training, Mr. Speaker, for example in the use of Moodle, Web 2.0 tools, eClassroom, et cetera, to allow them to interact and to collaborate with their students and their colleagues via blogs, wikis and video sharing. They do not know how to do that. They have not been trained in that.

4.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, what the Minister should look at is an article by Dr. David Subran in the newspapers—I think yesterday—where he is going into much more detail on why—he said it is time to salvage the programme.

You should read that article from Dr. David Subran. I have it somewhere here. Look at it here, Mr. Speaker, Dr. David Subran, on Monday, September 16, 2013 in the *Daily Express*, “Move now to redeem laptop programme”. This is what he is saying; that they are not using—where there is Internet service, sure you can use it to download information: good information and bad information, but they are not using it effectively in such a manner that learning takes place. It is not being used. [*Interruption*] You can say what you want.

Mr. Speaker, with regard to the laptops, only approximately 30 per cent of the machines given to Form 4 students are functional—that is the first batch—only 30 per cent. With respect to Form 3 students, about 40 to 50 per cent can be accounted for and approximately 60 per cent of those given to Form 2 students are in good working condition.

Mr. Speaker, many of the laptops—I will prove it, Mr. Speaker. I will call the

names of the schools. Many of the laptops are in a state of disrepair and parents are now responsible for repairing the machines after the warranty has expired and they do not want to do that so they are giving back the laptops to the schools. For the past three years the Minister has been promising to increase the Internet capacity to 50 megabytes in secondary schools—[*Interruption*—it is in the budget statements for the last three years—and 20 megabytes in primary schools. The fact remains that this has not happened. They only have five megabytes, except in some cases where some schools are trying, on their own, to improve their Internet capacity, independent of the Ministry of Education and they pay providers like Flow for the service.

Mr. Speaker, I have a list of the schools here and I am going to go through them: Belmont Secondary, no Internet access for students; low voltage; laptops in disrepair; parents who have to pay for repair after warranty, they do not want to do so and they are giving the laptops back to the school.

South East Secondary, network and servers non-functional, three to four years now; school embarked on its own initiative to get Internet; absolutely no Internet from the Ministry of Education; they get it from Flow. I must say, Flow is giving some schools free and some schools are paying their way. East Mucurapo Secondary, network and servers non-functional; the Ministry of Education is making no attempt to repair the equipment.

St. Joseph's Convent, St. Joseph, network and servers functional, however there is no wireless connectivity; only wired machines connecting to the network with Internet access. Internet is slow and drops regularly. St. Madeleine Secondary, it is the only school I met that is a cross-section, Mr. Speaker, across the country; network and Internet functional.

Tranquility Secondary: servers are operational; that is they can be started and booted up but the network is not functional; machines cannot connect to the network. ASJA Girls, Charlieville: network and servers functional, however, there is no wireless connectivity only wired clients—clients are machines, Mr. Speaker—connecting to the network with Internet access.

Belmont Boys Secondary—[*Interruption*—go and find out—the entire network infrastructure is down for a long time. The ICT technicians from the Ministry are currently working on it but seem unable to solve the problem. The school relies on their own independent system which they have established for network and Internet connectivity.

Diego Martin North Secondary: only the students' side of the network, the

library and the computer lab are functional with Internet access. I am glad for that. The staff site has been since 2008 and has never been attended to. These computers have never been used. They have sat idly for five years collecting dust.

Mr. Speaker, Mayaro Secondary: the student server is down and there is no Internet access—notice I am going across the country. Providence Secondary: the entire system is down for a while. Technicians from the Ministry visited but were unable to solve the problems. Moruga Secondary: there is no Internet access for a very long time, but the network and servers are functional. So, Mr. Speaker, if the network and server are functional, and there is no Internet access, as happens in many schools, what is the use of the equipment? What is the use of the equipment? To what?

Mr. Speaker, San Fernando West Secondary: the entire system has been down for a while; no Internet access; nothing; nothing is functional. I got these from the schools, “eh”. Naparima College: the student server is not booting up. Vishnu Boys: the entire network is non-functional but this is a board school, Mr. Speaker, and they purchased their own server and set up their own Internet service. St. Benedicts College: the network is down for two and a half years; nothing doing.

Penal Secondary: network down approximately two years, nothing working. San Juan North Secondary: servers not in use; they are not functioning properly. The servers have to be bypassed and the school used its own initiative to get their own Internet access from flow. Holy Faith Convent, Couva; Sixth Form Government Secondary; ASJA Girls, San Fernando: their system is up and functioning, but the Internet and computers run very slowly; it is very frustrating and it wastes a lot of teaching and learning time.

Malick Secondary: servers down for months due to faulty power supply and they are awaiting approval from the ICT department to purchase power supply. Coryal Secondary: no wireless access in the staff room and admin areas; Internet, where accessible, is slow and very spotty and many, many students do not have Internet access at home. So what is this laptop programme about, Mr. Speaker? What is it about? What is it about, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker, I have here some pictures—they are showing pictures. Mr. Speaker, this is one lab. [*Showing picture*] “All the computers packed up; packed up.” [*Showing pictures*] Look at this one. “This one, all the wireless and so in disarray and all the wires are out.”

Hon. Member: “How we know dah is a school?”

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Well, you could go and see; you could go and ask.

Dr. Moonilal: “That is home by you.”

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: “Yeah, is home by me.” I have so many computers. Look at this one, “all the computers packed up”, Mr. Speaker. They are packed up in a corner. They are packed up.

[*Showing picture*] Look at the state of this lab. You might think that the chairs are stripe; it is not stripe. That is the foam. The lab is in a mess and all the computers are packed up in the corner. You could see the back of them. You could see the back of the computers within. [*Showing picture*] Look at this, look at this one, Mr. Speaker. [*Showing picture*] Look at this one; [*Showing picture*] look at this one; [*Showing picture*] look at this one [*Showing picture*] and look at this one. [*Showing picture*] I think this one depicts all. Look, they are packed up there with all the wires. Look at it; all the wires.

Dr. Gopeesingh: PNM friends.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: And this is the boast; this is the boast. [*Crosstalk*] I know schools; I was a principal for 30-something years. Mr. Speaker, everything is packed up. [*Interruption and crosstalk*] “Yeah”, I know; I know.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Many of the labs the Minister is boasting about are in a state of disrepair.

Mr. Speaker, I was dismayed but not surprised to hear the Minister of Finance and the Economy announce that full scholarships towards a master’s or Ph.D. degree programme, at any recognized university, anywhere in the world, would be given to Bachelor of Science students alone who achieve a first-class honours degree. Mr. Speaker, I say dismayed because under the People’s National Movement this opportunity was open, available, to all students attaining first-class honours, irrespective of area of study, be it the humanities—

Hon. Member: Correct.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh:—the social sciences or the natural sciences. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, but I was not surprised to hear that comment because in last year’s budget statement the Minister of Finance and the Economy had announced that government funding for a scholarship will focus “on the areas of priority

study necessary to support our strategy for economic and industrial development.” That is page 21 of his last year’s budget statement.

Mr. Speaker, I was also not surprised, because I am familiarly acquainted with the case of a young lady, Zezia Moonan, holder of a first-class Bachelor of Arts honours degree, who requested a scholarship to pursue postgraduate studies in French, Chinese and Spanish and this was denied on the basis that her course of study was not an area of priority study in alignment with national development goals.

Mr. Speaker, what this UNC-dominated Government is doing is discriminating against talented students who may wish to pursue the humanities. This Government is introducing a new type of discrimination based on areas of academia where taxpayers’ money is being used to favour some, at the expense of others. [*Desk thumping*]

What type of subliminal message is this UNC-dominated Government sending to our nation’s children, that students wishing to pursue postgraduate studies in languages, law, modern studies, visual and performing arts cannot aspire to the very opportunities afforded their colleagues pursuing the sciences? Mr. Speaker, is this Government establishing a new matrix in equity and inequality? What about the overworked adage “no child left behind”?

Mr. Speaker, has this UNC-dominated Government no vision? They speak of areas of priority in respect of national development goals. Is it that we are going to base a society around the sciences alone and neglect the humanities, the soul of any nation? Mr. Speaker, we live in a global village. It therefore stands to reason that any country that aspires to successfully conduct cross-border business must appreciate foreign language experts.

More and more Trinidad and Tobago has been fostering bilateral relationships with Latin America, Europe and China. Surely our foreign service must need linguists and translators to facilitate communication with our foreign partners. How then are foreign languages not an area of priority study in respect of national development goals? As a former student of foreign languages, I myself feel insulted. Probably I should not be here, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, this UNC-dominated Government is devoid of basic common sense and vision and for these terrible deficiencies our nation is suffering.

Mr. Speaker, the problem with national budgets is they are weighted heavily in favour of political agendas designed to propagate the interest of the ruling party. The consequence is that resources are never allocated equitably. So that

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only some—as we heard all over there—of the citizens enjoy a better life, a higher standard of living while the rest are neglected.

Mr. Speaker, this is what has happened over the past three years that this UNC-dominated coalition has been in power. Many constituencies, particularly the PNM constituencies—we had the living example here; the living proof [*Desk thumping*]*—*have been unfairly deprived of benefits that could improve the lives of their constituents.

Mr. Speaker, in an article in the *Business Guardian*, the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy admitted that a budget is a political document as well. The question I ask, Mr. Speaker: To what extent are the needs of some citizens—certain citizens—sacrificed on the altar of political expediency?

Mr. Speaker, I read an article in a daily newspaper entitled “Suruj wants \$2.5b to develop south, central infrastructure”. “I doh mind. They getting their development.” Then I looked and I saw “Roadworks ahead: roadworks get going at Freeport”. I do not mind. It is Trinidad, I do not mind. People live there too.

Mr. Speaker, I received an email with a video—if you see it, Mr. Speaker—from the Member for Couva South showing the newly constructed—he was showing off, “eh”; he sent me—Tsunami bridge in Barrackpore. The first—I do not know what it is “eh”, Mr. Speaker—AIT composite arched bridge—I do not know, the video showed—to be built outside of the USA by a company from Couva called Lincoln and Associates. Mr. Speaker, “I glad for them; I glad for them.” As I turned the page, I saw a retaining wall, a threat in Belmont; a retaining wall falling; down; a little man there with his retaining wall in Belmont, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I have to say, we do not have the luxury, the pleasure—like the Member for Mayaro—to say, as he said on Wednesday, August 14 in the *Trinidad Guardian*, “Fix Mayaro or I walk”. We cannot do that, Mr. Speaker. We cannot tell anybody fix anywhere or we will walk. We have to sit and take it.

Hon. Member: Correct. [*Laughter*]

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Mr. Speaker, I thought of the many letters that I have written to the various Ministers of Works and Local Government requesting rehabilitation of roads in the constituency of Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, all to no avail. I wonder whether the people of the PNM constituencies also pay taxes. Do they pay taxes, Mr. Speaker?

I am making a plea, I am begging the Minister of Works to please, please, repair the retaining wall that is crumbling in Davis Street, Belmont that was in the newspapers, to rehabilitate Augustine Lane, Gonzales; and Albert Lane, Belmont Valley Road, both of which collapsed more than two years ago and posing a serious threat to the homes in the area and inconveniencing the lives of the people in those areas, Mr. Speaker. I am begging, Mr. Speaker.

Please rehabilitate the St. Ann's/Cascade bridge and the bridge in Julian Trace, Cascade. Year after year, Mr. Speaker, we come to this honourable House to debate the budget and highlight the plight of our constituents with a hope that they would benefit from their fair share of the national pie but, Mr. Speaker, year after year their needs are hardly ever or never ever met. National budgets [*Crosstalk*] are supposed to improve [*Crosstalk*] the lives of all citizens through the equitable distribution of the State's resources. What citizens have to ask themselves is whether they are getting value for the money they pay in taxes and from the revenue that the Government collects annually from our country's resources.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I should like to end by making reference to the address by His Excellency President Anthony Carmona, at the reopening of the Parliament when His Excellency reminded the Government that his role is that of the people's steward, not partisan benefactor.

Hon. Member: "Doh cry, doh cry."

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: "Is thing to cry for. Is thing to cry for." His Excellency continued—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you would know that under our Standing Orders we are not supposed to use the name of His Excellency to influence the debate. So I would ask you to stay away from that and get on to some other subject.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Mr. Speaker, I am just ending and I was heeding the advice but, however, I understand and I take guidance from you. You are in charge here, Mr. Speaker. I must, I must take guidance from you. This is not my school, this is your domain.

Mr. Speaker, the Government should ensure that the nation's resources are evenly distributed; not based on how one chose to cast one's vote. To do otherwise is to make a mockery of democracy.

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I think it is a good time for us to suspend the sitting for tea. This sitting is suspended until two minutes past 5.00 p.m. Before you move, Members, just hold. Member for Diego Martin North/East, could you rise?

Mr. Imbert: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I realize that you all had slipped into some area of forgetfulness.

4.32 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.04 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Toco/Sangre Grande, Minister of Science and Technology. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Science and Technology (Hon. Dr. Rupert Griffith): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Just hold a second. I understand we are still short of a quorum. So let me get 12 Members before you begin, otherwise whatever you say will be null and void. [*Pause*]

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Minister of Science and Technology. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Science and Technology (Hon. Dr. Rupert Griffith): Thank you, hon. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to join the debate at this time. After three days, much has been said. And, you know, Mr. Speaker, one of the things coming this hour—many of the policies, procedures and initiatives on the Government side have already been said, but what I would focus on today, I would speak about the work the Ministry of Science and Technology has been undertaking over the last 12 months or so, Mr. Speaker, to improve the lives of our citizens and the plans to sustain the work through the many new initiatives in this fiscal year 2013/2014.

Mr. Speaker, before I go on though, I want to compliment my colleague, the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy, the members of his staff—many of them are still here, Mr. Speaker—and all those persons who assisted in putting together, what I consider a great budget. This budget, as most of the speakers have said, would stimulate the recovery of our national economy and engender the sustainable development of Trinidad and Tobago.

The People's Partnership Government has a vision for science, technology and

innovation for Trinidad and Tobago, and through the efforts of my Ministry and the other agencies under our mandate, we intend to bring about a new way of thinking—a critical revolution, if you will, Mr. Speaker—through ICT technology.

As the Minister of Science and Technology, I am spearheading a team that is consistently encouraging our citizens to push the science and technology envelope—step outside of the boundaries of what they may be accustomed to—to embrace the digital age that we are in and to ultimately translate this into the fulfilment of our national development objectives.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Science and Technology will ensure that whatever programmes and initiatives are undertaken reach the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago in a meaningful and tangible way. In other words, we want to touch and transform the lives of everyone—men, women, children, the young and the not so young, as well as our elders. Whether you are a student, a homemaker, an entrepreneur, a farmer, a teacher, retiree or a differently abled person, our goal is to make the link between science and technology and an improved quality of life for all.

You will hear me repeat particular words and phrases today like human capital development digital inclusion, digital access, universal services, connectivity and innovation. I want to assure this honourable House, Mr. Speaker, that they are part of our everyday parlance in the Ministry where we live by the credos and I quote: “people-centred development” and “a connected nation.”

Mr. Speaker, before I proceed any further, please allow me to respond to some of the statements made by my colleagues, particularly on the other side. I know all of the colleagues on my side, or this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, responded to many of those questions. What has saddened me, Mr. Speaker, after the many years that I served in this honourable House like your good self, is that the Opposition really brought nothing substantial to improve the debate or to even enhance the efforts made by the Ministry of Finance and the Economy in bringing our national budget. They seem to think, Mr. Speaker, that if they come with a plethora of negatives, and they keep repeating them as they are wont to do, the national community would listen to them, would hear them, and eventually vote them back into office.

Mr. Speaker, I recall distinctly, the last time I spoke on the budget—last year’s budget—I advised my colleagues on the other side to step up; to come up better so that the nation could look at them as a responsible Opposition and that

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they may consider voting for them to some extent so that we establish the democracy that we need as a nation to have a strong Opposition, as well as a very effective and proactive Government, as the one that we now have, Mr. Speaker, but one year later, to no avail.

You know, when you listen to the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, she says, "this budget is nothing but a repetitive wish list". It is far from that, Mr. Speaker. When you listen to the Member for Point Fortin who says, "at best this budget is anecdotal". I mean, we have to get serious. I mean, that is an insult, not only to the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, but an insult to the nation—such a budget that would advance the cause and the economy and all the other things my colleagues spoke about in this country.

Then, another Member, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, I think it was, says "the blind leading the blind and they all will fall in a ditch". What nonsense! Which blind and which ditch? If it is any blind that led the blind, it is the blind of the PNM—the leader of the PNM in 2010—when the people of Trinidad and Tobago voted them out, and we are here today and that is why they are there, over there. [*Crosstalk*]

So, Mr. Speaker, allow me to get back to my original purpose of being here today. I sat patiently all this time listening to the debate. My contribution to this budget today, the very substantial achievement—these were the very substantial achievements of the plans of the Government in science and technology.

Let me ask you to think for a moment, Mr. Speaker, what would life be without science and technology? Science and technology has changed every aspect of our lives: how we work, how we do business and how we communicate with one with another in our personal and professional lives. Ask yourself, what this world would be like, Mr. Speaker, if science and technology was not available to enhance our lives?

Today, without the Smartphone, ask yourself, what would life be like?—your laptop or the Internet. We are in the age where email, twitter and whats app have effectively replaced, the post office and the fax machine—and where in this new world, the encyclopedia is replaced by Wikipedia. That is the society we live in, that is the technology.

Mr. Speaker, the creation of the Ministry of Science and Technology on June 25, 2012, singularly dedicated to the business of science and technology, was a well thought out and purposeful act by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. I

want to compliment our Prime Minister, our astute Prime Minister, for a vision in separating aside and setting up such a Ministry. It was meant to embrace the significant changes which we are facing today and equip our people with the tools, skills and understanding that they will need to function effectively in a modern day “boundaryless” world. We either harness the potential of science and technology to our advantage, or run the risk of continuously playing catch up with the rest of the international landscape. Trinidad and Tobago cannot be left behind, and I dare say, will not be left behind under the People’s Partnership Government.

Let us look at the people-centred development. The foundation for the operations of the Ministry of Science and Technology is pillar I of the medium-term policy framework plan; that is the people-centred development. This is at the heart of Government’s economic development strategy. It focuses on the people of Trinidad and Tobago and their aspirations, as well as the strategies that allow each and every individual the opportunities for growth and development.

5.15 p.m.

This Government, Mr. Speaker, recognizes that advances in scientific knowledge have led to greater benefits to humankind. Life expectancy has increased significantly; cures have been discovered for many diseases and antibiotics alone have saved more human lives than were killed in all of the centuries of wars that were fought. Agricultural output has increased significantly, and helps fight food and world hunger. As well, innumerable products, services and processes have made life infinitely more comfortable for successive generations.

Mr. Speaker, due to progress in transportation and communication, millions of human beings cross national borders every day, and hundreds of millions of written, visual and sound messages are exchanged instantaneously, on the World Wide Web and with the click of a mouse or the touch of your screen, individuals around the world can access them. In your pocket, Mr. Speaker, the Smartphone possesses more computing power than all the computers used to send Apollo to the Moon. Imagine that; that cell phone in your pocket, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it is mindboggling to fully comprehend the impact of science and technology in this world. Is there any wonder that as a Government we are dedicating such immense resources and emphasis on developing this sector and, by extension, placing high priority on the development of our citizens? Mr. Speaker, my Ministry is relatively a new one, but the work we have done since June 2012 touches the core of human development in Trinidad and Tobago.

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The Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, has said and, I quote:

“One of the most effective channels for eradicating poverty, creating wealth and enhancing competitiveness is through the acquisition, adaptation and application of relevant technologies.”

This concept forms the basis of my Ministry’s core values. We intend to ensure that technology is available to everyone, Mr. Speaker.

Today, Mr. Speaker, in Trinidad and Tobago, I am pleased to report that the mobile penetration in 2012 stands at 142 per cent, and it is up from 138 per cent in the previous year. This is one of the highest in the world, and we could be proud of achieving such a mobile penetration. [*Desk thumping*] It exceeds the developed world’s average of about 128 per cent penetration and far exceeds that of the developing world which averages about 89 per cent, Mr. Speaker; so we are doing good.

That simply means that most persons in Trinidad and Tobago have at least two cell phones, and in some cases some people have three cell phones, but domestic broadband penetration rose from 48 per cent to 52 per cent in the same period. The ITU, the International Telecommunications Union, Mr. Speaker, estimates that for every 10 per cent increase in broadband penetration, GDP will positively be impacted between 0.8 per cent and 1 per cent. So you see the significance of that broadband penetration. Connectivity, Mr. Speaker, leads to economic growth, and this Government has been leading the charge to make Trinidad and Tobago a connected nation.

Under this Government’s stewardship, revenues for the telecommunications and broadcasting industry rose to 12.6 per cent over the period 2011—2012. This translates into \$5.3 billion or equal to about 3.3 per cent of the GDP, Mr. Speaker. The diversification process requires nurturing the creative and innovative capacity of our citizens, shifting the national mindset away from the traditional economic and employment staples to a generation of new diversified and sustainable sources of wealth, particularly in high value niche markets. It is also imperative to increase investments in science and technology, and innovation and build human and institutional capacity which stimulates the non-energy sector, diversifies the range of economic activity and as a result boost global competitiveness, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, let us look at some achievements in fiscal 2012/2013. You would by now appreciate, Mr. Speaker, the huge responsibility that rests with the Ministry of Science and Technology and the three agencies which fall under our purview. These agencies are: NIHERST, that is the National Institute of Higher

Education, Research, Science and Technology; the iGovTT, the National Information and Communication Technology Company Limited and what we refer to as TATT, the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago.

Let me start with the achievements in the area of governance, ICT governance. The National ICT Policy: Mr. Speaker, in 2012/2013 the Ministry of Science and Technology completed the development of the smartTT, that is the National Information Communications Technology Plan 2014—2018. SmartTT was developed after widespread national consultations that highlighted the critical need to optimize this country's financial, human and other resources towards the creation of lasting prosperity. SmartTT is the first phase of the large national ICT roadmap, Mr. Speaker, for the ICT sector and to become the major contributor of the country's gross domestic product.

The roadmap consists of two additional 5-year periods: 2018—2022 and 2022—2026; SmartTT consists of five themes: innovation and human capital development, access and digital inclusion, e-business and ICT sector development, infrastructure development and e-government. The ICT plan is currently before Cabinet, and I want to assure this august House, Mr. Speaker, that it is not just ink on paper. Another mechanism utilized by the ITU is a global benchmarking tool known as the Global ICT Price Basket Index.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about how a country is rated and how the rest of the world looks at us in terms of our level of ICT development, and our capacity to do business electronically. So in order for Trinidad and Tobago to be in a position to leverage technology for increased competitiveness, internationally, it is imperative that this country improve its ranking in key ICT indices used to assess and measure the ICT development of a country, vis-à-vis, other countries and international benchmarks. In other words, we are compared with other countries around the world to see where we are as far as our ICT development.

Mr. Speaker, one such index is in the ICT Development Index (IDI), is a composite index used by the International Telecommunications Union to monitor and compare ICT development globally among 161 countries. Mr. Speaker, in 2011 Trinidad and Tobago was ranked 61st, in 2012 Trinidad and Tobago, based on previous years' performance, would have expected to rank 49th out of the 161 countries. With the implementation of the SmartTT, it is forecasted that the IDI ranking for Trinidad and Tobago in 2018 will be within the top 20 countries out of 161. So you could see the phenomenal growth and development in ICT for Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Speaker. That is quite a quantum leap as far as ICT

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development.

Another mechanism utilized by the ITU as a global benchmarking tool known as the Global ICT Price Basket Index, normally referred to as IPS; this measures the cost and affordability of ICT service among 161 countries, Mr. Speaker. On the basis of 2011 data the country would have ranked 31st out of 161 countries in 2012, demonstrating an upward movement. It is forecasted that Trinidad and Tobago will be ranked within the top 10 out of 161 countries by the year 2018, Mr. Speaker—another quantum leap in terms of our ICT development in Trinidad and Tobago—provided that appropriate strategies such as those proposed by the SmartTT policy document are implemented.

Mr. Speaker, the Global Competitiveness Index, that is the GCI, is an internationally renowned mechanism utilized by the World Economic Forum to assess the competitive landscape of a basket of countries, and seeks to provide insight into the drivers for their productivity and prosperity. In 2012/2013, Trinidad and Tobago ranked 84th in this index out of 144 countries; that is the basket of countries they put together comprising development, not so developed and even, to some extent, some small states.

It is significant to note, however, that the sub-indices used to calculate this index relate to variables such as: basic requirements, and that is institutions and infrastructure; efficiency enhancers: that is high educational and training, technological readiness, and business innovation and sophistication. The strategic focus and directions of SmartTT result in a high degree of congruence between Trinidad and Tobago's national ICT plan, and the GCI indicators of prosperity.

This is what we would have to be benchmarked and marked against to determine our level of development with ICT. This is a very critical benchmark. Given this positive alignment, it is foreseeable that Trinidad and Tobago will be ranked among the top 30 countries out of 144 by 2018 using these benchmark indicators, Mr. Speaker. Again, that is phenomenal growth.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to advise that achieving high ranking in these internationally recognized indices is important in the national and global context. The indices identify the key factors that are fundamental to sustainable economic growth, competitiveness and long-term prosperity including the requisite policy tools, institutional reforms and processes.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, the indices allow for comparative analysis and benchmarking among countries at similar or disparate levels of development.

These international indices and the rankings assigned to the countries provide Governments with a mechanism that allows them to measure the impact of their policies and regulations in various areas to determine whether the most appropriate methodology is being utilized, vis-à-vis, accepted international practices.

5.30 p.m.

The mechanism also facilitates review of the potential ICT to enable the establishment of a knowledge-based economy. By continuously attaining improved ranking, Trinidad and Tobago will be signalling to the world its readiness as a technologically sound society and viable environment in which to conduct business and thereby enhancing competitiveness and attracting foreign investment.

Mr. Speaker, you see the importance of Trinidad and Tobago developing its ICT resources so that we could track the very needed foreign investment at this time. How is this going to be achieved? How are we going to develop as an ICT nation? How are we going to be recognized? What mechanisms do we need to put in place to ensure that we are on the right track, and in the time frame we have set for Trinidad and Tobago we could meet these benchmarking deadlines? Well, we have set up a ministerial steering committee on information, communication technology and this has been established to give much needed impetus to the various plans and projects which comprise critical components of the national ICT agenda.

As Chairman of this body, which is comprised of eight Ministers—or eight of my ministerial colleagues—I can attest that since the constitution in July 2012 the committee has been working consistently to provide the requisite strategic oversight to advance a number of key ICT projects. One of these projects is the health information management system for the Ministry of Health. My colleague, the Minister of Health, spoke about that at length and the benefits that it will derive. But one of the advantages that he mentioned, and I would just like to emphasize on, is the accessibility of patient information in real time and at any point of presence.

So whether you live San Fernando, Point Fortin, Arima or Matelot and you go to a health facility for a medical procedure, that information will be online, so that a health institution with the relevant password, with the relevant security can access the information. No longer will a doctor have to sit and write out a whole case by hand and send it to the next health facility or the next doctor. It is all

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online. As my colleague reminded me, this can be done in any part of the world. So if you leave Trinidad and Tobago and you went to Washington DC or any part of the world, you can access that information readily online. That is one of the systems we are putting in place.

Another, Mr. Speaker, is our work in the Ministry of Education. We are putting in place another system to enhance education and training in Trinidad and Tobago. The Minister of Education mentioned something about the TT Edulink project. We have conceptualized that project and it is in place right now. There are a few kinks we have to work out still before it is fully implemented, but we are about 90 to 95 per cent there.

This is a programme that the Ministry of Education—this project will comprise the implementation of a suite of solutions, ranging from increased bandwidth and broadband access on site to wireless connectivity and video on demand for education content delivery system as well as an integrated security surveillance solution designed to complement the current manned security guard.

When our colleague, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, spoke very negatively about the initiative for the Edulink, it is really discouraging to hear that.

Mr. Seemungal: She did not know what she was talking about.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: Some of the things mentioned, that it is ineffective and talk about laptops—children looking at certain not recommended types of activities on the laptops. I do not know what language I could use here, Mr. Speaker, that is acceptable, but I think you got the idea what I mean. It is really not happening.

What could have happened, because I myself have heard something like that, is that on a couple of occasions children accessed their parents' laptop or their sister's or brother's laptop, brought it into the school and they had a good time looking at some programmes that did not help. To hear the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West come here to use that example is really pitiful. There will always be a downside in almost every invention, every technological invention. Bridges are built so that traffic can flow, but people go on bridges and jump off. So what would you do, not build bridges? Tablets are made for medicinal reasons and people take an overdose of tablets and they die. What do we do, we stop making them?

So if one or two children should access their brother's or sister's or some relative's laptop, and bring it into a school situation, and they are caught with it,

then do you condemn all of it?

The first year, this People's Partnership Government, gave out 1,700 laptops, and since then, to date, it is 70,000 laptops that were given out. We have built into those laptops certain firewalls that the students can only access certain information. There are restricted areas. They are built and designed for that purpose. So to come here and say that the children can access programmes that are not permissible, it is not—well, how could I say it—it is not quite accurate.

The Member also said that rather than trying to enhance ICT education, awareness and development in students, this Government is doing nothing. It has a—to not exactly use her word—but means that we have a frivolous approach to ICT as far as schools are concerned. Let me give you some information on this SmartTT plan and what we are implementing in our schools right now.

I did establish we have about 70,000 laptops. She talked about the teachers not knowing what to do. This Government has trained through the Ministry of Education 400 teachers. All the teachers working with the students with laptops are properly trained to tutor and guide the students with the use of laptops. In addition to that, even the principals have been trained. I think the last figure the Minister of Education gave me it is 400 principals—sorry, let me get that right, 4,000 principals and 400 teachers have been trained to assist the children with the laptops.

Further, Mr. Speaker, to the eCAL initiative, which is the laptop initiative and the programmes associated with it, there are a number of additional programmes set out in the SmartTT to promote ICT skills development. For example, some of these is the development of an ICT training framework; two, the integrated human capital development, education training with industry needs; create digital content for the use of all levels of education; web production incentives; offer scholarships as identified areas of research and attract and retain ICT professionals.

There is no shortage in ICT training in Trinidad and Tobago. We are going to be an ICT savvy society within the time frame that we have spoken about. Let me give you an example of what education is doing right now.

The Trinidad and Tobago education sector is a very mature one, as far as ICT is concerned. ICT training and certification is prevalent throughout the country. For example, the National Energy Skills Centres have offered ICT certification since 1998—so where is the shortage?—and has trained over 110,500 persons to date. ICT enrolment and graduation among the flagship tertiary educational

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institutions, including UWI, UTT, and COSTAATT are also noteworthy. In 2010/2011, 388 persons graduated in ICT degree, associated degree and diploma programmes at those institutions. The total enrolment as at January 2012 in those institutions in ICT degrees, associate degrees and diploma programmes is 2,209.

So when my colleague, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, said that the training is wanting or the training is not effective, here is the information, you can check it out. I wish she could go on the Internet, do her research and find out more about this.

Mr. Speaker, even smaller but noteworthy institutions such as the School of Business and Computer Science, that is the SBCS, and the Caribbean Tech TrendZ Limited, that is CTTL, have also been in the forefront of IT professional training for many years. So, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, look again. You would see that there are a lot of initiatives that are taking place.

I want to talk a little about another mechanism we use for the advancement of ICT in Trinidad and Tobago, and that is the e-Business Roundtable. Another area in which we have made considerable progress is that of the e-Business Roundtable, the membership of which has been enhanced to ensure appropriate synergies, with policy direction being pursued by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago with respect to ICT. The e-Business Roundtable plays an important role, not only in charting the national ICT agenda, but also providing an example of successful public/private partnership.

The body comprises key members of the business community, including the ICT industry, academia and public sector. I have no doubt that this think tank can be modelled to advance development in other key sectors of the economy. This Government appreciates the valuable contribution of the members of the e-Business Roundtable, and their commitment to assisting Government in the development of the requisite policy environment and change management strategies.

Mr. Speaker, in November 2012, the roundtable, in partnership with the Ministry of Science and Technology, hosted a signature event and that is the ICT Business and Innovation Symposium. This was held at the Hyatt under the theme, "Realizing the Future from Vision to Reality". The theme sought to reflect the commitment of economic diversification in which ICT, as one of the pillars for growth and economic prosperity, would contribute to the country's transformation and knowledge initiatives. That was very successful, and we have received a lot of valuable information to guide us forward, as far as ICT development in

Trinidad and Tobago.

We are not only operating within our borders, there are international and regional activities that take place. Information and communication technology is an accepted area of international discourse. It is one in which the particular views, concerns and positions of countries such as Trinidad and Tobago must be heard and considered. In this regard, the Ministry of Science and Technology has pursued a number of regional and international activities.

I wish to inform this honourable House that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago facilitated the hosting of the Korea-Caribbean ICT e-Government Forum last September right here in Trinidad and Tobago. This forum brought together leading information and communication technology representatives from Korea and the Caribbean. During the session, they dialogued on the challenges and benefits of implementing ICT, particularly e-Government-type ICT initiatives for national development for which Korea is a recognized leader.

5.45 p.m.

If Trinidad and Tobago is to realize sustainable and meaningful national development, it is vital, Mr. Speaker, that we forge regional and international partnerships with the other nations as well as with international ICT organizations.

Mr. Speaker, the concept of utilizing these relations and instruments for achieving development goals is sound and well tested since member States can pool resources and assets to solve problems and can use their unique but complementary strengths and core competitiveness, core competencies to add value to development efforts.

So, Mr. Speaker, consistent with this philosophy, in October 2012, the Ministry also hosted the regional preparatory meeting for the World Conference of International Telecommunications. The International Telecommunications Union is the United Nations specialized agency for ICT. The Ministry of Science and Technology has participated in a number of conferences and meetings convened by the ITU. One such key forum was the World Conference on International Telecommunications which took place last December 2012, to address the revision of the International Telecommunications Regulations.

Trinidad and Tobago was one of the 89 signatories of this treaty. Not only did I have the honour to lead the national delegation to this conference, I was also

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privileged to sign on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, the final Act of this conference.

Also, in March of this year, Trinidad and Tobago hosted and chaired 26 executive council meetings and the 15th General Conference of Ministers in the Caribbean Telecommunications Union.

I wish to point out that this was done in Trinidad in the capacity as chairman of the general conference and a position that it held for two consecutive terms.

Mr. Speaker, under the Commonwealth Connect Programme, Commonwealth Cybercrime Initiative, Trinidad and Tobago has secured technical assistance. This will facilitate capacity building for a number of judiciary, legal fraternity and law enforcement, as well as conduct of an in-country assessment.

Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago remains an active participant in this multi-stakeholder process which aims and I quote;

“...to achieve a common vision, desire and commitment to build a people-centric, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information.”

In this regard, the Ministry of Science and Technology has sought to participate in and contribute to the critical global dialogue on ICT. Engagement at the international level allows for the articulation of the unique views and perspectives of countries such as our own, namely small island development States.

Mr. Speaker, regional engagements: CANTO, at the regional level, the Ministry of Science and Technology is currently participating in the broadband infrastructure inventory and public awareness in the Caribbean project that is being funded by the Inter-American Development Bank and executed by the Caribbean Association of National Telecommunication Organizations; that is what CANTO stands for.

The project's primary objective is to support the design and national broadband strategies in the Caribbean region, and to identify the specific needs of the region that will need to be incorporated into the strategies. A key outcome of this project is the elaboration and practical guidance for the implementation of broadband access technologies consistent with the globally accepted standards and international standards.

So, Mr. Speaker, let me move on to another area. If ICT is to be successful and

effectively implemented in any country, the legislative framework, or the legislative backbone, is very critical.

Mr. Speaker, I would now like to turn your attention to the very important issues of legislative responsibility of my Ministry. The development of a robust science and technology legal framework is intended to further enable the transformation of Trinidad and Tobago into an ICT knowledge-based society. It is important to note that an e-enabled society, be it Government driven or the private sector led, cannot be realized without a supporting and enabling e-legislative environment.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Minister of Science and Technology has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Hon. J. Seemungal*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: You may continue, hon. Minister.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, thank you colleagues. Essentially the e-legislative framework is intended to serve as a critical enabler with respect to the following: assurance of citizens' trust for data protection and personal privacy; development of competition and a suitable competitive regulatory environment in telecommunications and broadcasting; enhancement of citizens' safety; security and cybercrime; development of e-commerce which will facilitate the transactions thereby reducing transaction cost and time, and standard of interoperability framework, access ICT and technology landscaping.

Mr. Speaker, given the overall governance and coordinating function, the Ministry of Science and Technology has placed great priority in spearheading certain e-legislative initiatives which are intended to be achieved during 2013/2014, such as the amendment to the NIHERST Act, amendment to the Telecommunications Act. This amendment of the Telecommunications Act has been completed by TATT and will be coming before this honourable House during this term.

We are also looking at the Electronic Transactions Act and regulations. In addition to this, the Ministry also plays a critical support role in relation to e-laws proffered by other Government agencies which dovetail with the sphere of ICT such as proclamation of the Data Protection Act and regulations, Cybercrime Bill, Cybercrime Security Agency Bill, Electronic Transfer of Funds Crime (Amdt.)

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Act and Electronic Transfer of Funds Crime Regulations, Electronic Evidence Bill, Exchequer and Audit (Amdt.) Act and regulations, as well as the e-waste or electronic legislation.

Mr. Speaker, you know this is something that requires legislation right now because just imagine the obsolescence of the numbers of computers and handsets and electrical appliances in Trinidad and Tobago and there is no legislation governing that. A lot of times, computers old ones, are just discarded. There are chemicals in those computers that are very carcinogenic, very poisonous—
[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: That is right.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith:—and it could enter the aquifer, and in our water we can drink it and it could be very detrimental to us. So therefore, there must be some form of legislative backbone to regulate disposal of electronic waste.

I mean, there are some places where computers are piled up in rooms, they do not know what to do with them. Around the world there is legislation, best practice we are looking at. Some of them, like in the United States, they require—like if you go to buy a laptop or an iPad or a desktop or something like that, you are required to, when you sell one, take the old one back and dispose of it in some way. So we are looking at legislation for this very, very critical e-waste legislation.

Mr. Speaker, let me just fast-forward a bit. One of the pride projects that we are going to implement to bridge the digital divide in Trinidad and Tobago is the community ICT access centres.

The citizens of this country, in a very real way, I am pleased to report that in 2013 the Ministry of Science and Technology commenced the planning, design and implementation of a STAR.TT Community-based ICT Access Centre initiative. The STAR.TT Community-based Access Centre initiative is targeted to reducing the digital divide through the implementation of fit for purpose equipment ICT facilities.

The introduction of these community-based ICT access centres will enable user-friendly technology-enabled environment accommodating underserved communities. It will allow community members quick access to information, training and e-Government services, access to it in the underserved and in the less developed areas; in the very rural areas is where we will concentrate with these centres.

Mr. Speaker, my colleague, the Minister of Legal Affairs talked about the efficiency in accessing Government information and the speed and time it saves and indeed, cost, at times. A lot more of these centers will be enabled so that people in the very rural areas will be able to access some of these Government services.

So, Mr. Speaker, we are going to be building out these ICT access centres. By the end of this year we hope to have six of them ready and within the next year, 2013/2014, we will have 42 such centres throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

Achievement of the agencies TATT, NIHERST and iGov: just briefly, TATT, the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, was established in June 2004 by the enactment of the Telecommunications Act, 2001, as the independent regulatory body responsible for the transformation of the telecommunications sector from a virtual monopoly to a competitive environment. Regarding the telecommunications and broadcasting sectors, managing spectrum and number resources, encouraging investment in other facilities, the availability of affordable telecommunications and broadcasting service.

Let me fast-forward. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: Nizam, press that button for him.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: Mr. Speaker—no, you do not need to press a button.

The implementation of an Internet Exchange Point, IXP: This is a very notable project of TATT. What this will do—you know, whenever you send an email, let us say internationally or even here in Trinidad and Tobago, what happens? It goes up to the United States and through some Internet backbone and then it comes back to Trinidad at a higher cost. The IXPs will be transmitting or allowing local Internet to be trafficked locally. So therefore, there is an interest in saving of time and cost as far as this is concerned. This will be in place before the end of this year.

Mr. Speaker, we are reviewing the national broadband plan, and as I said, pretty soon we will begin to build out the broadband plan. But let me talk a bit about what we mean by that and what will be the benefits.

The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West talked about the speeds of the various computers, trying to refute what the hon. Minister of Education said about the 50 megabits per second. But, Mr. Speaker, in our SmarTT plan we will be giving primacy of widely available affordable broadband as an indispensable access factor in the achievement of the knowledge-based prosperous society. The

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following are some of the national broadband targets that are recommended for Trinidad and Tobago over the next six years, and if we are to develop and be assessed by the benchmark indices I referred to earlier.

6.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, in 2013, with respect to broadband fixed and mobile access speeds, and percentage of population coverage targeted—in 2013, at one megabit per second, there would be 90 per cent access—90 per cent, as at right now. At two megabit speed, 75 per cent access, and at five megabit speed, in 2013 there would be 55 per cent access. In 2014, at one megabit per second, 98 persons will have access at one megabit speed, and that goes from 90—98 per cent within the year. At two megabit speed, 90 per cent will also have access in 2014, and at five megabit speed, 65 per cent would have access. The objective is at the end of 2014 to arrive at a speed of 10 megabits. In 2015, we will see an increase in the number of persons having access at two megabit speed at 98 per cent access, and at five megabit speed, 80 per cent. But as we fast-forward to 2018, we will have 98 per cent access to megabit speed of 10 megabits per second.

Mr. Speaker, if you look at the broadband fixed penetration, that is subscription per household, that is for people who have phones in their households, you will see in 2013 where it is about now, heading to 2014, 42 per cent penetration—60 per cent penetration at one megabit, and one megabit per second, and 42 per cent at two megabits per second. In 2014, there would be 49 per cent at two megabits; 2015, 56 per cent penetration at two megabits; 2016, 63 per cent at five megabits; 2017, 70 per cent at plus or minus five megabits. And by 2018, there will be 95 per cent at five megabits.

So, Mr. Speaker, you would see over the five years Trinidad and Tobago will be able to generate access speeds to more or less carry out every operation that we need. Mr. Speaker, how much time do I have left?

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Two minutes.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: Two minutes?

Mr. Speaker: Eighteen more minutes.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: Eighteen more minutes—because I do want to spend some time in my constituency. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, NIHERST will be building—and I think most people would be happy to hear this—a National Science City; this is in Central Trinidad. This will be a state-of-the-art world-class science city that all of us would be proud of. We will start the construction early

2014 and it is to be completed by mid-2015.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take some time and go on to my constituency. You know one of the things that was made clear—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: Read from the shopping list.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: Yes. One of the things that was made clear, was that my colleagues on the other side apparently do not know the borders of their constituencies. Because as I listened to my colleague, in terms of the achievements and the number of projects completed, the Minister of Works and Infrastructure—I mean the list of ambitious projects that was completed since 2010, not only in what they referred to as Government MPs’ constituencies, but globally, you see clearly, Mr. Speaker, there is a lack of understanding of what is going on in their constituencies. Things are happening and they do not know they are in their constituencies. So, the first recommendation I would make to them is to know your boundaries, know your constituencies. The second recommendation I will make for them, get more involved in your constituencies.

Hon. Member: Right, I agree with you.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: As the MP for Toco/Sangre Grande, Mr. Speaker, is one place you can find me, on a Tuesday and a Saturday, that is in Toco/Sangre Grande. Not only in my office. We have cottage meetings, we have walkabouts, we have small group meetings—on Saturdays it is exclusively for groups—and you know how big Toco/Sangre Grande is. When you leave Valencia and you go to Matelot you have to travel about 75 kilometres. And it is a whole-day jaunt. But this MP still finds time to know my boundaries, know what is going on in my constituency and everything that is done—and I want to also recommend this strategy to them—in Toco/Sangre Grande is documented.

Mr. Speaker, with your leave, I just want to highlight some, not all, but just highlight some of the projects. If you look at the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation, what we were able to get done there were 15 roads paved. And I am talking about one organization “eh”, the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation. They built 18 box drains. The recreation grounds, they refurbished seven of them. I have 16 of them, and I hope that in the next two years before the end of this term we will have all of them completed, Mr. Speaker. Work is also going on on some of them right now. They completely refurbished one of the cemeteries.

If you look at the Unemployment Relief Programme—some of them criticize Unemployment Relief and they talked of all sorts of things. But in my

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constituency, through the Unemployment Relief Programme, I was able to get six roads completely repaired and repaved, and 18 box drains by the URP, and they had 32 sanitation gangs. The sanitation gangs you know what they do, Mr. Speaker, they cut the bush, they clean and, you know, they keep the place looking “real” nice. I want to say that it is very critical for Toco/Sangre Grande because you know we are one of the most beautiful tourist attraction communities in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Samuel: After Arima.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: It is the home of the leather back turtles. You have any in Arima?

Mr. Samuel: “Yeah.”

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: It is the home of the leather back turtles. Over 200,000 tourists a year, local and international, travel to my constituency to watch the nesting as what is going on right now; over 200,000.

Mr. Samuel: We go to Blanchisseuse.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: Therefore, they keep the place nice and pristine so that, Mr. Speaker, when you and your family come you could enjoy the nesting and several other—the waterfalls and all the beautiful things we have in Toco/Sangre Grande in comfort and cleanliness.

The Rural Development Company, the RDC, they have completed 16 roadworks and they have constructed two bridges, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Sharma: Good work, good work.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: And they are in the process of constructing another six which will be done before the end of this year, hopefully.

Mr. Sharma: That includes the Bull Bull Bridge?

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: “Nah”, Bull Bull Bridge is in another constituency. The Ministry of Works and Infrastructure Programme for Upgrading Road Efficiency, that is PURE, they have completed six stabilizing walls. These are leaning walls ready to fall down.

In Matelot, when I was first elected and I went there, in Matelot, there was a big wall hanging over the road. If that wall—it was there for 25 years—had come down it would have blocked off the entire village of Matelot. I want to tell you today, that wall no longer exists. It was fixed, and I thank the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure through PURE for that programme.

Mr. Sharma: PURE do good work.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: There are six other walls that they stabilized, similar walls. Drainage and concrete works, there were eight of them done. Reinstatement of failed slopes, that is landslides and that sort of thing, there were ten of them completed and roadworks, PURE did four roads for us. So, when we add up the number of roads, Mr. Speaker, you could see how many roads were fixed and refurbished and repaired in the constituency of Toco/Sangre Grande.

Then when you look at the Water and Sewerage Authority, one of the difficulties Toco/Sangre Grande was expecting was a lack of water supply and WASA has installed two water treatment plants in Toco/Sangre Grande and we have significant improvement in the water supply. In some areas we now have 24/7, but there is still improvement. I understand WASA at this point in time—the Minister of State in the Ministry of Environment and Water Resources might be able to attest to that—is doing some additional work to improve the water system in Toco/Sangre Grande.

Toco/Sangre Grande functions and events: we have 18. So, Mr. Speaker, all of these things are captured in this document. And if you should request it, I would be happy to let you have a copy so you could see what is going on in the most pristine constituency in the north-eastern area.

But we did not stop there. We have another document here, Mr. Speaker, which says: “Toco/Sangre Grande Speaks.” Beautiful document, well written, well bound. And what this document sought to do is to give a listing of the types of functions, mainly culture and social functions.

Just to give some of them—they have some 27 of them listed here, but I would not talk about all of them Mr. Speaker, in the interest of time: the opening of the Valencia Centre. It is one of its kind. Nowhere else in Trinidad and Tobago you will see a Valencia Visitor Centre of the kind. What happens is that it is a first stop for people from any part of Trinidad and Tobago or any part of the world. It is the only place that has a public toilet from Arima to Valencia. That is the first stop. And it has a display of wild animals, it has a mini zoo and a very, very accommodating and welcoming staff, six days a week and sometimes seven days if the demand is there to welcome visitors to the constituency of Toco/Sangre Grande.

Hon. Member: I think you should invite the Minister of Tourism.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: Yes, the Minister of Tourism will be invited.

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Sangre Grande Queen Show: we are noted for our queen shows. Since I have been there we have completed three of these queen shows and they are very, very popular and growing.

The North-Eastern Community Centre: I want to thank my colleague, the Minister of Community Development. We received a brand new community centre in the north-eastern village. Opening of the On-the-Job-Training Programme: Mr. Speaker, we have opened an On-the-Job-Training Programme in Sangre Grande and we have placed over 2,000 on-the-job-trainees already since it was opened in 2010.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I found when I entered Toco/Sangre Grande in 2010, is that higher education access was at zero. The students from Matelot had to travel—the nearest higher education centre was in Arima. As I said, that is about 75 kilometres morning and day. In addition to that, some of them had to go beyond Arima. I want to tell you within nine months of my representation there, we opened a full branch of COSTAATT. We started with 200 children. My office assisted in the registration and the development of that campus. We did registration and a whole host of things. We started with 200 and to date we now have over 800 people from villages as far as Matelot, Rio Claro, Mayaro, Manzanilla, and all of the villages from Matelot right down to Sangre Grande are attending school at COSTAATT. And that is another flagship project we were able to get for the young people there. They were complaining: “We have no place to go after high school. We need higher education”, and within nine months, Mr. Speaker, we opened a branch of COSTAATT.

Then we have lots of functions. We would celebrate every function. Mother's Day function: we celebrate the mother's, we treat them, we dine them, and this is usually held at the Visitor Centre and it is a big one for the mothers. We have a Little Miss Sangre Grande competition. The children are involved. We crown the little girls, beautiful little girls of Grande. We also celebrate all festivals and religious occasions, like Eid and Emancipation Day. We also had a big welcoming motorcade for Keshorn Walcott. As you know, he is a son of our soil, he is from Toco, and that was a big event for us and we spearheaded that aspect of the motorcade and we cherish Keshorn. He works closely with us in Toco/Sangre Grande to encourage and motivate young people coming up. He is a role model in Toco/Sangre Grande, Mr. Speaker.

Then we have sports and family days. We had three; one each year. The first one was in Valencia, one was in Toco. This year, on November 17 it will be in

Matura, and Mr. Speaker, I want to extend a welcome to you and your family and your friends to come and enjoy a good village camaraderie and just good times.

6.15 p.m.

We celebrate Divali. We give donations and have distribution of hampers on holiday occasions. We have a Mathura Youth Enhancement Programme and we also celebrate Christmas.

Hon. Member: “Wha bout Ram Leela?”

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: Ram Leela too, and all of those celebrations we celebrate.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am again happy to be part of this Government, this team. We are a team and we deliver. While the others talk and criticize and negative—negativize, if that is the word; they come with their negative tendencies; they have been doing it from year to year—Mr. Speaker, we are busy getting the job done to serve the people.

Hon. Member: That is correct.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: Our motto, led by our Prime Minister is: serve the people; serve the people. We started that in 2010 and 2015 we will continue to serve the people—2015 and beyond we will continue to serve the people, Mr. Speaker. While the others old talk, we deliver. So I want to thank you for this time and for the contribution and I wish you, Mr. Speaker, all the best to you and your family.

Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Public Administration (Hon. Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to participate in this year’s budget debate for the fiscal year 2013/2014. Mr. Speaker, let me put on record my congratulations to my colleague, the Minister of Finance and the Economy, for delivering a budget which takes us one step closer to our goal of sustainable national development.

For the first time since sugar was king, we would have a situation where the earnings from the non-oil sector are greater than what we earned from our non-renewable hydrocarbon resources. Therefore, this provides us with greater flexibility in managing and allocating our scarce hydrocarbon resources and also in moving away from an overwhelmingly and unsustainable dependence on fossil fuels. At the macro level, this is the way we are to go and we are fully and firmly

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on the path to sustainable development and national self-sufficiency.

The Ministry of Public Administration is charged with the responsibility for transforming the public service into a 21st Century citizen-centric organization which provides the best, highest quality and most accessible services at the lowest possible cost and the least inconvenience to the people of our country.

This Ministry of Public Administration, I feel, at the end of the day when we come up with our plans—and I want to discuss those plans here because the public service of Trinidad and Tobago is the largest employer in the economy of Trinidad and Tobago, and because of that there is a large cross section of our national population in the public service of Trinidad and Tobago. They are also clients in the public service. The members of their families actually access public services. Everyone here in this House is a shareholder and a stakeholder in the public service and in the transformation of the public service.

Last year, Mr. Speaker, we had the opportunity to launch the Gold to Diamond journey at a gala event in December 2012. The hon. Prime Minister was present to give awards to 50 public servants who contributed to 50 years of public service life. Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister was also present to launch the new Gold to Diamond journey, the new architecture, the new human resource management architecture, for the public service. We also gave awards for service excellence, and that was determined based on a mystery-shopping exercise.

But you know, Mr. Speaker, we cannot transform the public service. It is not one in itself. For transformation to be effective and sustainable, it has to be national and not sectoral and, therefore, it is the vehicle—and I always recall when coming into the Ministry of Public Administration as the Minister of Public Administration, I recall the former Minister of Finance, the Member for St. Augustine, indicating that we needed a vehicle to deliver on performance-informed budgeting and results-based management. Therefore, we took up the task then, the challenge, to develop that vehicle in this new transformed public service.

The public service is pervasive. Instead of it running deep with all the red tape, it is very, very important that if we do not make changes in the public service there will be no changes in the private sector. In fact, Mr. Speaker, if we are still deep in red tape and dependent on multiple carbon copies of files, then our suppliers will not invest in paperless offices.

In fact, do we speak to ICTs, as we just heard the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande speak to ICT? If the public service does not get involved in using ICTs, the

private sector has no incentive to do so. If we talk eGovernment but we are stuck in the past, those who provide us with goods and services will also be stuck in the past. If the public service is not innovative, then it is useless to believe that the private sector can be innovative.

You know, subsequent to the presentation of the budget by the Minister of Finance and the Economy, what was very interesting to me was to hear the many raging debates nationally. And one of the issues that came up was the public service: reform of the public service; transformation of the public service; the bureaucracy of the public service, and the importance of the public service in the ease of doing business in Trinidad and Tobago, and therefore making this country attractive to investors internationally, and domestic investors. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, we cannot be talking about a public service that continues to be the biggest obstacle to improving the ease of doing business in this country.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I said we launched what was called the Gold to Diamond journey, and we said gold because we celebrated 50 years last year for the public service. While we also celebrated 50 years of independence, we celebrated 50 years of the public service in 2012. Therefore we charted what is called a 10-year journey for the year 2022, when we will celebrate our diamond jubilee, our 60th anniversary.

Therefore we have come up with a vision for what that 2022 will look like. In 2022, it is our vision that you can walk into any government office and get your passport renewed; have your driver's licence renewed; get an update on your health records; obtain a home improvement grant. And this can be in any part of the country. Or, you can start the process at home, or you can actually have the full delivery of your service on your home computer or actually complete the service by your smartphone or your iPad.

Mr. Speaker, this does not exclude Members of Parliament offices. Why not? MPs offices are paid for by taxpayers. Your staff is paid for by taxpayers' dollars. So why can you not walk into an MP's office and get the full range of government services?

Hon. Member: I agree.

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: This is, Mr. Speaker, what we talk about, the whole of government approach. And, in fact, when the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Development was given the award for TTbizlink, it was because of that single window, that whole of Government approach. In fact, Mr. Speaker, what we are speaking about here today is the single window into government services so that the citizen, at the end of the day, does not have to know which

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Ministry is delivering which service.

Mr. Speaker, in this very House last year I made the point that we are now looking at the public sector as a business that influences and determines the success of other businesses and sectors. We have to provide value for money. And it was interesting to hear how many commentators spoke to this issue of value for money, and to ensure that all our clients are satisfied and that we demonstrate continuous improvement and excellence in service delivery. We cannot be innovative, as I said, in the public service, if we are not prepared to take this forward. We cannot achieve the diamond standard of service excellence in 2022 if the public service is the only institution that will be transformed. Power must come from accountability.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to use this opportunity today to speak about some of the programmes we have launched over the last year, some of the projects, and to speak to some of the issues that we are going into today. I want to start by talking about—there are four, in my view; four simultaneous and converging phenomena that are happening right now. I spoke about one already, which is the value for money. And as I said, in most of the post-budget discussions, you know, we heard so much about value for money.

Then the second issue—and my colleague from Toco/Sangre Grande, the Minister of Science and Technology, spoke a lot about ICT, the eGovernment platform, because without it we really cannot reduce cost and improve service delivery to Trinidad and Tobago. So ICT is one of the important pillars on which we will build this transformation exercise.

Mr. Speaker, third—and, you know, many people will doubt this because when we speak about public officers and public servants, we speak so negatively about them, but there is an enthusiasm in our public service among our public officers to be more, to become that professional, and that there, Mr. Speaker, presents us with a platform in which we can take off with a transformation exercise. Our public officers are looking for greater upward mobility and opportunities for advancement, increased flexibility in hour arrangements, redefined work in order to allow more autonomous-type work environments.

Fourthly, Mr. Speaker, the political will. Without the political will we cannot take this transformation forward. And today, Mr. Speaker, I thank all those in the Government. I thank the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance and the Economy, for supporting this initiative called the Gold to Diamond initiative.

Mr. Speaker, the major projects, if I may go to the PSIP, under the Ministry of

Public Administration, we would note that on page 99 of the Estimates of the Development Programme, under Head 31 we will see the projects involved, and out of those figures we will note that we have almost \$300 million in PSIP—not quite \$300 million; it is \$295,668,000. But out of that, \$244,588,000 goes towards scholarships. The rest of it, \$51 million—out of that \$51 million, \$40 million goes towards what is called the eGovernment knowledge brokering loan, which is an IDB funded loan, and the rest of the \$10 million will be spent on some of the projects that we have over the next year.

I want to speak to these projects, Mr. Speaker, in five areas: one, our diamond certification programme; two, the restructuring of our human resource management architecture for the public service; three, scholarships; four, the strengthening of all our central agencies and open Government.

Mr. Speaker, our diamond certification programme, one will ask, what is this? It is equivalent to a certification programme that was done by other countries, including the United Kingdom, Malaysia and others. But it was aligned to the international competitive index, the Global Competitiveness Index and the Ease of Doing Business Index.

We thought again, because the public service, because of its 43,000 employees, that if we were able to align the services in our public service in accordance with the criteria of the Global Competitiveness Index and the Ease of Doing Business, we would be able to build a sector that is more aligned, that is customer-focused, technology-driven; one that is built on education, training, development, continuous improvement, innovation and creativity.

Those were the areas in the Global Competitiveness Index that we pulled out and we tried to make them as criteria for our diamond certification programme. Our diamond certification programme is where we are going to be looking at all service agencies interacting with citizens and they must become diamond certified. If they are diamond certified, they will gain a diamond logo.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, what we have launched in June of this year, in 2013—June 24 to be specific, we launched this programme and there are 24 pilots that are participating. In this first year of the pilot which will end in June of next year, they are required to work on their service charters. And service charters mean that they will be able to put up on the wall of this particular unit, or service unit—they will put up, for example, how many rings before I answer the phone. So it is the commitment of those delivering the services to the citizens and their contract with them.

So, contractually, they are bound to respond to an email within 24 hours; they

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are bound to respond to a query within a particular time. The waiting time in a queue is limited. So every agency will have these service requirements recorded in a service charter. In addition to that, the citizens have obligations when they come in to access that service, including walking with the right documentation, and on both sides being courteous to each other.

Mr. Speaker, in this pilot going forward, there will be three months available for them to develop their service charters because many have started this programme over the last year, so they are already some way ahead into the development and establishment of their service charters.

6.30 p.m.

The second part of it is the actual development of their service improvement plan, which will be part of a 24-step process, which will take three months. Subsequent to that, they have six months to implement this service improvement plan, and subsequent to that six months, the last three months of the 12-month period, they will be required, Mr. Speaker, to go through an assessment by trained assessors.

The criteria we have developed are based, again, as I said, on the Global Competitiveness Index Criteria and the Ease of Doing Business, and some of the feedback that we received from our MORI Polls. Mr. Speaker, for example, they will be assessed on their customer-focused culture. So they will be assessed on how well they deal with customers, how do they respond to customers. They will also be assessed based on their physical environment. And, in fact, we have established something called the “outfitting policy”, which requires that all these agencies and all public offices to be designed in a particular way, to allow better interaction between the service providers and the customers, the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

As result of that, there will be no more glass walls between you and the citizen. There will be more sitting areas where you interact directly with citizens. In addition to that, you will get points for how many times the person—the citizen—has to move from one counter to another. There will be nothing more like counters, and they will be required to actually—the more that they are able to make only one contact, the more points they will get in the assessment exercise.

Mr. Speaker, they have to understand, they have to do customer feedback forms, the citizens are required to fill out those customer feedback forms, they make suggestions in the suggestion box, they have complaints forms, and there is a promise that they must be able at the end of the day to address those complaints.

How well they do that, they will actually get points. So if it is I make a commitment, a promise to put things right that go wrong—So nothing is wrong, there will be mistakes, but how much do those service providers or those employees, those public officers, how well do they actually address the issues raised by customers?

Mr. Speaker, how much do they have of a web page that citizens can access information, brochures about the service, how much of it can be started from home electronically or at a ttconnect centre, or from your smartphone, they will also get points for that. [*Desk thumping*] How accountable is the service; how much information is available.

Mr. Sharma: I will have to buy a new phone.

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: Mr. Speaker, very important, the last criteria out of the seven that I just spoke to, is one that commits to continuous improvement, innovation and openness to new approaches to technology. Therefore, the public officers themselves, showing initiative over that 12 months, who are able to actually show that we were continuously able to improve using technology will gain more points for that.

Mr. Speaker, the last one, the eighth criterion, is one which we call partnership with other services. Because we are talking about a single window into Government services; we want, as we said, by 2022, you can walk into a library and pay your parking ticket and, therefore, as much as this particular agency could partner with other agencies to deliver that service—if I can partner with the library, the NALIS, to be able to deliver part of my service, I am able to get more points and NALIS will get more points for it. Mr. Speaker, if I can go to another agency and actually pay towards the renewal of a driving licence, I will get points for that.

Hon. Member: Well done. Well done.

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: So, Mr. Speaker, that partnership part of it is how we will start moving towards that single window into Government services, the no-wrong-door approach to Government services. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, next year June—12 months after the start of this programme because it was launched in June of this year, 2013—in 2014, the Prime Minister will award all those their certificates when they become certified, and will actually award them their diamond logo which will be placed on that particular service and will be placed in that physical environment. So anywhere you walk in

now, you know, that this service has been diamond certified.

Mr. Sharma: You will see that in the Tourism Ministry.

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: Yes, we will start with yours, Minister, in Tourism. Mr. Speaker, I do also want to state—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Indarsingh: Member for Point Fortin, you hear that?

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan:—that after this pilot is finished with the 24 agencies, what is important, is that it will become mandatory for all Government services to become certified using this diamond certification process. *[Desk thumping]* So therefore, by 2015—not all. They may not pass the test because as they assess—if they do not pass the test they will have to go back to the drawing board until they are certified.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that when we launched it on June 24, 2013—this year—we had a number of leaders and team members, and they all sat together in their teams, reviewed their service charters, their service improvement plans, and they partnered and contracted between leaders, service providers because one of the things that they must have is something called a user panel. For you to qualify to become eligible to apply for the certification programme, you must have a user panel which will tell you some of the problems with your service, the users of your service.

The various agencies that participated and are participating in this year-long programme are the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Investment, TTBizlink Office and Trade Licence Use Unit; the Town and Country Planning Division of the Ministry of Planning; the Ministry of Legal Affairs, the Companies and Civil Registry; the Ministry of Public Utilities, a T&TEC office in Mount Hope; the Home Improvement subsidy and grant from the Ministry of Housing; the Ministry of the People and Social Development, the TT Card programme. And, Mr. Speaker, we have two such agencies under the Ministry of the People and Social Development, and that is one, I think, it is an office in Rio Claro, Minister—*[Interruption]*

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Yes, that is right.

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan:—is the one that is working, which is all only the TT Card and they will also be looking at one, an integrated office in the area in South Trinidad.

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Thank you.

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: Mr. Speaker, the water taxi service, NIDCO

water taxi service is also participating; PTSC coach service; the various emergency departments of the Sangre Grande Hospital—Minister of Health—the Eastern Regional Health Authority, the North-Central Health Authority, the South-West, North-West, all of them, their emergency departments are right now participating in this Diamond Certification Programme, as well the Tobago Regional Health Authority, and in the case of Mount Hope, their medical records department; the Judiciary of Trinidad and Tobago; the Family Court, right now is on and they are working on their diamond certification together with—we are still urging them to bring on a Magistrate Court. Right now the Ministry of National Security: the Immigration Division, Passport Section; and Belmont Police Station; the Tobago House of Assembly; The Emergency Management Agency, TEMA; the Ministry of Education has two schools on, Naparima College, I think is one, and the Marabella South Government Secondary School; and at the Ministry of Public Administration, the Scholarships Division is one of the agencies participating.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to thank all those teams who came forward from these agencies, these 28 agencies, who are participating in this programme. I want to thank their leaders. In fact, I want to say because what actually happened is that they sat there, committing to each other, and the Minister of Health was present as well as some of the other Ministers, and the Chief Justice of Trinidad and Tobago. This is what true leadership is about, because they sat together indicating what is my commitment to the project and what is your commitment to the project. In fact, wherever there are stumbling blocks, how we will both work together as leaders to actually remove those stumbling blocks and obstacles in the programme.

Mr. Speaker, if we are talking about innovation—in fact, what we have done is we have set up what we call a diamond certification unit, and the moneys utilized this year—we have projected an estimate of \$10 million over the next fiscal year for the implementation of this particular project. And, what has happened is that in fact it is similar to the certification programme, as I said, in other parts of the globe, and we are—and I want to make this point. This particular diamond certification unit which will be handling these projects will be partnering with the private sector, similar to what has happened in the UK in their certification programme. When they were doing theirs they partnered with a number of private sector agencies in a type of secondment type arrangement. So that you get an input from the private sector, especially as we move towards customer service. We look at best practices and efficient, and effectiveness, the use, the value of money.

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Mr. Speaker, the second project that I really want to move on to is the implementation of our new human resource management architecture. Last year, I mentioned that here in this House when we talked gold to diamond, and I said what was the diamond shape architecture for the public service. We recognized that in order for the public service to be able to deliver in a 21st Century, with a citizen-centric public service, we must ensure that we are able to widen the middle management of the public service. In the past, we had what we called pyramid. It is a triangle and it did its work, it had its purpose. In 1962, when the civil service was set up, it was triangular in shape, very narrow to the top with leaders, but with a lot of clerical staff at the bottom, and that represented the society of then—what happened then.

I always say I will use the example of the nine to five. If ever you look at that show, 9 to 5, that is exactly what conglomerates look like, multinational companies look like. But in today's era, with technology available and new practices that are available, new HR techniques that are available, Mr. Speaker, what is required now is a larger middle management which will be able to accommodate the many professional opportunities that are not readily available in today's public service and, Mr. Speaker, that is because we have very few professional streams currently within the public service of Trinidad and Tobago. And today, therefore, we want to widen that and we want to develop what is called an empowered public service, one that is able to actually implement decisions based on clear policies and procedures.

Mr. Speaker, it will be able to allow to ensure, again, the upward mobility, opportunities for advancement, increase flexibility in hours, et cetera, but it also would allow for that innovation and creativity at that level of the organization.

Mr. Speaker, what is important in all of that, is that once you empower the employees, if you empower middle management, however, there must be accountability and transparency in all decisions that are made. And as a result of that, we cannot just push decisions down, decision making power, devolution of power, but we must be able to ensure that accountability and reporting systems are in place. One of the areas that I really want to speak to, as I talk about this particular initiative, is that as we move from that pyramid to the diamond shaped architecture, we are looking at all these new specialized professional streams that we need for the sustainable development of Trinidad and Tobago. And that is one of the problems.

I listened to many who have been saying that the graduates—we have a lot of university graduates. Tertiary education is available but there are no job

opportunities, and that is because you cannot ask a graduate to come and pick up a clerical position, a Clerk I and a Clerk II, and that is what has been happening. That is why I said there is an enthusiasm among our public officers. Our public officers are ready to get rid of all of those streams. They are ready to take up that professional challenge. Mr. Speaker, you will be surprised to know, and I said that last year and I will say it again, you have Clerk Is who have PhDs in this public service and there is no room for them to go, and we need to create that space.

So, we have started that in terms of the performance-informed budgeting. We have looked at the new types of job opportunities we would like to implement, and, Mr. Speaker, some of the areas we have started defining new job specs for so that they will become part of the establishment, an area such as the knowledge worker, information worker. Do you know this public service has no established—very, very few, probably two positions in ICT as established positions? The rest are contract because there are no opportunities in the permanent establishment for ICT. There are no project managers, facilities managers, communication, can you believe, Mr. Speaker? Nothing for monitoring and evaluation. No project management, programme management. And project management, programme management and monitoring and evaluation are so important if we are talking about performance-informed budgeting and result-based management in the public service.

So, Mr. Speaker, we have done a lot of research work over this last year and we have developed job descriptions for these new positions. Last year, I spoke about replacing the bottom—and this is why we had it as the diamond—the bottom of the architecture, that bottom heavy part, removing all of those clerical positions and developing what is called the management support office series, which is one stream that will support all of the middle management, and it is a multi-skilled individual who understands technology can use e-Government, can do data entry, can do some scheduling of meetings, can actually carry out some project management and, therefore, that multi-skilled individual is what we are developing. As you know, right now, that MSO series is before the personnel department and it should be classified within the next month or so.

6.45 p.m.

We have spoken to the union, the PSA, and they are very much in agreement with those new jobs that are coming in, and as a result of that, Mr. Speaker, we have already set up the GHRS to start training many of the clerks and so on in the public service because everything is going to be on merit. You will have to be

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competing for each of these positions and the Service Commissions Department will start advertising for these positions. We hope to have all of this in place before the end of this calendar year.

Mr. Speaker, we talk about innovation, and as a result of that, the importance—because part of the issue here is that as we develop these new job descriptions, we also have to reengineer the processes within the public service, many of the systems in order to allow for this empowered professional, because the processes that we have right now are very paper-driven, they are not technology-driven. So we are re-engineering processes to take advantage of these new job opportunities, these new professionals, and at the same time, to make sure that they are using the technology that is available.

We also want that to be an innovation—a creative platform. As part of—you know, as I said, in the diamond certification part of the programme where you are doing the services, to citizens, you recall that one of the eight criteria was innovation. We have started training in customer service; we have started training in innovation. In fact, two weeks ago, we launched the innovation platform, and that is where we are actually training our public officers in a particular technique, based on the Renaissance effect, and where it is called the Medici Effect. This is because the public service is a platform that can be innovative, because if you look at innovation, innovation takes place in an environment wherever there is diversity of disciplines, professional disciplines, culture, race, you know, Mr. Speaker, and we have that in the public service. Therefore, you have a ready platform for innovation.

So what we are teaching our public officers right now—we are taking the first set of those involved in the diamond certification—is how to actually implement this technique where you get the intersection of disciplines to create something called the “click moment” which is the innovation part of it. So that is how we will get the creativity and the innovation, but very important in there is what we want for that middle layer of the public service of Trinidad and Tobago.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Very good!

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: Mr. Speaker, the middle management has to be empowered through these new systems and revised processes and so on.

However, we know that there will be some legislative changes to take place. We have to revise our legislative framework. We also have to change our compensation philosophy and methodology. In fact, that is one of the projects on here for today under the PSIP project. That is because we are dealing with a

classification system that was developed in 1962 and our current compensation system—I see Minister Mc Leod has heard me say this several times before—but the compensation policy today in the public service does not allow us to retain professionals because as soon as they are trained or they come in, they will go out into the private sector. So we have to put a new mechanism in place, a new philosophy for compensation, a new policy with new procedures that is quite different from the classification system.

Mr. Speaker, based on what I have just outlined there, what are some of the areas that we are doing in that new HRM architecture? I spoke to the new job opportunities, I spoke to the reengineering of our processes, Mr. Speaker, creativity and innovation, we have four pilots that we have launched over the last three months which will take us into the next fiscal year. Those four: one, the Judiciary; two, the Inland Revenue Division; three, Customs and Excise Division, and fourthly, the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Investment. These four agencies are part of what we call this pilot and right now what we are doing with them is training them in competency-based recruitment techniques because your whole recruitment process will now be based on competencies only. They will be the first to implement this new architecture.

We will be looking for whatever opportunities there are among these four agencies for what we call “shared services”. I mentioned last year the “shared services” concept. They will also have to be able to adhere to the new outfitting policy which means that their offices and so on must be designed for productivity, meaning that they allow for teamwork to take place because everything today is no longer hierarchical in structure but it is about team efforts, and therefore, your outfitting must be designed for that.

The objective is to create that organization in the new architecture that will allow for opportunities, again too, for our returning scholars. They must be able to carry out what we call “business continuity” and that programme is also going into effect. The BPR, as I said—and when they are re-engineering their processes—is to ensure there is value for money throughout and to be technology-driven.

The design work: one of the things that we are having a problem for is our public officers want to be empowered, and we are not designed, our work processes are not designed to empower our public officers, and therefore, when we redesign, we have to come up with what we call “autonomous units of work” to allow people to work.

Mr. Speaker, what that also does for us, it encourages what we call flexitime

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and hot-desking. We have already put flexitime into effect but it cannot be implemented because of the way we work. I have to be present to receive an instruction from my senior. But if I can carry out my work at home on my computer, I can deliver at the same time. Think of what that can do for us if we have flexitime and we have hot-desking—hot-desking meaning that this morning, I use the office space, this evening, another set of employees use that same office space. We can spend more money outfitting effectively to allow for productivity, to encourage team effort, and at the same time, we can reduce the cost of Government rentals, because every time you have to put on a new division, a new project, you have to rent space. So we envisage the future of the benefits of that in terms of reduction on cost.

Mr. Speaker, one of the issues here is that—oh, in the Customs and Excise Division, just let me give you an update quickly on those four agencies where the work has reached. The Ministry of Public Administration, PMCD, is working with them. The structure will be in keeping with the international best practices so we have looked at international best practices for that division; that is the Customs and Excise Division. In fact, Mr. Speaker, for the Customs and Excise Division and the Immigration Division, we have worked out new job specs that require their officers entering—customs officers—no longer need to be required to work as a clerk which was something that happened in the past, and today we have been able to remove that requirement.

Mr. Speaker, Inland Revenue Division, again, the Ministry of Public Administration, we are working with them through the PMCD. We are developing—right now, we are doing some manpower audits for both of them—the customs and Inland Revenue. We are working on their facilities management functions, et cetera and we are also, as I said, conducting that manpower audit.

As part of the \$40 million that I said that we have in the knowledge—the e-Government loan under the IDB, one of the projects we will be implementing is the GenTax project and the upgrade of the GenTax. They currently have the GenTax system, but right now we are upgrading to allow for the processing of applications and to implement the electronic tax services such as electronic payments, electronic filing of returns, taxpayer registration and the viewing of account information. In fact, in 2013, we expect to spend about \$5.9 million, close to \$6 million, on this project. The total cost of this project is \$17 million but some of it is expected to go into fiscal 2014/2015. So that takes care of what we are doing with the Board of Inland Revenue.

The Judiciary, Mr. Speaker, we are right now looking at how we implement

new governance systems, modernizing the governance structure of the Judiciary. I want to say as well that one of the issues there, again too, is about HR management. We would recognize that HR has developed so much, there are so many new emerging practices, best practices, we have not encouraged that into Trinidad and Tobago. So I mean we are also faced with the challenge of getting good HR practitioners, and we are working within the Commonwealth to get those who have worked on projects such as this, modernizing of the public services in other countries, in other Commonwealth jurisdictions, and we are getting some good exchanges taking place between Trinidad and Tobago and those jurisdictions.

Mr. Speaker, Ministry of Trade, Industry and Investment, we have completed the 360 degree assessment which is a performance appraisal type system. It is a managerial 360 degree assessment on the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Investment. This assessment is an agreed initiative between the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Investment and the EU, the European Union Development Fund, to be used as an indicator of the Ministry's management and leadership capacity. The assessment was inclusive of the Ministry's Minister, the Minister of Trade, Industry and Investment himself and his staff, and I must say that the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Investment scored highest in the competencies of ethics and values. Should I repeat that? They scored highest in ethics and values, stamina, stress resistance and communication.

They scored low, of course, you will always have weaknesses, and their lowest was in the competencies of creativity, visioning and cognitive capacity and we have identified consultants to be able to address those weaknesses which we will be addressing over the next couple of months. Therefore, the Ministry has committed to undertaking the complete organizational review which includes assessment of previous consultants' reports in order to develop the structure to support its strategic goals.

One of the other longer term projects that we speak about is, for example, the Ministry of Health. We would be doing an individual master plan for the redevelopment of the Port of Spain General Hospital, the San Fernando General Hospital and the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. In addition, we are also working on the scholarships and advanced training information system, and it is represented here in this loan. I cannot call out all the projects that we have on this, but in it as well, we will be talking about the Ministry of Legal Affairs. The hon. Minister of Legal Affairs, Prakash Ramadhar, the Member for St. Augustine, started off by talking about some of the areas he was able to have some success in

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in terms of the e-services that are being offered, and that is one of the areas that we want to use those offices to become the one-stop shop for Government services.

Mr. Speaker, in fact, we are going further in terms of that, this is one of the pilots that are coming on board—the Ministry of Legal Affairs—because just the same way that the Ministry of Health, we recognize one of their key areas is the medical records, the modernization of their medical records, the area here under legal affairs is the whole issue of—and which is what we are doing. We have gone out for a consultancy to—actually for a system called the “radio frequency identification system” and this is to track and manage the movement of records for citizens and business entities in Trinidad and Tobago. So these records which form part of the living vault, include land deeds, marriage certificates, births and death certificates and business registration documents. We expect that would cost us about \$115,000 over this fiscal year, and in the subsequent, close to \$1.1 million for the development of this system.

Mr. Speaker, you would be happy to note that one of the projects under this e-Government loan is the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago and, of course, this is to provide the modernization, the ICT, the e-Parliament. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we expect that will start very soon, that particular project; the modernization of the Parliament. I look forward to that particular project, and I am sure Members in this House look forward to that project as well.

Mr. Speaker, the Central Statistical Office (CSO)—everyone has been speaking about the CSO for the longest while and I thought I would bring to this House—because I heard so much about the CSO. But the CSO, on February 09, 2012 last year—this is 2013—this project was initiated on the CSO, and I announced that in our budget presentation last year. That is to provide support—a consultant was engaged to provide support for the CSO to perform a gap analysis study on the supply and demand of statistical information within and outside the country and define core projects of the agency consequently.

7.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the aim is to develop what is called the Central Statistical Authority and therefore we are developing that IT master plan for the CSO in order to align the mission of the proposed reorganization to the new IT system so as to make it possible. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the cost of that particular project, we are in line to implement what is called the ERETES system in that Central Statistical Office. And again that consultancy service is to transform that system utilized by

the National Accounts Division for the storage and production of economic data into an efficient, well-coordinated system which readily facilitates the compilation of national accounts data and information.

So Mr. Speaker, that project is ongoing, for many who have been—recently I have seen a lot in the public about the Central Statistical Office and what is happening in that particular project.

I want now to go to the concept I had introduced last year when we spoke about the shared services. Having said that last year, that we are about to introduce the concept of shared services, you know, the Minister of Finance and the Economy spoke about shared services in the banking sector and he indicated that that was able to employ some 1,000 people.

There are many opportunities in the public service for sharing of services, back-end services, whether it is in accounting, finance, payroll et cetera, Mr. Speaker. Last year we ran a pilot between the Ministry of Public Administration and the Ministry of Communication where the Ministry of Public Administration was able to offer services of accounting, finance, payroll, ICT services. In that agreement, we actually had something called a service level agreement between the two Ministries; so where we pay them—they would pay us for those services. So the Ministry of Communication would actually—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for San Fernando West and Minister of Public Administration has expired.

Motion made: That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. *[Hon. R. Indarsingh]*

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: You may continue, hon. Minister. *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and Members on both sides of the House for this opportunity to continue. Mr. Speaker, I was mentioning the issue of shared services and I indicated that there is that agreement between the Ministry of Public Administration and the Ministry of Communication as a pilot.

Mr. Speaker, this year, into this fiscal year, we are moving forward with another shared service project, another pilot and this is the Integration of Services in the Social Sector of Trinidad and Tobago; because Mr. Speaker, many times you hear about—and the Member for Arouca/Maloney spoke extensively about

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the social services sector—and in fact there are many Ministries involved in the delivery of social services, whether it is the Ministry of the People and Social Development, Ministry of Community Development, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development, the OPM, the Ministry of National Security—would you believe the National Insurance Board of Trinidad and Tobago?—the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, the Ministry of Public Utilities, the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training and the Ministry of Local Government, Mr. Speaker.

All of these Ministries are involved, in some way, in delivering social services. What happens, Mr. Speaker, is that when we have all these social services and we have duplication of offices throughout the country, you find that you cannot have an integrated approach to delivery of services.

Mr. Seemungal: “Yuh like da one eh?”

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: Mr. Speaker, the issue here is that sometimes you may be under the radar with a particular situation; it does not allow for something we call case management. So there are a number of paper-based processes. There is a duplication of information processes. So when you look at that you will realize that at the end of the day we are wasting resources in the duplication of the administration of these various services, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we have come up with, and we have launched a project, a month ago, with a plan as to how we will integrate these services; the Ministries will still operate individually, but when you get out to the customer, so it is an example of moving towards the no-wrong-door approach, the single window into government services; so we will be integrating the social services. So when we speak to old age, for example, you know the elderly, the citizens who are elderly, they may need their pension, they may be going to NIB, et cetera. If we can get all these agencies to come together and offer one service, Mr. Speaker, we will not only—one of the things that we will be doing, of course, will be the cost effectiveness of it because we are accessing multiple services in one place using one set of resources.

We will be sharing resources so we will be reducing transaction cost, avoiding again common services; and because they are co-located in one office it means that the citizen, the customer can receive all his services or her services at that one location. An important benefit out of this programme, Mr. Speaker, is something

called case management and with case management we are able to manage the client and the client's family through and out of the system by providing services.

And as Members of Parliament, I am sure Members opposite, and Members on this side will recognize that when someone comes to you and asks you for a food card, you really have to investigate what is happening with the rest of the family, because that food card that they are asking from you is a symptom of a problem; unemployment problem at home, children not going to school; a deficiency, a disability, a medical issue. And therefore we will start developing, what we call, case managers, so we will train our public officers. Instead of: I am just dealing with the food card, or I am dealing with the health service, or I am dealing with the old age pension, this person can be a case manager and can deliver on all these Ministries for social services, Mr. Speaker.

As a result of that, the individual agency with the overview role of that case, imagine the information they will be able to capture on that and it becomes that wider exchange system. Mr. Speaker we base this—we call it the bundling of services, as I said, the co-location of services; and one of the issues there that I want to say is that we have developed this along the model of something that is called Centrelink in Australia, that is their no wrong door policy; Service Canada, which provides a one-stop service for federal government programmes and one of the British colonies, Mr. Speaker. I do not have time to go through all of them.

But, Mr. Speaker, very important in there is that at the end of the day we have a proposed action plan and that action plan is going to take us 15 months to implement. In fact, this particular project, the Minister of Finance and the Economy mentioned in his budget presentation in terms of the integration of social services, Mr. Speaker. And in fact, we will be looking at that single portal for all social services, the sharing of information, intergovernmental collaboration and partnerships, and these systems have to go in place.

We expect, Mr. Speaker, that we will have to make legislative changes, and we hope to do that within the next 12 months. Mr. Speaker, I know I am out of time, I am running out of time. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Seemungal: You have time. You have time; 22 minutes.

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: That normally happens in a case like this. Mr. Speaker, allow me to talk a little bit about the institutional strengthening that we are talking about. You know, we talk a lot about the public service. I heard the Member for Chaguanas West carrying on about how many vacancies in the public service and we always seem to have these figures wrong.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Public Administration together with the Service Commissions Department met to discuss this issue and in fact, Mr. Speaker, we funded and resourced the Service Commissions Department. We provided funding to ensure that they could put on a number of parallel selection panels to deal with the number of vacancies within the public service. Mr. Speaker, as of January, 2012, let me just say—January, 2013, 6,009 of the approximate 8,000 vacancies have been filled, so 75 per cent of the vacancies in the public service of Trinidad and Tobago have been filled. [*Desk thumping*] And Mr. Speaker, therefore when I keep hearing this issue—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: “Where de Member for Chaguanas West?”

Dr. Gopeesingh: Repeat it for them.

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: My colleagues are saying to repeat it. Six thousand out of the 8,000 vacancies were filled as of January, 2013, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] It is not possible to fill 100 per cent, and I want to make this point, because I hear the Member for Chaguanas West. The issue is, the issue I raised earlier, and that is if we try to fill all the vacancies you are going to end up filling only vacancies for janitors and clerks et cetera; positions that we want to be deemed obsolete going forward as we develop new professional opportunities.

I want to say to the Member for Chaguanas West that if we are dealing with the young people of Trinidad and Tobago who are graduates, trained, some of them with Masters and PhDs, they are not interested in a janitorial position—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: “Yeah.”

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan:—and they are not interested in a Clerk 1 position. So, please, when we talk about trying to fill all these vacancies, some of the vacancies are no longer relevant to a modern public service of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] How we will deal with this issue is by putting forward all these new opportunities, these new professional jobs in the public service. But, you know, Mr. Speaker, the problem we have with the Service Commissions Department and getting classifications going—Member for St. Ann’s East, you would know this problem that we have, being an HR practitioner yourself—you would know the challenges we face in that. And as a consequence of that we are not going to get this done in the time frame we need it to do.

So therefore, Mr. Speaker, we are using these same job specs that we have developed for these new positions, monitoring and evaluation, programme management, facilities, communication, auditing, et cetera, programme, project, whatever. We are establishing them as standardized contract positions in the Public Service of Trinidad and Tobago with standard terms and conditions [*Desk thumping*] because, Mr. Speaker, “leh” me tell you, I “doh” know if others realize how many projects, how many people in this public service are on contract and, from as far back as 2000, do not have their terms and conditions determined. And I find it is such an unfair—I mean, I cannot imagine where there can be justice in such a system, Mr. Speaker.

As a result of that, the Ministry of Public Administration, in collaboration with the CPO’s office, the Personnel Department, established what is called a backlog project and in that backlog project what we have done is we have hired some young people, we have hired some retired officers who know the system and understand terms and conditions and we are clearing the backlog. We have cleared 600 in the Judiciary of Trinidad and Tobago to date under that backlog project, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] We have cleared another 600, Mr. Speaker, in the Ministry of Education. But the problem that we have, at the end of the day, is if we standardize these terms and conditions, “we going forward”, the CPO’s office will only have to focus on those specialized positions for terms and conditions.

So we have a number—over the last year the team has developed standardized job descriptions for BOAs, what we call the clericals and the manipulatives; we have done communication, we have done facilities, we have done legal, so all of them are on. Today we have already finished the ICT stream as well. So those are standardized, with standard terms and conditions. So when you come for a job in the public service you know your terms and conditions, and you do not have to hear “to be determined by the CPO”, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Very good.

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: Mr. Speaker, one of the other things that we will be doing, as I said, we are changing the compensation philosophy that will allow this new information system of compensation. We will be also putting in, on that project—in fact, Mr. Speaker, the strengthening of the Service Commissions Department before I forget this. We see, Mr. Speaker, going forward, that based on where the public service is today, the Service Commissions Department and the Public Service Commission, we see a changing role in accordance with the Canadian Public Service.

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We have had discussions on our SHRM Council, our SHRM Council—the Strategic Human Resource Management Council, which I chair, Mr. Speaker, comprises the members from the Public Service Commission, the CPO’s office, the PMCD et cetera and it is going to be widened to other service commissions. And one of the things is: what is the emerging role in the 21st Century for service commissions, Mr. Speaker? We have had a lot of discussions on it and if we look at the Canadian Public Service, we will see that what has happened is that you cannot depend on every promotion and selection to be done by the service commission.

When you are talking about 50-something thousand employees, it is impossible to do so and therefore we now have to strengthen the HR divisions in the Ministries to actually take up—something that, Mr. Speaker, I think you may have started when you were Minister of Public Administration. I saw that in a document. It amazes me how long some of these things have been there. And, Mr. Speaker, what we are doing with that is that if you are able to get this role to emerge, what will be the role of the Service Commissions Department is to go in and audit all these Ministries.

So you audit the processes to ensure they follow, they comply, they conform with the various HR recruitment and selection and promotion processes, Mr. Speaker. Similarly, we are now empowering the Ministries, the HR divisions, to actually put out the terms and conditions because we have standardized. So the CPO’s office will become an auditor and audit—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Thomas: Right.

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan:—all of these, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Thomas: Yes.

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: Mr. Speaker, we are also putting in place something called a competency based management framework. I think that is expected to cost about \$1.5 million—\$1.3 million, Mr. Speaker, out of the e-knowledge brokering loan, the e-knowledge loan, the IDB loan. That is to allow us to make everything merit based, to allow us to adopt the merit based HRM systems, because everything will be based on merit.

It is no longer on seniority. All the new positions you have to compete for and therefore, Mr. Speaker, your performance appraisals, et cetera, but it must be based on the competencies required within this framework of the public service. We expect that project to finish within a year, Mr. Speaker; it is close to being

awarded. I would imagine by the middle of next month that project will be awarded and we would have that implemented.

Mr. Speaker, a very quick one, the Scholarships Division—Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West—I want to tell the Member, you always come to this House and you mislead this House—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yes. Give incorrect information.

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan:—each time, all the time, with scholarships and I must make this point. Mr. Speaker, let me tell you something, you can go on our website. Since I have been there we have implemented an electronic system and you can monitor all the evaluation frameworks for every scholarship we offer in this country of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] That is being open and transparent.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Everybody could see it.

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: Anybody could see it. It is based on, and there is a selection committee and they score in accordance with that evaluation framework, Mr. Speaker. You can monitor your process yourself. But you know what, Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: It never happened under them.

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: No, it never happened, because theirs was a slush fund and you know, “Please handle this discreetly” “yuh remember that one?”

Miss Hospedales: That is not true. No slush fund.

7.15 p.m.

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: Mr. Speaker, let me just say, one of the issues with scholarships is the issue of having these scholars return, returning scholars, finding jobs in the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. When you allow—I have known no other country; we researched. When we make up decisions, when we come up with policies, it is called evidence-based policies, formulation and evidence-based decisions. It is based on research and facts and nowhere in the world have you ever heard a country and a government giving out scholarships where those scholarship winners cannot come back to the country and be employed. Saying that I have a first-class honours is not enough. You must ensure, at the end of the day, that this person can return to the country and they can actually serve.

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When they cannot serve, let me tell you what happens, the Government, the taxpayer, loses that money when they cannot be put into a position where they can deliver. Secondly, that individual, that young, bright mind becomes frustrated because they cannot practise what they learnt and we have had that problem in what we call our Associate Professionals Programme where we have been absorbing these returning scholars. Do you know why the Ministry of Public Administration had to put on that programme? Because we cannot get positions for these returning professionals. Imagine that!

Right now, yes with the new structure that is going into the public service, the new HRM architecture, there will be new opportunities for these returning scholars. But do not tell me somebody goes and studies nuclear energy. Where in Trinidad and Tobago are you coming to serve in that area? There is no place. When the Member talks about—what?—a candidate who was—what?—doing foreign languages; let me just say something; that individual already had a scholarship at the first degree level. She called the name, had a first degree, serving on an AP, resigns her job and goes to another—takes up another programme and then applies for a scholarship, when we were very clear that we said, in order to ensure there is a return on investment on the money spent on these scholarships, it must be tied to the development needs of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Did I tell you how much money we are spending? I told you how much it was. It is close to \$256 million that we are spending on scholarships every year. Let me give you the exact figure in this whole thing, social infrastructure, \$295 million we are spending, and if we put out this money every year, taxpayers must get a return on it. And, therefore, we must ensure that on both sides, the person is able to come back and serve and contribute to the development of the country, and secondly the individual is able to develop.

In our Associate Professional Programme, I will tell you, we are developing clear policies so that there can be no ambiguity as to how you get a deferral. We are now standardizing policies for deferral, for extension of scholarships, for suspension and reinstatement of scholarships. Those are before—one or two of them—the Cabinet. The other one, placement policy because we cannot absorb them in the public service. We are going to expand our placement policy to allow for practise in the private sector, in order to ensure that these people can contribute to the development and at the same time, they are not frustrated because they are not actually practising what they learnt.

I really could not understand, when they continue to talk this nonsense

about—what?—we are doing things because of—what?—friends and family. But I want to know which friends and family when they wrote “discreetly” and we have ours up on the Net, on the website. You could follow every evaluation framework. This is transparency and accountability. [*Desk thumping*] In fact, I want you to know, “you see all these freedom of information requests”, it is a thing of the past because—“you know why?”—everything is up on the Web now: who gets a scholarship, what scores they get. It is up on the website.

Mr. Speaker, that brings me to the open Government initiative, because one of the things we want to do is we have to get people to start the open data initiative. Ministries have to start publishing their datasets. The Ministry of Public Administration is going to start by publishing all its Ministerial Minutes that I approved for the employment of people within the Ministry. We are publishing the list of all scholars, their scores and the process that it takes.

I know there are several other projects that I did not get to deal with, but I just quickly want to go to San Fernando West. Just the benefits to everybody in this whole public service transformation, this new implementation, and that is for the citizens: improved satisfaction, providing tangible evidence to citizens through improved Government reporting on results; providing better service how, when and where they went; new career opportunities in the public service.

For the public officers: new career opportunities and pathways; more training and development opportunities for public officers; empowered employees, people who feel that they are part of the decision-making; faster decision-making in matters that affect citizens the most.

For our leaders in organizations: making the difference; satisfied citizens; value for money; improved international rankings and ratings; enhanced international image; excellent performance report; accountability and transparency.

Mr. Speaker, just let me turn quickly now to San Fernando West. Probably I would just go straight.

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

I would not call out all the roads and so on, and so on, that were paved, Madam Deputy Speaker, with all due respect. I would not call out all the roads and so on, because I know that tends to somehow anger the Members on the other side. So I would not call them out to anger them this evening.

Mr. Indarsingh: Tell them.

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: Madam Deputy Speaker, let me just say that the waterfront project that we spoke about, which was done by “San Fernandians”. In August 2011, we had concluded this plan and it was based on 11 previous plans and we actually created a design for the waterfront. In fact, it was to be able to allow for ecotourism, health and medical tourism, cultural and historical tourism, utilizing all of the old sites like the old railway station, the museum. One of the things was to be able to create that exit; the major exit and entry arteries. So we are talking about using part of the train line as an exit route because San Fernando is so gridlocked with traffic right now. It provides commercial areas, residential, recreational and housing facilities.

Madam Deputy Speaker, one of the issues here is that it has gone to the Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development and they have put out a request for proposals to do the feasibility study. That is currently on the way and what it will do is be able to determine the cash flows for this project. This is a project that we are looking at, a public/private partnership. In the interim, the San Fernando former Mayor, Navi Muradali has gone ahead and we have done some things to be able to show what is the true potential of the waterfront.

Most important is that the constituents of San Fernando West and the people of the City of San Fernando, as a whole, want this project. Everywhere I walk, when I walk on a Tuesday evening, I hear: “When is this waterfront project going to come to fruition?” They have waited long enough under previous administrations and I want to say today, on behalf of the Government of the People’s Partnership, we will make this waterfront a reality.

I can talk about the infrastructural works, but I just want to say that some of the other projects that we have launched, for, example, the URP Women’s Programme. We have actually encouraged them into a number of training programmes and we have worked with the Ministry of the People and Social Development to access the microcredit and through that microcredit facility, they are able to start up their own businesses. So we really want to treat the URP Women’s Programme as it was designed for. The Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development helped us with that, through NEDCO, the national entrepreneurship and so on, to allow these ladies to become their own entrepreneurs or business people.

In fact, we realize that many of them were intimidated because they did not understand the financial aspects of the business and we did put on, in collaboration with Central Bank, a financial literacy programme for all the female URP employees and that went down very well.

This year we also launched programmes on domestic violence to follow presentations from the Rape Crisis Centre at the National Centre for Persons with Disabilities (NCPD). We also dealt with areas like the rugby team in San Fernando on the train line, a very, very good team. I do not know if many of you all would have seen this. Mr. Jack—is a very progressive team. We have gone on and we have really, as much as possible, tried to help this team. They have gone to Cuba. They have gone to St. Lucia for rugby tournaments, Guyana. In fact, St. Lucia in July, Guyana in October last year, Cuba in November 2012, et cetera and they have won all their games.

Mr. Sharma: Very good, very good.

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: They have won all. I must say it here today, let me say to that rugby team, under the leadership of Mr. Jack, I am very proud of that team.

The lighting of grounds: I want to thank here the Minister of Public Utilities and T&TEC for the lighting of the Naparima grounds. Work continues on the lighting of the Soogrim Street grounds and we expect to complete those grounds very soon.

We also have a sort of children's play park set up at the Gulf View Community Centre. We are doing a pavilion at the TML grounds and jogging tracks in that area. We are working with the URP and the City Corporation to refurbish the Bel Air recreation building and grounds. There are many other recreation grounds in San Fernando West such as the Ocean Avenue grounds and the Cowie Warner Park and those will be coming for repair and refurbishment in this coming year, but we must prioritize these grounds.

Madam Deputy Speaker, let me just say the Ministry of Food Production—I want to thank the Minister for partnering with the URP and the MP's office where we started the "agriculture now initiative" three months ago in Bayshore, Marabella on the train line. They have started with agriculture and they are already producing tomatoes, eggplant, patchoi, chive—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Sharma: "Yuh mean baigan?"

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan:—celery, lettuce, et cetera. In November, they will be starting an aquaculture, while continuing the agriculture project.

We have had roads that have been paved. I must say they have been paved. We had one, for example. We have paved a road that was not in Bel Air Drive, which had a depression and a sink. "If you see it. It was one huge—if yuh car go down in it, you might not come back out" and for 20 years that continued like

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that. This year, we have paved it. In fact, we have not paved any roads in Bel Air for the last 20 years and, therefore, in 2013, that sink no longer exists in Bel Air.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I know my time is out. I want to say, in closing, that what we are attempting to do, as a Government, at the end of the day we need the support of everyone. A government alone cannot achieve, if we do not have the support of everyone. We cannot transform a public service without transforming Trinidad and Tobago and having the support of its citizens.

Today I outlined the Diamond Certification Programme. It is where we involve many of the user panels. Customers and citizens must participate. I want to make an appeal to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago to participate in this project over the next 12 years and let your views be heard. Go on the website, put in your inputs, fill out your customer feedback forms, make sure you put in your suggestions, participate on the user panels. That is how we will improve public services in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I say a special thank you to all the members of the Ministry of Public Administration, the Permanent Secretary, Deputy Permanent Secretaries, members of the SHRM Council, and including the Service Commissions Department, the Personnel Department and all the other divisions, the PSCD, the SHRM Unit and so on, for believing in the gold to diamond journey. Without them and without that shared vision, we would not have been able to be where we are today, moving forward with our successful action plan. Because it is all well to have a vision and if it is not shared, it cannot be implemented, it remains a dream. If we do not put an action plan to it, it is not reality at the end of the day.

I also thank the members of my staff at the Member of Parliament office in San Fernando West who from day in, from morning to night, will continue to serve the constituents of San Fernando West and I thank the members of San Fernando West, the constituents, for having me here today. I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to participate. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Nizam Baksh): [*Desk thumping*], Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am indeed grateful for this opportunity to stand before this honourable House in support of the Appropriation Bill, 2014, and it is with great pleasure that I join with my colleagues on this side in congratulating the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy, Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai, on the excellent budget statement which he delivered to the honourable House on Monday, September 09. I also thank my colleague who just

concluded her wonderful contribution here this evening.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of Public Utilities, which I have the honour to lead, has been given the mandate to provide effective and efficient leadership and governance in the delivery of public utilities services to the citizenry of Trinidad and Tobago. The Ministry executes this mandate in conjunction with the state enterprises and agencies—*[Interruption]*

7.30 p.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Members on this side—Members on both sides, Hansard is having some difficulty in understanding what the Member for Naparima is saying. So I want to ask you to please allow the Member to speak in silence, so Hansard will be able to pick him up. Thank you.

Hon. N. Baksh: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was making the point here that the Ministry does this in conjunction with the state enterprises and agencies under its purview—namely, the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission; the Telecommunications Services of Trinidad and Tobago; the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Services Corporation; the Regulated Industries Commission; the Government Printery and the Electrical Inspectorate Division (EID).

In keeping with the theme of this year's budget statement—Sustaining Growth, Securing Prosperity—I wish to share with this honourable House the tremendous amount of work that has been done, and will continue to be done by these agencies at the macro level, in terms of laying down the necessary infrastructure to support the country's economic growth and development.

Madam Deputy Speaker, these agencies continue to work efficiently and consistently and their programmes and projects are in good alignment with the development objectives which this Government has set out for Trinidad and Tobago. It is in this regard I will share with this honourable House the steady progress by T&TEC, for example, on its bulk power transmission projects; the expansion of high-speed broadband services by TSTT; the reengineering efforts of TTPost to position itself as the world leader in the provision of postal and consumer services; the steady increase in electrical inspections and services provided by the Electrical Inspectorate Division; and the progress in the relocation of the government printery, as it seeks to become the premier, modern and efficient printing service in this country.

Also, Madam Deputy Speaker, at the micro level, the Ministry of Public Utilities has in place some significant programmes which assist the vulnerable and

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less fortunate in our society. These benefits are provided under the Utilities Assistance Programme, the UAP. The Government has agreed to expand the UAP for the new fiscal year and this is a testimony—as the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy has said—to the fact that this Government continues to place great emphasis on easing the social challenges posed by poverty for all our citizens in such circumstances.

At the community level, the Ministry of Public Utilities, in conjunction with T&TEC, continues to bring much needed improvement and relief in communities, particularly the villages in our rural areas. These programmes are like the national street-lighting programme, illumination of parks and recreation grounds, illumination of regional health facilities and grounds, and the illumination of grounds at police stations.

I will now highlight the works being done by T&TEC, Madam Deputy Speaker. For fiscal 2013, the Ministry received a total of \$66 million for capital projects in the electricity sector. The focus of T&TEC has been to continue to provide a safe, reliable and high-quality electricity supply to our citizens in Trinidad and Tobago, utilizing best practices.

I will look at the transmission aspect of T&TEC. TGU, Trinidad Generation Unlimited continues on the TGU projects such as the establishment of the Union Estate substation expansion, the Gandhi Village substation and the Gandhi/Debe 132kV tower line.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the infrastructure is being expanded to increase the absorption of power from the TGU power station onto the national grid, from its present 260MW limit to the plant's full 720MW capacity. These works are expected to be completed in 2014.

Works continue on the Sea Lots/Gateway 132kV cable circuit and the Gateway substation. Works also continue on the Pinto Road substation upgrade 3 and the Debe/Penal 132kV tower line.

The impact of these projects that I made mention of caters for anticipated load growth in North West Trinidad and the eventual de-commissioning of the Port of Spain B power plant, and improves the reliability of supply. It also improves reliability of supply to customers in Pinto Road and environs and customers in the Debe/Penal environs.

Various substation upgrades were completed throughout Trinidad and Tobago for example, north: Laventille, San Juan, Diego Martin; in south: Syne Village,

Tabaquite, Mayaro, Point Fortin; in east: Trincity, St. Augustine, O'Meara; central: Charlieville, Claxton Bay and M5,000.

For Tobago, Madam Deputy Speaker, we commissioned the Studley Park substation. Works continue on the extension of 12kV supply out of Cove power plant into the national grid. Works continue on the second 66kV line between Cove and the Milford Bay substation. Work also continues on the Milford Bay substation.

We have taken a new step in which works continue to allow the use of natural gas which is less expensive and more environmentally friendly, instead of diesel fuel for the Cove power station. These measures will allow us to improve reliability of supply to customers throughout Trinidad. Emphasis will be placed in areas such as Diego Martin, Petit Valley, Diamond Vale, Maraval and Morne Coco Road. Also, relief will be brought to customers in the north of Tobago including Charlotteville, Roxborough and L'Anse Fourmi. We will also improve reliability of supply throughout the island, including areas such as Scarborough, Courland and Milford Bay. With these measures, outages and blackouts will be minimized considerably or be a thing of the past.

The commission installed and it upgraded 1,765 street lights throughout Trinidad and Tobago. This measure brings benefits to the citizens of T&T by providing well-lit communities and roadways, thereby contributing to a greater sense of safety and security for citizens at night time.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I have some documents with me here—you know, I have been hearing our colleagues on the other side making mention that we only focus on certain communities and constituencies. I have in my hand here—that lights have been done in the 41 constituencies in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Member displays a document*] I could share this but it is quite lengthy to go through the details, but I just want to let them know that in T&TEC and in the Ministry of Public Utilities, we look at service throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

Since my tenure as the Minister of Public Utilities, the commission has illuminated 23 recreation grounds and parks, and these were done in 14 constituencies. Again, I have the list here to indicate the areas and the constituencies that these grounds have been lit, but again against time, I will just make mention of the 23 grounds in the last year in 14 various constituencies.

We continue to meet citizens' demand for facilities for evening time leisure, sporting and cultural activities that will increase the quality of lives of the people. And you will recognize that we have two objectives in addition to others that we

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work in tandem with Ministries—the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of National Security—when we put these lights in these communities.

The Minister of Health has introduced a Fight the Fat programme and we use this here to support this programme here, where people could come after work and join in their communities, and the citizens of those communities to go and walk and keep fit, you know. We also encourage the young people to come to these recreation grounds and participate in the recreational facilities that we have established for them, so that in this way we keep people with healthy lifestyles and to keep them away from the negativities in various communities that we experience.

The commission also illuminated 34 public spaces and we continue to meet citizens' demand for safer, well-lit public areas. Again, I have a list of all these 34 communities that we have been doing work throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we put a lot of focus on the service to our customers. T&TEC has 439,811 customers. One of the largest networks in the history of our country here and they have residential, commercial and industrial customers. Customers can now access their accounts online and view their billing and payment histories, update their personal data and make request for additional services if necessary. What we are doing as well to ensure that we continue to offer a good service to our customers, we are upgrading the fleet of vehicles in the commission. This will ensure that we have a very efficient and effective response to any calls that we have outside there from customers.

We have also introduced outbound calling on the interactive voice response system, where customers whose accounts are in arrears are now notified of their arrears and encouraged to make their outstanding payments to avoid the inconvenience arising from disconnection for the non-payment of their bills.

Text message facilities: the commission is currently involved in examining the use of text message facilities, so that customers who may not get through to T&TEC via telephone lines, can contact the commission in the event of outages or any problem that they have outside there. It would also be used by T&TEC to contact customers who may be at risk of disconnections as well. [*Interruption*] We are now introducing it. I want to take this opportunity to thank the general manager and the board of directors and all members of staff for their quick responses to any urgency that we experience outside there in the national community.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I will now address the achievements of the

Telecommunications Services of Trinidad and Tobago, TSTT. Trinidad and Tobago Telecommunications Services Limited completed, as planned, 54 bzones providing a supplemental broadband access network with Wi-Fi hot spots, also known as public Wi-Fi, which mobile users can use for data services when they are in public places.

Currently, there are 47 bzones strategically located in Trinidad and seven in Tobago, in areas where people congregate—Maracas Bay, Ariapita Avenue, City Gate, PTSC San Fernando, Queens Park Oval, Pigeon Point, Scarborough, Charlotteville, to name a few. What this means is that customers throughout Trinidad and Tobago now enjoy high-speed data services, surf the Internet, send and receive emails, stream live news, music and video on their mobile devices via this TSTT public Wi-Fi framework.

TSTT commercially launched its 4G HSPA+ network on November 05, 2012. Since its launch, TSTT has seen an exponential increase in mobile broadband data usage. This new 4G mobile network utilizes the UMTS HSPA+ technology, covering 95 per cent of the country's population and brings significant mobile data services to the country, literally putting the Internet in the palm of citizens' hands in Trinidad and Tobago. Wherever they might be, citizens can now surf the Internet, send and receive emails, download attachments, watch movies, download music and use their favourite applications at 4G speeds from their smartphones.

7.45 p.m.

TSTT continues the services improvement and population coverage along with its in-building coverage programmes. To achieve this target, TSTT has expanded on a number of cell sites on its network over the fiscal 2012/2013 and will continue into 2013/2014. Expansion was targeted in the areas with previously poor coverage and particularly in South Trinidad and Tobago. The current 2G voice population coverage is 98 per cent for Trinidad and 95 per cent for Tobago, while the data coverage 4G is at 85 per cent for Trinidad and 80 per cent for Tobago.

The completion of the Interisland Trinidad and Tobago Fiber: Madam Deputy Speaker, the Interisland Fiber was commissioned on August 03, 2012. With the installation and commissioning of this Fiber, the capacity between Trinidad and Tobago has increased by 10 times from its original capacity. This allows for Tobagonians to continue benefitting from the current ICT explosion taking place. Additionally, TSTT is now better able to deliver voice, broadband Internet and

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Internet TV to Tobago.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the 2013/2014 initiatives and plans are as follows: Development of a customer self-service portal for a “hassle free” customer experience. In the area of customer service for fiscal 2013/2014, TSTT plans to introduce the e-service portals, for wireless and broadband services, thereby giving customers the ability to add, change and modify their service packages from the comfort of their homes using the broadband Internet connection, thereby bringing “hassle-free” service to its customers.

TSTT will continue to migrate its core towards full IP, that is Internet protocol for 2013/2014. This will allow customers to take full advantage of ICT-type services, example, cloud computing and other web-based applications. Additionally, this will also facilitate customer/client integration to business applications and particularly to the suite of e-services being offered by the various Government Ministries so that we are going to take advantage of this to expand the government services as well.

What this means for the average citizen is that they can comfortably sit in their homes through an Internet connection access available government applications, get information about Government services, fill application forms and receive status updates on applications or request for information. Madam Deputy Speaker, just imagine that hundreds of citizens can now, in the confines of their own homes, transact personal business. This is going to be a remarkable achievement.

Over the fiscal 2013/2014, TSTT will continue on its planned national broadband roll out. This will include broadband service delivery via wireless and by Fiber to homes and businesses. This Fiber to homes and businesses will satisfy customer demands for higher Internet speeds that continue to be driven by new applications. The deployment of wireless broadband will allow for fast deployment and increased penetration in the previously unserved communities.

Thanks to new technology, wireless broadband technology can now match the speed of a wired connection. Wireless broadband provides a cost-effective, reliable connection while providing significant Internet capacity to the home. This will provide the citizens with a truly flexible “hassle-free” alternative to the fixed line broadband services at home.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I will now speak of another agency under the ambit of the Ministry of Public Utilities, that is TTPost. TTPost is the designated provider of postal services in Trinidad and Tobago, making it Government’s sole

provider for delivering quality postal services to every person in this country.

TTPost continues to face some challenges, but there has been some progress with respect to its reform and transformation efforts. The postal reform project, Madam Deputy Speaker, is not new. It started way back in 1999 with the transformation of the then General Post Office into the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation.

At its core was the mandate given by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to create a viable and sustainable postal service—a mandate which TTPost continues to pursue vigorously. To pursue this mandate, TTPost has focused heavily on diversifying its activities to include profitable ventures into local courier, international courier, Internet shopping services, advertising services and distribution services through its expansive retail network, and we have heard from my colleague here, the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande, of some of the problems that, with the introduction of new technology, some of these agencies will expect and they have now taken that initiative to counteract some of those negatives that they are going to face with the downturn of their line of business.

They are now also partnering with the Ezone, which has led to improved viability, speed, service, quality and brand-name usage for TTPost. The corporation is now positioned to be a major player in the lucrative and growing Internet shopping market. You know, Madam Deputy Speaker, that online shopping is an in-thing nowadays so that TTPost is using this opportunity to attract customers to its business.

TTPost remains committed to efficiently executing its universal service obligation, the USO, thus the acquisition of a new fleet of vehicles and mail delivery aids is priceless. The new fleet will allow the corporation to better meet its obligations and they have upgraded six delivery offices; opened five new retail shops and 37 stamp resellers. They have also acquired a fleet of eight vans, 50 bicycles, 50 scooters and 50 mail carts, so we expect to see an improvement with the delivery service as we move on here.

Dr. Griffith: They bought bikes, boy.

Hon. N. Baksh: Those are the motorbikes, the scooters.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we have now taken on a global challenge in improving the quality of service in TTPost and as such we have embarked on the S42 certification implementation. What this means is, as you know, we have been used to, in the past, where people when they want to post a letter they will put some addresses that are not very exact. In fact, they work with lamp poles, mile

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marks and, in some instances, they will say, “next to Chung Lee shop” or Mr. McLeod’s house or some kind of information because those would have been—

Mr. Sharma: The mango tree.

Hon. N. Baksh: Something like that. So, in those days, people who walked the streets to deliver mail knew almost everybody, so when you give them a description of an area there, they will know all the landmarks as well, but today we have gone past that. We have introduced and implemented the S42.

What this means is that every house will have a postal number. Also we have gone a little further than that. By streamlining some of these issues—in fact, we have done it in two areas: in Point Fortin where we launched the pilot project and we have also completed one in Chaguanas and Tobago as well.

What we have actually done there is try to regularize the postal numbers and so—like on one side you will have even numbers and the other side odd numbers. This is what we are doing here. What they are doing too is that they are zoning the areas, like the zip code—when you get foreign mail, there is a zip code—so that you know exactly how you can pinpoint these mail, where they come from. What this will do here is to avoid missent mail as far as possible. This is a new thing that we are introducing and I hope very shortly that we will be able to do that throughout Trinidad and Tobago. We are looking at how fast we can implement these programmes so that people can benefit. Very often we have complaints from those receiving mail and we want to see if we can solve those issues that we are facing. The impact of this is to reduce the number of missent mail and improve the overall quality of addressing in the nation.

TTPost has embarked on the implementation of the S42, as I said, standard addressing, in Point Fortin, Chaguanas and also Tobago. This will also have a wider effect on the nation as it will be used to improve signage throughout Trinidad and Tobago because you must have proper signs when they go to deliver these mail as well. Emergency services, national security and even tourism will stand to benefit from this drive.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we have a matter here that we are proud of. We can blow our trumpet with regard to the services delivered by the public utilities ministry. TTPost, according to the MORI poll, for the fourth consecutive year, they have placed number one for service delivery and close behind them, we have T&TEC, placing third. So that we have some room for improvement although they are first; but we recognize that we have some room for improvement and we are going to work assiduously to ensure that we improve the quality of service we

deliver to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we in the Ministry of Public Utilities are being charged with the responsibility to facilitate the effective delivery of efficient, affordable and quality public utilities services throughout Trinidad and Tobago. The Ministry also has the following services and divisions under its purview that assist in fulfilling its mandate, and these are the Utilities Assistance Programme, the UAP; the Electrical Inspectorate Division, EID; and the Government Printery.

The services of the Ministry of Public Utilities are designed to ensure that the Ministry does its part in maintaining a prosperous and sustainable nation. I would like to inform this honourable House of two initiatives administered by my Ministry that are aligned to Government's 2011—2014 *Medium-Term Policy Framework for Sustainable Development*, by delivering on the priority areas of poverty reduction and human capital development. These initiatives are the Utilities Assistance Programme and People's Issues Resolution Facility.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the UAP is a social intervention strategy introduced by the People's Partnership Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in December 2010, which provides financial assistance to eligible citizens to ensure their continued access to the basic utilities such as water and electricity. The programme is aimed at enhancing the real income of beneficiaries by cushioning the effects of the rising cost of public utilities. The programme is managed and facilitated by the Ministry, in collaboration with the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission (T&TEC) and the Water and Sewerage Authority.

8.00 p.m.

The UAP is designed to provide financial assistance by way of subsidies to low-income customers of T&TEC and WASA. The programme currently targets citizens that are in receipt of senior citizens' pensions, disability or public assistance grants and beneficiaries of the Targeted Conditional Transfer Programme of the Ministry of the People and Social Development. Madam Deputy Speaker, this initiative is designed to ensure that the targeted citizens can have access to basic utilities which will improve their quality of life.

In order for citizens to qualify for the electricity subsidy, citizens must be residential customers of T&TEC with a consistent consumption of 400 kWh or less which must be maintained for three consecutive billing periods. This consumption level has now been increased to 500 kWh.

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Water subsidy: citizens must be residential customers of WASA and own one property in class A¹, A² or A³. Qualified customers receive a subsidy of \$140 or \$200, according to their customer class. Madam Deputy Speaker, from its inception an average of 11,000 persons have benefitted annually from the UAP, with 11,707 persons benefitting for fiscal 2013 up to July 2013. During this fiscal period total subsidies applied under the programme amounted to \$2,517,699.

The response to this initiative has been overwhelming, and this has occasioned me to seek an expansion of the programme. On May 29, 2013, Cabinet approved the increase in the usage level criterion of the T&TEC subsidy from the current 400 kWh to 500 kWh, because what we found, there were a number of persons who are in need but were just above the 400 ceiling we had and we decided to capture those persons by increasing it to 500 kWh.

In addition to the increase in the T&TEC subsidy, the Cabinet in July 2013, approved the expansion of the UAP by firstly extending the bill subsidy to two new categories of deserving persons and, secondly, by the addition of two new programme facilities. This expansion of the UAP takes effect from October 01, 2013 and in terms of the billed subsidy component now includes the UAP subsidy to low-income persons who have been certified as disabled but not in receipt of the disability grant.

So what we have actually done here, move it away it away or included other persons who have been getting disability grant or pension from other sources other than those from the government source. So that we are capturing more people who are in need because there were a number of complaints coming to us saying that they are pensioners, they are getting assistance from other organizations other than the Ministry of the People and Social Development and, as such, we have amended the programme to capture these citizens as well, and they are very happy with this move that we have made here.

What we have done here, Madam Deputy Speaker, is just level the playing field and removed any discrimination in the delivery of service. It should be noted, though, that these new categories of persons will be subject to the same criteria as current UAP beneficiaries, and their income should be no more than \$3,500 per month.

In addition to the billed subsidy, the UAP has added two new facilities, one being the water tank assistance and the other the solar panel assistance. I would take a minute to explain this as well. The water tank assistance seeks to assist poor persons with water storage and provides water tanks to low-income

households up to a maximum benefit of \$1,500 and where there is no pipe-borne supply of water. So we are making a distinction there; so that this is available to people who reside in those areas and can benefit from this programme as well. It would also be made available to community facilities to a maximum benefit of \$2,000 and families who benefit from this assistance should earn an income of no more than \$6,000 per month. Madam Deputy Speaker, this would only be made available for qualifying citizens and communities who meet the programme criteria.

I move to the second assistance we are going to give here for solar panel assistance. We know that there are a number of areas in the country—remote areas—that do not have a supply of electricity and it is too costly to do that because of the terrain, the distance from the existing electricity fixture and an unfavourable cost-benefit analysis. In this regard, we decided that we are going to implement or put in place this programme so that people can benefit; families can benefit here to a maximum of \$25,000 for this programme here.

Mr. Sharma: Brilliant measure; excellent, excellent.

Hon. N. Baksh: Having recognized this, the PP Government, through my Ministry, has embarked on an initiative to provide these panels for those low-income households in these communities. You know that we have also been giving out laptops and the people who reside in such areas complain that they do not have electricity to charge these computers and so I am sure that these programmes that we have been implementing here will definitely benefit these citizens who are in need.

Again, there are some qualifications: they must be a low-income household with income no more than \$6,000 per month; persons must have proof of right to occupancy to the place of abode and must have proof of having applied to T&TEC for an electricity connection, where they will give grounds that it is uneconomical to do that. The provision of solar panels will be prioritized to households occupied with children, persons with disabilities and the elderly. Also, the area must be outside the current electricity grid and have been identified as uneconomical for installation of electrification infrastructure.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the maximum benefit that will be provided to the qualified recipient would be \$25,000 per household. In the first year, the UAP intends to assist about 35 households at a cost of \$875,000. This initiative is one of the means by which my Ministry seeks to ensure that all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago have access to an electricity supply.

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The other initiative being undertaken by my Ministry is the peoples issues resolution facility. Madam Deputy Speaker, this initiative is designed to assist citizens in resolving their issues with the public utilities. I have recognized that moneys are being expended by the Government to provide efficient and quality public utilities to the citizenry and they, in turn, have the level of expectations. As such, as Minister of Public Utilities, I commit to the citizenry of Trinidad and Tobago that my Ministry will deliver the best possible service to its customers.

As such, citizens are welcome to visit, write or call my Ministry and lodge their complaints on any of the utility entities and the matter will be addressed and resolved in a timely manner. The contact numbers for these services are 625-9500, extension 1144 or 1104. Members of the public can also email the Ministry at customerservices@mpu.gov.tt. These will be made available for the public to have in their possession. Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to reiterate that the Ministry of Public Utilities will continue to develop programmes which include development of staff to ensure that our customers are treated as an asset and not as a liability.

I will now like to turn your attention to the Electrical Inspectorate Division (EID). The EID, through the Electricity (Inspection) Act, Chap. 54:72 is charged with the responsibility for the inspection and certified approval of all electrical installations—domestic, commercial and industrial—in Trinidad and Tobago before connection or reconnection to the supply stream; issue wireman's licences, projectionist—cinemas operators—licences according to certain basic minimum qualifications, age and years of practical experience; investigate fires with a view to determining if the cause is electrical; and investigate incidents of electrical shock and electrocutions, and conduct generator inspections.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the EID has and continues to assiduously pursue its responsibility and as at July 2013, can boast of the following achievements: they have conducted 29,073 electrical inspections—that is a record in itself—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Sharma: Excellent, excellent. How much?

Hon. N. Baksh: Twenty-nine thousand and seventy-three.

Mr. Sharma: Excellent.

Hon. N. Baksh:—conducted 73 fire and electrocution investigations; issued and renewed 1,314 wireman's licences; conducted 46 inspection audits to ensure compliance with inspection procedures; and the EID provided advice to 35,165

members of the public consisting of property owners, electricians, contractors and others in need of information on the inspection of electrical installations.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in addition to these achievements, the EID has, for 2013, established its main office in the east of Trinidad. Thus far, the EID is offering electrical services to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago via its offices in north, east and south, and Tobago as well. Right now we are looking at an office in central where we can service people throughout Trinidad and Tobago with ease. We are also pursuing appropriate accommodations, as we say, throughout the country. We have also established a sub-office at the Ministry's headquarters in Port of Spain there, so that people from the north-west peninsula could come to that office for service there as well. So we are opening up the service and making it available to all our customers outside.

The division continues to improve on the capability of its inspectors through continuous training in the inspection of electrical installations. This fiscal year the EID, for the first time, received training in fire investigations. The division intends to make the training in fire investigations a key training aspect of the EID, because we are required to inspect, whenever a fire occurs, to determine whether it is an electrical cause and they have to be trained in this as well. It is also my desire that with the computerization of the EID, the capacity of the EID will increase immensely.

For fiscal 2014, the EID proposes to undertake the following initiatives which are aimed at providing improved services to the national community.

- The EID will continue to decentralize its offices in central and south.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the Member for Naparima and Minister of Public Utilities has expired.

Motion made: That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Hon. E. McLeod*]

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. N. Baksh: Thank you very much, my colleague, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre and all other colleagues.

I was making the point that the EID will continue to decentralize its offices in central and south. In fact, in south we are looking for a new building so that we could facilitate our clients in deep south.

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- Provide continuous training to its electrical inspectors in the areas of inspection of electrical installations;
- Computerization of the manual operation of the EID.

This project has started since the request for proposals has gone out and, as such, it will commence in fiscal 2014. The computerization of the EID will reduce the processing time for an inspection. The present processing time is about three weeks and we are going to reduce it to about one week, once we have these measures in place. I think this is going to be of tremendous assistance to those contractors outside there who are doing construction business there. Also, information requested by the public can be readily available thus reducing the lag time between the request and the response to the request.

8.15 p.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as I have mentioned before, the World Bank in its 2013 report on the ease of doing business in Trinidad and Tobago, has ranked this country 69. Madam Deputy Speaker, one of the requisites used to establish the index, is the ease of getting electricity, where our country is ranked at 11th. With the computerization of the EID, it is my desire that this ranking will improve, making Trinidad and Tobago more competitive and attractive for foreign business and investments.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Government Printery is a key entity to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, as it provides printing and binding services to all Ministries. Some of the printing undertaken by the Government Printery, such as the printing of our ballot papers, is essential and extremely sensitive.

For fiscal 2013, the Government Printery's main objective was to complete its relocation exercise to Frederick Settlement, Caroni, in the shortest possible time. The relocation of the Government Printery will result in:

- the provision of a new and safe environment that will meet OSH Act standards;
- improved facilities which will increase productivity, improve efficiency and timely output on jobs; and
- all operations being housed at one venue thus reducing lag time between functions at the Government Printery.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is expected that the Government Printery will be up and functional at its new location before the end of the next fiscal quarter. This

will allow us to function as an efficient, effective, modern operation, providing publication services to the public service as well as the framework for the dissemination of Government information.

Despite the relocation exercise, the Government Printery still managed to complete 469 printing jobs in fiscal 2013, and also deliver in a timely manner, the budgetary documentation before us today. I think they should be highly commended for this, indeed, working under the present conditions and delivering on time. In fact, they work round-the-clock to deliver these documents.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to extend my deepest heartfelt appreciation to the dedicated, hard-working staff of the various utilities and agencies that are under my purview. Without their commitment to duty, worthwhile contributions and their desire to go beyond the call of their job descriptions, the Ministry would not have been able to achieve its objectives for fiscal 2013. The Ministry has obstacles, however, their persistent support and dedication is a reflection of their fortitude to nation building. As I stand here before you today, I can boast that my Ministry continues to be up-to-date in all its reports. Madam Deputy Speaker, it is always important for buy-in by staff in any initiative being undertaken in the Ministry in order for it to be a success, and I have to say that the staff of the Ministry of Public Utilities and its entities, demonstrates full support for the respective initiatives.

We in the People's Partnership Government continue to demonstrate our commitment to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. I look forward to continue serving the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, through effective and efficient leadership of my steward, so as to improve the standard of living of citizens.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to take the opportunity to share a few moments on my constituency. I think it is important, because this is an opportunity to share with them, what we have done throughout the constituency because very often at the constituency level, we do not have the machinery to advertise and to sensitize the constituents on the programmes and projects we have done in our respective constituencies.

I want to say that, you know, we have worked closely—the MP, myself, with the councillors—as a team in delivering service to the communities in the constituency of Naparima. As such, we were able to achieve a great measure of success in delivering to the needs of the communities.

And, you know, I think it is necessary for me to identify some of these areas

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rather than just to mention roads, street lights, recreation grounds and water projects because when people hear—I mean, I am talking now to my constituents—and when they listen to what we have delivered, I think they feel proud to have an MP that is delivering. I am sure that all my colleagues are in a position like this.

With regard to streets paved throughout the constituency, I have done the 2nd and 3rd Streets in Harmony Hall; Flintstone Avenue in St. Charles; Andra Lane in St. Charles; Hope Road, Princes Town; Kent Street, Williamsville; M1 Ring Road, Usine Ste. Madeline which is a major road really. Since we have paved that road, it has become a high-volume traffic area; Arjoon Trace, St. Charles; Clement Joseph Trace; Battan Extension; entrance of Reform Presbyterian School; Messiah and Webb Streets; Stewart Street, Gasparillo; Victoria Street, Gasparillo; Jones Village, Barrackpore; Mooliesingh Trace; Woodland Road; St. Croix Main Road; Congo Hill Trace; Hamilton Drive; St. Croix Extension; Lothians Branch Road; Carapan Trace; Malgretoute Road and Sahai Trace.

Mr. Sharma: Well done.

Hon. N. Baksh: There are about 9,500 persons benefiting from these projects, plus those who use them to travel and communicate in those areas as well. [*Crosstalk*]

Pavements constructed: the Iere Village, Naparima Mayaro Road and in Manahambre Village, Crystal View area. These people told me that they have been waiting 17 years for this pavement there, and now they got it from the People's Partnership Government, and 1,500 persons are benefiting from these two projects here.

Box drains constructed: Madam Deputy Speaker, the Reform Presbyterian to Roger George; the Mussarap Trace; Andra Lane, St. Charles Village; M1 Ring Road, Usine Ste. Madeline; Oropouche River Road; Iere Village; Edoe Lane, Ben Lomond; Huggins Trace in Cunjal; Jaipaulsingh First Branch; Coryal Road in Williamsville; Crystal View in Manahambre; Yacoob Avenue; Blackman Trace, off Coryal Road and Iere Village Branch Road; Borde Narve; Jaipaulsingh Road; Reece Road in Barrackpore; Cemetery Street, Borde Narve and Sattar Avenue.

We have also done a number of water projects along the Naparima Mayaro Road, Iere Village, Cunjal Road, Mussarap 3rd Branch Trace, Papourie Road, Upper Barrackpore, Sahai Trace, Hope Road, Woodland Road, Mooliesingh Trace and Sattar Avenue.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I have also had discussions with the Hon. Ganga Singh, Minister of the Environment and Water Resources, to improve the water supply for Palmyra, Mt. Stewart, Cleghorn Village and Iere Village along the Naparima Mayaro Road. We have been experiencing some problems there, and he assured me that he is going to address the problems we are facing there, and shortly we will have an improvement of water supply in those areas as well.

With the assistance, Madam Deputy Speaker, of the National Commission for Self Help—and my colleague, the Minister of Local Government, at that time, they have assisted us in doing two starter houses there: one in Jones Village and one in La Paille Junction and one in Mussarap Trace. [*Crosstalk*] We have done three in the constituency of Naparima. If you look at the living conditions of these persons who benefited—it is a pity that I could not produce here a picture of before in the conditions where they lived—one room situations, no water, no electricity—and the physical condition of those houses that they resided in, and today what we have put those people in.

There is also another project that I did in Mussarap Trace as well, where I solicited materials from contractors and various donors as well and used self-help, self-help labour, meaning that we begged people in the community to come and contribute their labour to help this family and, today, we have built a three-bedroom house for them—well-furnished and everything like that—and they have been extremely happy for what we have done. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Sharma: Well done!

Hon. N. Baksh: I am doing this, and I am sure that we could use this to assist other members of our communities as well. I say this so that my colleagues—I am sharing this experience so my colleagues could also embark on similar programmes as well.

With regard to retaining walls and landslips, we have done one in Mattabar Trace, Coryal Road in Williamsville, St. Croix Village, Malgretoute Road, Edoo Lane in Ben Lomond, Papourie Road, Realize Road, Ciperio Road and Borde Narve.

With regard to recreation grounds, we have made requests to the Ministry of Sport and, today, I want to thank the Minister and my colleague here, for providing us with two recreation grounds—upgrading the ground and putting in pavilions—and those two areas are Kumar Recreation Ground and Inverness Recreation Ground. These two venues will become the mecca of sports in their communities and so, and we are already seeing, the kind of interest that the

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residents are showing as they see these new projects going in those areas. We have also started a ground in Crystal View to start this work there.

I also thank my colleague, the Minister of Education for two ECCE centres: one is Brothers/Garth, Williamsville which is shared with my colleague in Princes Town here and the Harmony Hall ECCE centre.

Mr. Sharma: “It eh ha no bus by you?”

Hon. N. Baksh: I will have to make representation. I want to admit that I failed to make this representation. You will have it soon. Tataree Trace, Kanhai Road north, Barrackpore, where we constructed a bridge—and also in Coconut Drive—which is being undertaken by the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, the PURE Programme.

I also want to indicate that through the assistance of the Minister of Education, we have visited all 23 schools in the constituency of Naparima—secondary as well as primary schools—and they were extremely happy to come and see the Minister visiting—both their area MP, their representative for the constituency and the Minister of Education—where we had discussions with them with regard to improving the facilities at the schools, and to discuss the needs of those teachers at the schools and to facilitate the children as well.

I have also been successful in obtaining assistance in lighting two grounds in the constituency: the Ben Lomond and Mt. Stewart grounds. At that time, the Minister was my colleague, Minister George.

We have done a number of agricultural access roads too and clearing of watercourses. You know, what we have done here, is to use the opportunity during the dry season to clean these watercourses so when the rainy season comes down, you have very little flooding; in fact, when water comes down there, in a day or two, it runs off very quickly. In years gone by, you know, there was a saying, once the rain set up, Barrackpore used to flood. Today that is history. I thank my colleagues in those various Ministries for delivering those programmes.

We have done agricultural roads in Carapan Trace, Gobin Trace, Cable Trace, Hope Road No. 1 Branch Road, Woodland Road, Coryal Road First Branch and Gilbert Trace.

You know, we have also assisted poor people with grants, minor repairs grant from the National Commission for Self Help, and we have done 24 of those. I really thank the National Commission for Self Help and the Minister there.

We have already embarked on discussions with regard to the regularization of those people who are on state lands and also on the former train lines. So we have

already started negotiations to see if we could assist those people to get some letter of comfort, or whatever it is they need to get, so that they could regularize their status in those positions there. We started it, and we hope that soon we will be able to deliver these to those citizens along the—you have three areas: one from the train line from Reform and then you have Ben Lomond and right down to Williamsville, and you have Derrick Avenue and Stanleyville where they are all along the train lines as well, and we are trying to assist those people as soon as we can.

8.30 p.m.

We have also started discussions to identify lands where we could initiate some areas for Land for the Landless, so that we could give people some comfort, and we hope that this too could be achieved during this term. And again I take this opportunity to thank all the members of staff, all the various Ministries for assisting us, and in particular my staff at the constituency level where they have been delivering yeoman service to the constituents on my behalf as well. So I take this opportunity to thank them publicly and, Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you very much for the opportunity. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member of Parliament for Tobago East, Minister of State in the Ministry of the People and Social Development.

The Minister of State in the Ministry of the People and Social Development (Hon. Vernella Alleyne-Toppin): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is indeed an honour and a privilege to address this honourable House at this time. I would like first of all to congratulate our Minister of Finance and the Economy, our honourable Senator, the Hon. Larry Howai, for an excellent budget presentation—preparation and presentation, Mr. Howai and his team. I would also like to congratulate our Prime Minister, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, for leading us into another year of prosperity and economic growth in this country, and I think my colleagues should applaud that. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, I will spend most of my time talking about what is happening in Tobago, rather than what is happening in the Ministry of the People and Social Development because my colleague, the hon. Dr. Glen Ramadharsingh, will talk about the people and social development where I do serve now as Minister of State. But I want us to understand what is happening in Tobago because we do not have a voice in Tobago, in the Tobago House of Assembly, and we just have two voices here in Trinidad.

Hon. Member: Thank God.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: I want to start by drawing reference relative to the Assembly of 1996—2000, and consequent upon the Dispute Resolution Commissions Report of 2000: the THA of 2001—2005, 2005—2009 and 2009 to date received a windfall; what was done with that inflow of funds? What?

In a similar fashion, this year's 2013/2014 allocation of \$3.3 billion is superior to what the Assembly of 1996—far superior—to 2000 received. Significantly, that Assembly that was immediately antecedent to the incumbent was superior in delivery and accountability, and was light years ahead of the Orville London administration in performance. When consideration is given to the excellent foundation that was laid, being in the fortunate position of having a guaranteed flow of transfers from the Ministry of Finance, and having been in office for three consecutive terms, 12 long years, what masquerades as governance in the THA can only be referred to as a travesty.

The THA under the PNM has adopted all of the negatives that are synonymous with the national PNM party: nepotism, tribalism, cronyism, kickbacks, ghost gangs, sweetheart deals, generations of overnight millionaires emerging; for example, in hardware stores: number two hardware, number three hardware, number four hardware, number five hardware. Using public funds to bribe voters, expanding homes, rebuilding homes, paving driveways, giving state lands to “PNM-ites” only, funding numerous unnecessary contracts to build retaining walls or access roads for friends and family, and potential supporters.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to state that from the outset of my stewardship as MP for Tobago East, as Minister of Tobago Development and as Minister of State in the Ministry of the People and Social Development, I have made representations for Tobago at every level, and in every sphere of governmental activity. Madam Deputy Speaker, I lobbied and prodded, coerced and advocated for the very best deals for Tobago, inside and outside of the Cabinet, in the Parliament, in caucuses, in formal meetings, at informal meetings and private discussions; on the radio, television, in the print media, everywhere, and I am proud to say, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am happy to record that Tobago has received a greater share of the national pie under the People's Partnership Government than under any Government ever in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Each year we have negotiated more and more, we of the Tobago Organization of the People, and have come up proud. Many feel that whatever the Assembly requests must be given, must be supplied; perhaps no government department has

ever received its entire budgetary request, in totality. Estimates of expenditure adjust that and no sum of money could satisfy some entities. The Treasury is not bound by an infinite supply of money, so we have to negotiate in order to get the things that we need to have for our country.

For those who would blindly follow the rhetoric of the PNM Government, let us be reasonable, ask yourselves: Are we working with an infinite sum of money? Are we? Therefore, I want to go back to the contribution of the representative of Laventille—I “cyah” see what it is you know—Laventille—

Miss Cox: East/Morvant.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: East/Morvant?

Miss Cox: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Yes. Yes. I want to go to that, and to talk a little bit about what she was asking about the Tobago House of Assembly. I am very glad to say that she was asking a whole lot about Tobago, I think she has some Tobago roots that intertwine somewhere with mine. [*Laughter*]

Hon. Member: She have family there [*Inaudible*]

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: It seems so. Yes, and she said:

“Permit me to first of all thank the Minister for his acknowledgement of the way in which the Tobago House of Assembly handled itself with respect to the timeliness of its budget submission to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Finance and the Economy.”

And I want to say, yes, I also congratulate them for the timeliness with which they brought that in, but what else have they brought in, in time. What have they brought in, in time? She said:

“Unfortunately, however, Mr. Speaker, although having received the required documents on time the Minister appeared to have neither fully appreciated the contents of the documents, nor the subsequent oral submissions made by the THA nor the enormity of the development challenges that Tobago faces.”

Because of this I will go back to the budget presentations and give just a synopsis of the budget presentations of the PNM over the period 2001 to present day, and to show that the People’s Partnership Government has served Tobago much better than the PNM has over a period of time. In 2001, Gerald Yetming, Minister of Finance, and I am quoting some of what she said:

“When the new THA administration took office, they indicated to me that they had”—received—“their allocations and were unable to identify any savings to meet their outstanding bills and commitments totalling \$150 million, which they inherited.

In the new fiscal year, we have allocated \$598 million from recurrent expenditure and \$110 million from the capital programme to Tobago.”

So in 2001, \$598 million for recurrent, and \$110 million for capital programmes, and he said:

“To improve the...health care in Tobago, Government will construct new health care centres, a hospital and upgrade local health facilities at Signal Hill.”

Note, in 2001 the PNM Government will build a hospital in Tobago. Madam Deputy Speaker, the PNM Government had planned to build a hospital in Tobago since I was born, and that is quite a considerable threescore years ago. “Leh me doh put it as so many.”

Madam Deputy Speaker, Yetming also said he will build the Roxborough and Old Grange police stations in Tobago.

Let us move on to 2002: Patrick Manning, Prime Minister and Minister of Finance:

“Permit me now to turn specifically to Tobago. This is the first budget presented by a PNM-controlled central government and a PNM-controlled House of Assembly...

Accordingly, let me take this opportunity to congratulate the Chief Secretary and the rest of the PNM team in Tobago for taking the lead in demonstrating to the nation the need for change.”

Okay, of a total of \$742.9 million, \$638.8 million for recurrent and \$104.1 million for DP. He has said here, 2002:

“Some of the major projects earmarked for Tobago include a new Scarborough library; new health centres;”— and—“the construction of the Scarborough Hospital.

Accordingly, the Government”—was—“reviewing plans for the construction of a new airport in Tobago.”

This is 2002:

“We would also ease the burden of air travel between the islands by reducing the cost of an airline ticket from \$300 to \$200...”

Madam Deputy Speaker, that has never happened.

“The Tobago House of Assembly (THA) has also proposed the construction of a transport hub in...Scarborough. This project entails the refurbishing of the Public Transport Service Corporation bus facility...”

To date we do not have a bus terminus.

“In the area of agriculture, the THA is working on the implementation of a New State-Land Distribution Policy for Tobago. This will ensure that State lands allocated to persons for agriculture are used for that purpose only.”

Well what we have seen is that state lands are allocated to friends and family, and not for the purposes of agriculture; for the purposes of building of work bank.

So we see again transfer to Tobago House of Assembly, \$639 million—the recurrent is \$639 million, and we have from other Heads of allocations—just like the problem they quarrelling about now—we have other Ministries in Trinidad spending money in Tobago. This is something that we are quarrelling about every time in Tobago.

Madam Deputy Speaker, 2003, Patrick Manning, again:

“...permit me now to turn to Tobago, for which I have special responsibility as Minister of Tobago Affairs.”

This is Prime Minister, Minister of Finance, Minister of Tobago Affairs, Prime Minister Patrick Manning; he is proposing:

- “the construction of the Milford Road Esplanade”, still under construction, this is 2003; he is constructing, promising
- “the reconstruction of the Scarborough Library”, that is not yet done; promising,
- “the transportation hub in Scarborough”, that is not yet done;
- “the desilting of the Hillsborough Dam”, not done;
- “the expansion of the Crown Point Airport Terminal”, not done;
- “expansion of the Scarborough jetty”, not done;

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- “a new financial complex”—completed during our time—
- “the Roxborough Plaza and Market”, not done;
- the “construction of a number of bridges and repairs to secondary roads”—very poorly done, the Windward Road is an obstacle course—and these are the projections of the Minister of Finance, Minister for Tobago Affairs, Prime Minister Patrick Manning.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to move on to 2004. In 2004, again, Prime Minister Patrick Manning:

“...permit me now to turn to Tobago. My Government wishes to congratulate the Tobago House of Assembly for its continuing efforts to develop Tobago...”

You understand how we developing Tobago “eh”.

“...the significant improvements”—of—“the operations of the air-bridge; commencement of work on the new Scarborough library...”—in 2004.

Commencement of the work on the new Scarborough library that is still to date in 2013 not completed. Right.

8.45 p.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker, recurrent expenditure, \$822.9 million; development programme, \$200.9 million; additional funding up to a maximum of \$500 million, subject to the explicit approval of the Minister of Finance. I am drawing a timeline here, and I am pointing us to a book written by Dr. Jefferson Davidson. The book is called *Tobago Versus P.N.M.*, and it talks about how the PNM underdeveloped Tobago. We are talking of 12 years and now 13 years of consistent PNM rule in Tobago, and we are seeing where 51 years of consistent PNM rule in some parts of Trinidad has resulted in underdevelopment and mayhem. We are seeing it in Tobago creeping in. So I want all the people who are listening from Tobago to understand that by continuing to keep the PNM-led THA in office in Tobago, we are condoning a creeping underdevelopment, a creeping poverty. That is why all of our systems are down.

We know in politics that if you leave anybody long enough in the position of authority, you will have that—whatever it may seem to be, maybe a benevolent dictatorship—whatever it may seem to be, you will not progress the way you should.

We come to 2005: 56 per cent of the workforce is employed in tourism. We

are talking here in 2005 about \$1.1 billion for recurrent expenditure, \$240.9 million for the DP and \$470 million under various other Heads—Patrick Manning, Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Minister for Tobago Affairs. He is talking about the development of the Cove Industrial Estate—still with no factory shells up to today—and the establishment of a generation station at Cove, which was completed under the People’s Partnership Government. We are proud to say it is now running natural gas and diesel; two engines on natural gas and two engines on diesel, soon to be switched over to natural gas.

The budget allocation for 2005: \$1.1 billion; recurrent, \$240.9 million development, \$470.9 million under various Heads of expenditure. I want to draw the reference to show you that this Government—the People’s Partnership Government—has given Tobago more money than any other government, and the People’s Partnership Government has paid more attention to Tobago and done more in Tobago than the PNM has done over a period of almost 13 years.

In 2006, we have recurrent expenditure of \$1,324.1 million and \$315.7 million for the development programme, and a further \$384.7 million available from other Heads of expenditure. Now, this is again Prime Minister Patrick Manning, Minister of Finance and Minister of Tobago Affairs. He has said here:

“...this year’s budget for Tobago includes provisions for:

the Special Windward Development Programme;”—not done;

“the construction of the Shaw Park Regional Recreation Ground...”—not done; and

“the construction of the Shaw Park Cultural Complex”—still not done.

The cultural complex is apparently suffering from structural integrity problems. It seems as though the day that they put in the air-conditioning the whole of it might start to—what you say in Trinidad—“kilkityay”, because they designed a structure, did not design the roof and when they put on the roof they had to start taking it off, because if you are from Tobago or if you know Tobago, that area is sinking sand.

The Minister continued:

“the construction of the Bacolet Aquatic...”—Centre, 2006—not done;

“development of the Cove Industrial Estate;”—again not done.

And we keep coming up with the same things over and over. Just as when I was born they were building a new hospital in Tobago, and that hospital only came

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into being when the People's Partnership Government took it, jump-started it and brought it to completion. There is in 2006 provision for the Roxborough town expansion and the construction of a UTT Tobago campus. We know that the UTT campus, the Bachelor of Education Programme, was started there in 2011 by Sen. The Hon. Fazal Karim.

We go to 2007—and I do not want to bore anybody with the details of expenditure, but this is what we are here to talk about, expenditure—\$1.398 million for recurrent expenditure and \$362 million for the DP. Further, we have \$478 million from other Heads for recurrent and capital expenditure. Madam Deputy Speaker, again:

“An expansion car park in Scarborough;

A CARICOM Jetty at the Scarborough Fish Port;

Extension and upgrade of the Charlotteville Jetty;

Construction of the Roxborough District Health Facility;

Construction of a Technical/Vocational Centre for disabled persons;”—et cetera, et cetera;

Madam Deputy Speaker, 2008—again:

“Extension of the Charlotteville Jetty;

Construction of the new market at Shaw Park;”—not done.

Completion of the acquisition of Friendship Estate;”—completed under the People's Partnership Government, I think this year or last year.

“Completion of the Shaw Park Cultural Complex;”—not done again.

“Completion of the Scarborough Library...”—the Lego library.

Every time you look at it, it has a different shape. They are putting on Lego blocks and taking them off and putting them on, and taking them off and putting them on. They decided that the building was too heavy and too dark because it was all concrete. They took off the concrete and started putting in glass; so this is where the money is going.

I have not talked about how much money and cost overruns. I have not talked about that because we have talked about that so many times. The Scarborough Hospital started at \$135 million in 2003, and ended up just about the amount that I think Paula was talking about. I am sorry—the Member for Point Fortin was talking about. It must be by now \$1.5 billion.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Scarborough?

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Scarborough Hospital.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: No, \$215 million, because remember we got back some money.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Not at all.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Yes, we won some of the court matters. [*Interruption*]

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Seven hundred and something million by the time we got in, and after that it has gone crossed the billion. It has crossed the billion.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: No, no, no, the Scarborough Hospital—absolutely not.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Well bring all the details.

Mr. Sharma: “You like a fowl. You know dem yard fowl? Yuh only scratching.” [*Laughter*]

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: “Completion of the Scarborough Library...”—not done. [*Crosstalk*]

“Construction of the Roxborough Administrative Complex;”

I am saying, if you start in 2001 with the PNM and you have money allocated every year, and you have all these cost overruns and money missing, and there is no timely presentation of the documents for the Auditor General to say what has happened since 2005—our Auditor General’s reports go to 2003, 2004, 2005, and after that nothing—six, seven, eight, nine, 10, 11, 12, nothing, because of the untimeliness of the presentation of the documents.

All those that have come in before have \$500 million missing, \$300 million missing. We have ghost companies. We have a company from India that came in and was well-funded and disappeared. We have all kinds of irregularities, including the fact that the hospital took so long for construction, because so much of the material from the hospital disappeared and went elsewhere. So we in Tobago have been pouring money into a bottomless pit.

I am saying that the hon. Member for Tobago East, Sen. Christlyn Moore, and myself have been working so very hard to ensure—and I want Tobago people to understand that—that Tobago gets as much money as the national budget can allow. We are working hard to make sure that development projects for Tobago are well funded, but we are seeing where because of the administration in Tobago, we are not getting what we have been putting money there for. One of the things

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that the Chief Secretary has said is that all Tobago needs is a good administrator, not internal self-government. So we are looking to find that good administrator that he is talking about.

I am going to 2009. In 2009, the Minister of Finance was no longer Prime Minister Patrick Manning—2008, I erred. In 2008, it was Karen Nunez-Tesheira and in 2009 it was Karen Nunez-Tesheira again. And we know all about the duster coat and all of that. Again:

“I now turn to Tobago and the Tobago House of Assembly.”

She is saying here:

“The tourism sector...the mainstay of the island’s economy, has undergone a not unexpected decline in activity in recent months—a direct consequence of the weaker global economy. In the first six months of this year, international...arrivals in Tobago declined by 47 per cent compared to the same period last year. In line with this development, hotel and guest house occupancy rates in Tobago in June stood at approximately 25 per cent and 35 per cent respectively.” [*Crosstalk*]

We saw that go to as low as 17 per cent, according to who is reporting. But she is also promising the new Scarborough Hospital will be finished this year:

“Extension of the Store Bay Local Road to Shirvan Road;

Extension of the Claude Noel Highway to Charlotteville on a phased basis;...

Construction of five million gallon desalination plant;...

Completion of the construction of the indoor sporting complex at Bacolet;

Completion of the construction of the cultural complex at Shaw Park;”—again.

“Completion of the upgrade of the Vanguard Hotel;”

which we finished, the People’s Partnership. We picked it up from rubble, finished it and opened it as the Magdalena Grand.

The Minister continued:

“Completion of Tobago’s new electricity generation plant in collaboration with T&TEC at a cost of \$600 million;”

And this we also completed during the People’s Partnership time:

“Completion of the \$1 billion natural gas pipeline to Tobago...”

Recurrent expenditure, \$1,470.5 million and DP \$301 million. Under other Heads, \$497.1 million.

I do not expect anybody to keep all of that in the head, but the point here is that what I said in my last year’s budget’s response—and I quote from my own budget response:

“So I want to put the Minister of Finance and the Economy on notice that when he does his budgetary allocations for 2012/ 2013, in the first tranche of that, the first quarter of the moneys that will go to the Tobago House of Assembly, you must be extremely mindful of the fact that most of those funds, we imagine, will go to buying votes for the 2013 January election. So you must understand that you have to monitor very closely and very carefully the allocations of the THA, as you go along.”

Minister, Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai, came to this House, and in delivering his budget presentation, he gave account of the moneys he allocated last year and how they have been spent. We expect that in future the Tobago House of Assembly will go to their House and give an account of how they have spent the moneys that they were allocated.

We are saying in Tobago, after \$20 billion and 12 years of PNM rule, where is Tobago at this juncture? Tobago remains undeveloped, underdeveloped, and Scarborough remains a shanty town. People come to Tobago, come off the cruise ships and ask us in Scarborough, “Show me the way to the town,” and they are already in the town. “Show me the way to the capital.”

The Orville London administration had time. They had three consecutive terms with a solid foundation that was left by the previous administration to move Tobago forward. They met a well-developed plan and ignored it. They had money to work with, but what did they do? We in Tobago must understand that what we do with the public purse is important to our livelihood, important to what is happening in Tobago.

The People’s National Movement in Tobago has polarized the community by openly favouring PNMites and callously despising non-PNMites through the years. Few opportunities for work; few opportunities for grant funds or none; few opportunities for accessing government housing, and that is extremely distressing to people in Tobago; no opportunities to access home improvement grants and loans; deliberately ignoring supporters of other parties and rubbing salt into the wounds of those who are needy.

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Actually, when the Prime Minister, Dr. Eric Williams, lost the election in 1976 in Tobago, he said, “Tobago people will have to eat grass.”

9.00 p.m.

So without being too rancorous, I want my people in Tobago to understand that we have to stand up for what is right. We have to stand up and demand—over the next two years, three years—of our Assembly that we must have value for money. So I am answering, in saying all of that, the concerns of the Member for Morvant/Laventille—I am not saying it right? Morvant/Laventille, you see. And let me just say a few of the things that she has said here.

Mr. Sharma: Very good comment. Very good.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Thank you.

“...the allocations to major specific projects and programmes in aid of Tobago’s development have fallen woefully short...”

This is what she is saying...woefully short for yet another year.” But what have they fallen woefully short of?

The People’s Partnership Government has given more money to Tobago than any PNM Minister of Finance or any PNM allocation in the past. In 2011, 2012 and 2013 we saw all of this materialize; the House of Assembly had, in 2011 an allocation of \$9.78 billion. In 2012, \$2.08 billion. In 2013, \$2.356 billion plus \$874.9 million allocated to various Ministries to spend in Tobago.

People want to give the impression that other Ministries have never spent money in Tobago until the People’s Partnership came into office, and that is not so, because Tobago does not have responsibility for national security. So all of the money that is spent in Tobago on national security belongs to the Ministry of National Security, and Tobago does not have responsibility for parts of public utilities, including WASA, T&TEC and other areas, some other areas of the public utilities. [*Crosstalk*]

We have to thank the hon. Member for Naparima for the kind of work that has been done in Tobago over the past—even the past—I think it is just a little more than a year that he has taken over. Even before that, the Minister who was there before, I think it was the Member for Tabaquite for the work they have done and at some point, Sen. The Hon. Emmanuel George.

We have seen such change in Tobago. The allocation—if the national budgetary allocation is \$58 billion and the THA allocation is \$2.3 billion, then the

THA is expected to receive 4.03 per cent as the Dispute Resolution Commission outlines. So we have never actually fallen short of 4.03, and even now the Minister was very careful to ensure that he did not go below the minimum.

Now, our hon. Prime Minister set out in January of this year to give us internal self-government and to raise our budgetary allocations, and right in this honourable House the PNM did not support it. For some reason, they have come up with some story that Mr. London had been asking for internal self-government all along—and this is not so.

Mr. Sharma: Quite true. Quite true.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: This is not so. The PNM in Tobago never asked Prime Minister Manning for internal self-government.

Mr. Sharma: Very true.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Never! But now the PNM in Tobago and the THA are asking Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar for everything that the PNM Prime Minister, Patrick Manning, would not give them.

Dr. Gopeesingh: And did not give them.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Did not give them. He actually told me one day, “you know, I never knew what Tobago wanted, otherwise I would have given Tobago something.” But what? He came to us, negotiated with us, and then came back to Trinidad and called a snap election. That was the first snap election before this last one; the first sporting declaration before this last one. He came to Tobago and negotiated and we said, “okay, okay you go back”. He said, “Tobago gets what Tobago wants”, and came back and just threw Tobago into the bamboo.

We remember in 1956 when Eric Williams said you could go, go, go, let them go if they want; go, and he removed all of the services of the Government in Tobago from Tobago—I was teaching at the time in Tobago and we had to really, nearly eat grass. We had to really, nearly eat grass. So we have been in Tobago, abused and used, by the PNM Government. And we still, some of us, insist that this is how we must vote. But I am telling my people in Tobago tonight that the TOP is coming back very strong and coming back, coming back from—just like the PNM came back from the 33-3, we are going to come back and you will see what will happen. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Sharma: Well said! Well said!

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: We are coming back very strong—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: Correct! Correct!

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:—because we have a heart for Tobago. We love our country, our island, and we believe that we can make a better Government because, according to my leader, Ashworth Jack, anybody could do it better [*Crosstalk*] and nobody could do it worse.

Talking about leaders, [*Crosstalk*] the interim leader of the existing PNM—the one up on that side—[*Crosstalk*] the interim leader—[*Crosstalk*] Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The interim leader on that end, [*Crosstalk*] holding the time for the leader from this end until the new leader arrives, just like the TOP, will go through its housekeeping, [*Crosstalk*] just like the TOP will go through its housekeeping, just like all the other political parties in Trinidad and Tobago and everywhere; nothing is cast in stone.

Hon. Member: Hmm.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: So do not be afraid. Do not try to tell me about leader because, you know, if we really start to talk about examining the horns [*Crosstalk*] you all will realize that you all, somewhere, either walking somewhere with a leader with two heads as leadership or none at all.

Mr. Jeffrey: One leader.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Because—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Jeffrey: One leader, girl.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:—we have all kinds of people in waiting, you know. We could talk about that but we are talking about the budget. We could talk about the ex-mayor, waiting. We could talk about a Senator is waiting, and we could talk about all the people who have come to us to find out all the little sordid details about interim leaders and so on, and that tells that you all know very well, and that will ensure that you all do not have certain people, who some of you would like to be—heading this beautiful country.

Mr. Sharma: The Member for La Brea will make a good leader. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Yeah. The Member for La Brea would make a good Prime Minister.

Mr. Jeffrey: Leave La Brea out of that.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Yes.

Mr. De Coteau: “La Brea is meh pardner, you know.”

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: So, the Member for Laventille East/Morvant talked about the scholarship programme—“...the allocations to major specific projects and programmes to aid in Tobago, development have fallen woefully short... the case for the Assembly’s scholarship programme for Tobago for young people is a stark example. Given the well-known human resource capacity constraints to Tobago’s development, the Assembly requested some six million to finance this programme in 2014.”

Madam Deputy Speaker, if you are not a relative of somebody very close at the top of that Assembly’s hierarchy, “yuh ent getting no scholarship”.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: “Dat sounding like de PP.”

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: I am telling you, you are not getting—the Member for San Fernando West just outlined how we do our scholarship distributions, and I am a member of the interministerial scholarships committee and I know the processes and I know how we do it, and it is transparent, and we are not giving out of the Ministry of Community Development any scholarships for all kinds of things. We are not doing that at all, and you can ask the Member for Mayaro. We are not giving scholarships to people who are just undeserving and who are friends and family.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Meritocracy.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Yes. [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Can I ask for a scholarship?

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: So the scholarship programme—[*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: You want a scholarship?

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:—okay.

“Take the case of the infrastructural development at Cove that is so critical to transforming the Tobago economy. The two million allocated for capital works at the business park for 2014 can hardly build a factory shell of average size.”

And I am here from the Member for Laventille East/Morvant. What factory shells are there in Cove? I think the Member for Laventille East/Morvant must go

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to Cove and see what Cove is. Cove is just a big dance hall. Nothing is happening there. There is nothing there driving any economy anywhere. I do not know whether there are any persons interested in building anything there.

She went on to the housing allocations:

“In fact ... with the excess of 6,000 applications for public sector housing in Tobago, the allocation of \$28.4 million for all housing projects and related activities, will result in a situation in 2014 where the Assembly has financing for the construction of a maximum of 25 homes in Tobago in the next year.”

They have built about 33/37 houses in a whole long time and they have given in one area three to brother and sister and brother, and two to the next sister and the next brother—one family; one family whose part of the family was sitting in this honourable House.

This family, one of the members of this family, came to me and said to me, “we din get five houses, is only three we get”. Now, two of the people [*Crosstalk*] “doh” even—have not even lived in Tobago for the past how many years. [*Interruption*] Well, we have that too, because we have the son—right in Tobago—of this one and the daughter of that one and so on.

Mr. Jeffrey: Six houses.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: In Tobago. [*Interruption*] We have that too. We have people right at the top with eight houses.

Mr. Jeffrey: “Wooo!”

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Yes.

Mr. Jeffrey: “It have people with eight houses?”

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: You want to talk about Tobago. We say in Tobago, “mouth open tory jump out”, you know. You would not like to hear what happen—you understand what I say. [*Crosstalk*] You would not like to—in Tobago.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: We know about six. We did not know about eight. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Right. Then the Member for Laventille East/Morvant says:

“...the meagre allocation of eight million to complete the Scarborough Library in the face of a requirement of \$40 million...”

How much money—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Please, please, please.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:—is enough to finish the Scarborough Library? How come the Scarborough Library cannot be finished? The children who were five years old when they started building the Scarborough Library have now left school, they are in university. When they asked the Chief Secretary what do you have to say about this Scarborough Library? “Why it not finishing at all?” He said we probably “doh” need any library, you could use the Internet. Then one of the other assemblymen said, you could go under a tree and study.

Mr. Sharma: What a shame.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: “Yuh understand”; with impunity. I spoke to one of the assemblymen one day and I said to him, you know, the Windward Road is an obstacle course. It is so terrible, you know, it is just mashing up “yuh” car, people cannot drive, it is causing accidents, and he said to me, that is why we have Prados and SUVs. That is what he said to me. That is why they have Prados and SUVs; very irresponsible.

Now, we go on to the Shaw Park Cultural Complex: “How can \$8 million”—and you know, Member for Laventille East/Morvant “doh leh them give yuh any of dem things to read because ah doh think yuh really know wha going on dey yuh know.”

“...the Shaw Park Cultural Complex when this project”—what are you saying here? It currently costs \$75 million to finish and we gave them \$8 million. How much money will you give to the Shaw Park Cultural Complex?

Mr. Sharma: “Gawd! “

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Right outside of the Shaw Park Cultural Complex right now they are building a roundabout, and the roundabout is going nowhere. It is a roundabout in the middle of a straight road going nowhere. There is nothing on the left and there is the Cultural Complex on the right. Where is this roundabout going?

All of a sudden the secretary for works says they are going to “gih ah roundabout. We go gih dem a whole set ah roundabout. All yuh, more roundabout coming. Like roundabout is, you know.”

So we are just doing things, according to some one of our colleagues on this side, by “vaps”. There is no scientific survey, there is no scientific evaluation, there is no feasibility study, “if de man feels to build a jetty over there, he build it

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over there. An if he feels to build a house over dey”, he build it over dey” and they have built for that reason houses in Roxborough, in Renaissance, which are built in a place we call in Tobago, Mesopotamia, between two rivers—a place between two rivers, the Argyle River and the Roxborough River. And every time there is heavy rain, we have flooding in there. This morning they called me to say your constituency office in Argyle is completely flooded out. Why? Because we know that area is a flood prone area. I have seen people’s washing machines and stuff float away in Tomas in 2010, but we are talking about putting more money, giving more money.

We are saying Tobago we have a Sou Sou lands model, an excellent model that has worked. We have seen it work in Bell Garden; at where we call Sou Sou Lands, near to Carnbee; we have seen it work in Charlotteville, where we call the new scheme; and we have seen it work in other places in Tobago, because Tobago people prefer to build their own houses, and they build very, very beautiful homes. They build homes to suit the family and then they expand—[*Interruption*]

9.15 p.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the Member of Tobago East and Minister of State in the Ministry of People and Social Development has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. Agriculture: Agriculture in Tobago is suffering from an extremely weak heartbeat. Agriculture is dying in Tobago. In a place that was once called the “Bread basket of the Caribbean”, in a place, because of our agriculture people said of us that: “When you are rich in England you are as rich as a Tobago planter.” Agriculture has gone to the pits, Yet, the Member for Laventille East/Morvant is asking us, why are we giving “a meagre five million allocation for agriculture access roads...five million dollars out of a budget of \$60 million to develop some of the fertile lands...” when all of our food is imported in Tobago. All of our food is imported, notwithstanding the fact that agricultural lands are being given to friends and family. Our food is imported. If our ferries do not run we are in trouble.

She talks again about the allocation for CEPEP in Tobago and says that there is

no allocation for CEPEP. Now, CEPEP in Tobago does not operate like CEPEP in Trinidad. CEPEP in Trinidad is contracted out to contractors and the contractors hire people. CEPEP in Tobago is the precinct of the Tobago House of Assembly and they then hire another set of people for their vote bank. So much so, that what our children are saying in Tobago when you go to the primary schools and you ask: “What do you want to be when you grow up?” Some of them are saying: “I want to be a CEPEP.” Yes, and I want to be a URP. And this is our legacy that the PNM—that is what we are generating in Tobago. You know what is happening with the URP? Children who are still going to school are being hired on the URP projects to work in the morning. And they have a little short work, but they are not going to school or they are going to school late. And then their mothers and fathers are hired there too, and they do not have people at home to supervise the children. So we are trying to see if we could breed another generation of people who have the same social support as the PNM gave to Laventille and other areas in Trinidad where they have been in existence, in Government for 51 years. I am saying to people of Tobago, we have to be so careful because that is not how we have been trained.

She is also saying: “Government should be accelerating tourism by building marina, do an industrial seaport, an aquatic centre”. All of these things appeared in the budget presentations from right back to 2001. She is talking about the Milshirv Project that we decided that was not open, not transparent and some people are saying there is nothing wrong with it. But I want to leave that alone because that could become a burden on the State, but then the State is all of us and that is something that we are not really aware of, you know. The State is all of us. The State is the sum of all the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and we think that when we rob one part of the State that we ease ourselves off some kind of burden. The burden is on all of us. Right.

Yes, she has talked too about delaying—we have delayed internal self-government for Tobago. We have not delayed internal self-government for Tobago. The PNM Members of this House have done everything possible to delay internal self-government for Tobago.

She is also saying that we have delayed a university campus in Tobago. Our Chief Secretary is on record saying that: “Tobago is too small for a university.” So there was never any argument on his part to have any kind of university in Tobago.

Mr. Sharma: “Da is true.”

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Until now, the People's Partnership has decided we must put a university in Tobago. We must try to keep our people at home studying. We must attract foreign investment even, foreign students even. We must build our housing plants to accommodate students and their families and to accommodate the build-up that comes from a university campus. Now they are saying, we are not finishing the university, we on this side. We have been fighting with the Assembly to give us land to build a university. We have been fighting with the Assembly that has 34 estates in Tobago, that owns 34 estates in Tobago. Not one single one of those estates is in viable—has had anything growing on it. The Government farms are run down, they are not working; people are just going there to collect money and this is how Tobago is being built by PNM.

Madam Deputy Speaker, now that I have cleared up some stuff for Tobago, for the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, let me go a little bit to what the Secretary for Finance in the Tobago House of Assembly has said. He said: "He will take the central government to court for back pay—arrears of the 4.03 per cent of the national pie over the last three years, 2010—2013." You know, I would like us to calculate the moneys that cannot be accounted for, from 2001 to present. Let us go back to 2001 to present and check all of the money that was given to the Tobago House of Assembly, inclusive of, maybe, \$20 billion or \$22 billion, and let us calculate whether that money was spent, whether there was value for money there, whether there was quality for money.

Now, the Secretary for Finance also wants to raise funds on the open market, to float bonds. As the Member of Parliament for Tobago East and as I said before, I am in favour of increasing funds to the Assembly. But in Tobago where we know each other, we see millionaires emerging overnight. We know their "tanty", their "nennen", their brother, their sister, "compere", "mackomere"; we know them and we know that these persons build huge condominiums; and so on, and small hotels have found their money somewhere—I do not know where. Are they paying the required taxes? Are we monitoring anything about their taxes?

We have squandermania, we have embezzlement, we have unlawful and criminal activity going on and we know that, and I am not saying that to say well this one is doing something illegal or that one is, I am just saying it is there. We are seeing these instantly rich paupers becoming very rich, and we saw it during the election campaign.

During the election campaign these people who were campaigning, people who are officers of the Assembly walked around with cheques in their pockets

made out to several different hardware companies. And these—they went around and as they campaigned they said things like: “You know, why you doh put on a downstairs, why yuh doh change the roof, why yuh doh”—and just handed the cheques to people. And I have heard in the other place a Senator from Tobago say that we in the Ministry of the People and Social Development go around with a big truck, and the big truck is playing music, and the big truck is saying: “Come out and get your food card”, and the people just running out and getting food card. Crazy, crazy. But we put some things like that into the national space so that people would believe anything. We have to be careful of what we are saying in these Houses of Parliament, because the people out there are listening and we have to give account for ourselves.

So, moving right on, moving right on. I know I have a little time so I want to make sure that I do not spend it on untoward stuff. What the Hochoy Charles administration did with so little money, \$30 million, very little money, was so much more than what the PNM is doing now with all of this money that they are getting. But what is wrong—I am saying, what is wrong with my people? Are we losing our powers of discernment? Having voted for the PNM in 2001, we voted for them again in 2005, we voted for them again in 2009 and then we voted for them again in 2013. Now are we suckers for punishment? Are we into the battered wife syndrome or the Stockholm syndrome? How much abuse will we suffer? Or is it that there is some kind of magic that happens every time there is an election?

So we have gone now—13 years and we are going on to 16 years with the same administration building the same things, doing the same programmes, our children are still at the bottom of the ladder in education, our agricultural system is right down. Our health care system is extremely sick, new hospital notwithstanding. We have excellent health-care providers and some very, very unprofessional providers among them and because of that, a service that I am begging the Minister of Health to help us with because our service delivery is not good at all.

And what is this heritage that the present Chief Secretary is protecting? Is he protecting the heritage left for us by James Biggart, A.P.T James, ANR Robinson or Winston Murray and Pamela Nicholson? Have they given their sweat and tears, and, in the case of President ANR Robinson, their blood and in the case of Biggart and APT James their lives, have they given those things in vain? They were trying to generate a culture of productivity and they were well on the way, very well on the way, and Hochoy Charles and his executives were living that dream. They

were working together to transform Tobago to self-sustainability. And the TOP is waiting to hold the reins of power to show what Tobago needs.

Tobago, I am asking, Madam Deputy Speaker, through you, Tobago how long will we kill our prophets? How long will we kill our prophets? We have had good quality representatives committed to the development of Tobago and at every turn we have ourselves set about to conspire and bring them down to our own detriment. Every time we start over, we lose.

And I am saying also to our dear Leader of the THA, what is the legacy that you will leave? Will you be remembered for CEPEP, for URP, for five days, for 10 days, for make-work? Will you be remembered for building the best vote bank ever? Is the PNM model a modern-day slavery, a Willie Lynch formula? Imagine you can go to work at 6.30 and come back home by 8 o'clock—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: What!

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Or by 7.30, that is the norm. How are we going to compete in this global market? Who is supervising these projects? And who is paying these people?

You know, I must congratulate our Minister of Education however, for the work done with his team in Trinidad. And when I hear what is happening in Trinidad I grieve because I know we need some of that energy in Tobago. I know of his struggles to get the Assembly to give him land in Tobago to construct special schools, and preschools.

Dr. Gopeesingh: We waiting two years now for that.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: We have universal primary and secondary education in Trinidad and Tobago. But what is the quality of the education we are getting in Tobago? Where is the accountability? And we blame the children. We scrutinize the results of the children. What are the results of the teachers? Mr. Speaker, our teachers are well paid. We had a teacher who taught Spanish for 18 years and not a single student passed O' level Spanish.

Mr. Sharma: That must be a world record.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Are we constantly retooling—is “ah” world record yes. Are we constantly retooling our teachers? And I am asking, is TTUTA a partner in our education in Tobago or is TTUTA the combatant? And I am asking that as a member, an old member of TTUTA. I want us to pay attention to the quality of education and to the outcomes of education, not just to the amount of

money that comes in and the amount of money that goes out. So our evaluation processes need to be examined.

Dr. Gopeesingh: The value outcomes.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Madam Deputy Speaker, we are also building a culture of disrespect in this country—disrespect for our President, disrespect for our Prime Minister; disrespect for our leaders; disrespect for positions, for people's property, for peoples life, for elders, for teachers for the law. It is becoming a virus. Madam Deputy Speaker, in many formal situations there is so much disrespect. We are now institutionalizing disrespect. Respect, good manners, good training and upbringing are not things that could be bought and sold. We have to instill them in our generations as we go along.

9.30 p.m.

Moving right along. I want to ask, Madam Deputy Speaker, how much time I have, please?

Madam Deputy Speaker: You have until 9.45. You have 15 minutes.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Fifteen minutes. All right. Let me talk a bit about our utilities in Tobago. T&TEC: we have the capacity to generate over 60 megawatts of electricity in Tobago, something we never had before. We depend on a submarine cable to bring in 15 megawatts from Trinidad and we are converting our plant from diesel to natural gas—I said a little bit about it before—and that will save us \$5 million a month in fuel costs. T&TEC has established a new substation at Studley Park, thanks to the Minister; and this was commissioned about two/three weeks ago, and the electricity supplies to the windward and northern areas of Tobago have improved.

I want to ask the people of Tobago east and north to bear with any inconvenience that they are experiencing as the changeover is being operationalized. Electricity must engage generation, transmission and distribution and I must say, under the PNM reign, the transmission system was largely abandoned and we now see the ills of this era, with rotted poles, worn and damaged insulators, frequent outages and low voltage.

Public utilities, again, WASA in Tobago: The Mount Irvine well has been commissioned at a cost of \$0.6 million. The Arnos Vale pipeline project has been commissioned. It saw the installation of 3.7 kilometres, 150 millimetres of PVC pipe and the number of beneficiaries, 950 persons, at a cost of \$9 million.

We had a total of 11 projects from WASA, 33 kilometres of pipeline, 40,951 persons supplied out of a total population of about 50,000—about that—and

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\$96.6 million in total spent from WASA in Tobago. Yet we are quarrelling about other Ministries spending money in Tobago.

People of Hermitage—through you, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am asking the people of Hermitage, I need you to know that I continue to work on your behalf to ensure that the quality of life in Hermitage is enhanced. I know I have said from 2010 I met the people of Hermitage with no water supply, and so many people in that area of Tobago have to rely on latrines rather than on toilets in their homes, and the inconvenience of that. We have pledged—the People’s Partnership—that we would change that.

We are having some difficulty with acquiring the lands on which the wells are located and we have to engage in all of the negotiations to get those commissioned. The owners of the lands are charging some exorbitant prices so we have to negotiate. We know that we need the supply. And, people of Hermitage, I thank you for your support. Madam Deputy Speaker, I must say that to my people, but I am working on it. I do admire your resourcefulness anyhow—Hermitage and Charlotteville—and I must say that you can expect better things. A better day is coming.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, there are no bad crews, you know, just bad leaders, and under the excellent leadership of the hon. Prime Minister, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, the People’s Partnership has achieved above and beyond the stewardship of every previous government since 1956, and especially in Tobago. And I will list some of our achievements in the three short years in Tobago.

We have finished and commissioned the Scarborough Hospital, which we rescued; we finished and opened the Magdalena, boosting tourism—the Magdalena Grand Hotel. We have secured visa waivers for Eastern Caribbean States to come as our visitors. We have introduced the electronic birth certificate, death certificate and now marriage certificate. We have brought all Government services to Tobago that are available in Trinidad. So people used to have to come to Trinidad for a birth certificate, “yuh know”, and to deposit wills and all of that.

We have brought all the services, including town and country, service commissions, legal affairs, auditor general. We have brought all those services to Tobago, and many others. We have brought the bachelor of education programme and the UTT campus to Tobago. When I lectured at UTT before I took this job, we had 17 campuses in Trinidad and not one in Tobago. Now we have a UTT campus in Tobago offering the bachelor of education programme and the pre-engineering programme at the UTT campus.

We have also, through tertiary, opened the Workforce Assessment centre and that is established at Canaan, and in that centre we have the MIC, the Tobago Technology Centre; we have the NTA (National Training Agency); we have OJT, and the OJT has expanded to an office in Roxborough; offices in Goldsborough. We have expanded GATE across the country. And you know in the People's Partnership, the rain falls on the just and the unjust, "eh", so we do not discriminate. We organize the national pie for every quarter of our society to have a piece.

We renamed the ANR International—Robinson International Airport, which was the Crown Point Airport, and we expanded that facility to include what we call the red-eye flights. So normally, at this time you could not go to Tobago, but when we shall have finished here tonight, if we finish before one o'clock in the morning, I could still go home and sleep in my own bed, rather than somewhere else.

We held land reform consultations throughout Tobago.

Mr. Sharma: I hope "yuh have yuh car".

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: You go with the car on the ferry.

We developed strategies to bring lands under RPO because, as I said before in this House, maybe about 85 per cent of the lands in Tobago are under owners who have since passed, and through the Minister of Legal Affairs, we organized all of that and brought the RPO thing into easier processes and people are now getting their deeds and titles and so on.

The minimum wage was moved from \$9 to \$12.50, and that is impacting very strongly on the people of Tobago, although some people think a lot of the things are being done in Trinidad, but they are national projects and they are impacting very nicely on our people.

We completed 68 wage negotiations. Think of all the people in Trinidad and Tobago that would affect. We provided scholarships in 2011; 26 Tobagonians got scholarships from the Ministry of Public Administration. In 2010, one Tobagonian got a scholarship. In 2011, 26 Tobagonians got scholarships because of the efforts of the People's Partnership in ensuring that that unequal system, unfair system that operated, where friends and acquaintances and family members of people in authority in Trinidad, including in community development, got the scholarships rather than the people who should get them by merit.

We have, through the Ministry of the People and Social Development, the

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conditional cash transfer card, or food card, and we have an office in Tobago and that is going very well. We also have the NSDP in Tobago from the Ministry of the People and Social Development—national social development programme—where we are bringing relief to people through wiring houses, doing guttering and doing plumbing.

We have increased citizens' pensions to \$3,000; increased NIS to \$3,000; distributed laptops to SEA students. And you know in Tobago some of the principals are telling the students—and you could know who are the principals who do not support the People's Partnership. They are telling the students, "You are not to bring any laptop to school. That is banned." [*Interruption*] Yes, Minister, they are telling them that, so the laptops are banned in certain schools—a serious story. I will get some details for you. And our Minister of Finance and the Economy and our Government has returned our country to positive growth.

Just before I finish, I want to affirm my support for the 2013/2014 fiscal package prepared and delivered by Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai. Economies thrive when communities bond, engage, empower and embrace all citizens, and the People's Partnership Government, under the leadership of the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, upholds these ideals and continues to work tirelessly to enhance the quality of life in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Deputy Speaker, James Freeman Clarke has said:

"A politician thinks of the next election; a statesman, of the next generation."

This budget presentation is testament that this administration is an administration of statesmen. We are cognizant of the fact that any financial policies and decisions that we implement at this stage affect the citizens of this country for many years to come.

As I close, I want to go to a story that I read in the newspaper two days ago, or yesterday—I think it was yesterday, *Newsday* of—which date is this? The 16th? That is yesterday?

"Opposition Leader Dr. Keith Rowley has advised Arima MP Rodger Samuel to leave God out of the politics..."

"So he invokes the name of God. He gone to fast and pray and talk to God. And after two weeks of talking to God, the only thing God could tell him was, 'you have to be a minister of the Cabinet'."

Madam Deputy Speaker, we honour the liberty of all people to express their

opinions, advance their views, practise their faiths and vote their convictions. The only limits on such liberty are those that prevent one person's freedom from infringing the rights of another. I dare say, if we are unwise enough to leave God out of politics, God may decide to leave us out of politics. Madam Deputy Speaker, if we are unwise enough to leave God out of politics, God may well decide to leave us out of politics.

God alone has that power. He puts up and takes down. God appoints leaders. Madam Deputy Speaker, righteousness exalts a nation and sin is a reproach to any people, and the prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Let us not be haughty; let us not fly in the face of God. It is by His grace that we sit in these hallowed halls, all of us.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in closing, I wish to thank Jehovah God for watching over this nation, its people, our PM, our Cabinet, our Government, the THA, the assemblymen, and all of our people. It is only through God that we can have success as a nation. Unless God builds the house, they that try to build it labour in vain. Unless God watches the city, the watchman watches in vain.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I pray that God will heal our nation of the scourge of crime; heal our nation of the scourges of nepotism and all of those other ills that I had outlined; heal our nation of this acrimony that pervades our Houses of Parliament and help us to work together. Madam Deputy Speaker, I pray that God will bless us all richly, and I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for Fyzabad and Minister of Tourism.

The Minister of Tourism (Hon. Chandresh Sharma): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I join in that prayer that God has truly blessed Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Deputy Speaker, for those of us who have had the singular blessings of observing the good work of God, regardless of which religion we subscribe to, would record that God intervenes at the right time. God's intervention obtained in Trinidad and Tobago in 2010 with the election of Kamla Persad-Bissessar as the political leader of the United National Congress, and subsequently becoming leader of the People's Partnership, leading very distinguished people like Mr. Errol Mc Leod, who now sits as the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre; the Member for Tunapuna, a political leader of another political party, and others, including for the first time, really bringing the people of Trinidad and Tobago together.

Of course, immediately after becoming Prime Minister of Trinidad and

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Tobago, the Prime Minister made a very instructive statement, an invitation to all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. This invitation has captured global attention which I will share a few thoughts on in a bit. What was that invitation? She invited the people of Trinidad and Tobago to get involved in the governance of Trinidad and Tobago. That is very instructive.

So it meant for the first time, whoever, wherever you were, there was an opportunity for you to participate: the teachers of the country; the taxi drivers; the business people; the housewives; the NGOs; the CBOs; the faith-based organizations. And what has that resulted in? Three years later we have become the most attractive country in the world, attracting business, attracting visitors, tourists and the whole world.

But more than that, it has attracted policymakers the world over to look at a good model for governance. In many, many countries, in the great United Kingdom, in Canada, India and elsewhere, they have been experimenting with partnership governments. The only one that has resulted in enormous good work and staying strong together, is the People's Partnership led by Kamla Persad-Bissessar. [*Desk thumping*] We should not be surprised, and "we", meaning all the people of Trinidad and Tobago; "we" meaning every Member of Parliament; "we" meaning every local government practitioner and the NGOs of this country, the CBOs and everyone.

9.45 p.m.

One of the most widely read magazine, the very respected *Time* magazine, in one of its earlier publications, five months after Prime Minister became Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, declared Kamla Persad-Bissessar as among the 10 top world leaders, female leaders, of course, at that time, and other publications, global ones indicated that, and that is a lesson for us to learn. That is why this country is doing so very well, which I will show in a few minutes again. And what has it done? Outside of Brazil, Canada and Chile, Trinidad and Tobago is the best place to be for business, for entertainment. In fact, the United Nations has declared that Trinidad and Tobago is the third best place in the world for young females to grow up, and that is very important; very, very important. But look at the global attention it has captured.

Within three years, we have had the visit of the President of China, one of the largest economies in the world. We have had the visit of the Vice President of the United States.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

We have had the visit of the President of Venezuela, Cuba. We had a state visit to

Canada. So it means that countries outside there are looking at us, and they are looking at us because we continue to influence good policies.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is the only country—very important; whether you are PNM, UNC, green, blue or black—where citizens in this twin-island Republic can wake up to a breakfast. There are many, many people in many parts of the world who cannot get food on a morning. Small Trinidad and Tobago, under Kamla Persad-Bissessar, the Prime Minister, you can wake up to a breakfast. Nobody in this country goes hungry. Almost every single home—and you have heard from the other contributors in the Parliament—obtains pipe-borne water, or is very close to pipe-borne water. Almost every home has electricity, and we continue to maintain the rates that every citizen can access that. We have gone further. We have indicated to persons, pensioners and others who may find a difficulty, to make sure they are not denied that.

Today, every child in this country, from kindergarten right up to university, can access education. Very, very few countries in the world can offer that. This is the great country we live in, and we must be very, very proud that we have a Government of the people, by the people, for the people that is doing it every God day, and we must thank Almighty God. I was glad when my friend from Tobago concluded her statement by recognizing the presence of God. In fact, our Constitution recognizes the presence of a God, and we must continue to subscribe to that.

Today, when the Member for St. Augustine spoke, he indicated in the last one year, 3,000 business houses registered for business. What does that say to us? It means—the Prime Minister said in 2010, not less than 10 per cent of all government and state agency businesses will go to first-time business owners and small business owners, and she encouraged women to get into business.

The Member for St. Augustine also indicated there were more than 5,000 also registered and waiting. The Member for Naparima indicated in the last one year, the Electrical Inspectorate inspected 30,000 homes or 30,000 premises, meaning dwelling homes and businesses. For a small Trinidad and Tobago, 30,000 new inspections is earth-shattering.

Hon. Member: Record.

Hon. C. Sharma: It is a record. It means that people are building, people are opening businesses, it means that our electricians are busy at work. That is why under the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development—68

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or 69? I know 69 is a good number—68 settlements were arrived at. In no other country has that ever obtained. Correct, Dr. Moonilal, you are a global learner?

Dr. Moonilal: Yes, it is.

Hon. C. Sharma: No other country has that obtained.

Dr. Moonilal: One more and Errol turn [*Inaudible*]

Hon. C. Sharma: So, Mr. Speaker, our country is tremendously blessed, because one of the things the Prime Minister has been able to capture through the People's Partnership is bringing all the interest groups together.

In terms of work in this country, Mr. Speaker, I had the good fortune of serving in local government in 2010, and at the end of December, that year, we had close to 500 projects in every single electoral district, all 134. I was succeeded by Dr. Suruj Rambachan. When he left office, he left 2,500 plus projects in the same 134 districts. It means to say in every single community work continues. That did not obtain under the PNM.

Today, in all 41 constituencies, 39 here and two in Tobago, work goes on in every single service agency. WASA is in every single constituency. So is T&TEC, so is housing, so are the grants, so are the repairs to schools, the building of schools. Every single NGO, CBO, faith-based organization is getting assistance. Under this Prime Minister, every single religious body during their particular time of service, whether Divali, Eid, Christmas, or what else you have, obtains government assistance because we encourage the active participation of all our people.

In fact, in the last two or three days, Trinidad and Tobago was declared one of the happiest countries in the world to be. All in three years. All in three years. So really, your Government, Mr. Speaker, continues to be working for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, I have had the good fortune of being here for quite some time—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Twenty years.

Hon. C. Sharma: Thank you for the maths—and, Mr. Speaker, I recall having sat for 22 budgets, that oftentimes under the PNM administration, there would be geopolitical discrimination which has been written about on numerous occasions. Opposition constituencies will not obtain—in fact, the evidence is there; in central Caroni, in that whole central area, not a single secondary school. After I left local government I went to the Ministry of Transport, and you would have heard from

the Member for Chaguanas East, in every community a bus is serving the country. Never obtained in the past. Today, under this Government, we have 5,000 maxi taxis available to our citizens, regardless of where they are. School children come to school in uniform, no cost, whether in maxi or in public transport. That is very important.

Today, our children—and you have heard from the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. There is a tendency by some Opposition Members to think to make a good contribution, you must criticize everything and be a bad news messenger. We are putting computers for all our children. We are seventh in the global index for the use of computers with children. What does the Member find? A school or two without access? Why not talk about the 535 that have? So, some people think you must talk bad news and that makes it a good contribution, or manufacture any bit of information in your mind and present it. The country has moved away from that. That is why the country is moving away from the PNM and moving away from our good friend, the Member for Chaguanas West and his political party. You cannot be economical with the truth. It is not allowed.

Governance is about people, about adding value to their lives, and measured value. Every one of us here has indicated clearly what we have done, as we are required to do. I think it was the Member for San Fernando West who indicated that under freedom of information all the expenditures of the country can be known. So when the Member for Diego Martin West talks about somebody stealing \$1 billion, the question on this side has to be: Is it you? Because, if that information obtains, bring it. So you cannot go about misleading the country.

Today, in the housing area, every family is treated with dignity. Previously, you had to go there and beg and find out and find out. Today, it is on the computer. You know where you are. Land for the Landless: this is the only country in the world that allows such a programme under our distinguished Prime Minister. Five hundred are already given and the Member for La Brea is very economical with the truth. Those 500 persons were selected through a computer system, through a lottery system, which was made public. Mr. McLeod could not have chosen a name there, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, or the Member for Port of Spain South, because if they both have to choose, they will choose 250 each. So, it is done in the most appropriate manner which is best practice all over the world where such obtains, or similar; and that programme has attracted 41,000 applications.

Under the PNM, they would tell you they are building house, but low-cost

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housing under the PNM was the most expensive low-cost house in the world. They did not deliver a single house for less than \$1 million. The PNM has been an enormous failure in this country, and there is nothing that you could say that we can copy from the PNM to do that adds value to people's life. So, Mr. Speaker, we must be very, very proud to be participating in good governance in this part of the world, and that is why we have become so attractive.

You would have heard of the number of business opportunities coming. You would have heard of the number of interest groups coming. Of course, Mr. Speaker, now that I am at the Ministry of Tourism—only a few days old there, Sir—already JetBlue starts flights in February. The power of negotiation continues regardless. Mr. Cadiz was at it. He has gone to a Ministry where there is a platform for him to do extremely well, and he has left me an excellent platform and the work continues because we work in concert with each other. We are not competing with each other. [*Desk thumping*]

So when the Minister with responsibility for T&TEC, the Member for Naparima, he has no friends in the Cabinet, he has no friends here. We are a group; all 41 of us. Not 29. All 41 of us, including the Member for Chaguanas West, including the Member for Diego Martin West because our stock in trade is people and our only business is adding value, taking goods and services to them on a daily basis, and you would have heard it from every Minister with line responsibility. You would have heard it from the Minister of Education; you would have heard it from Dr. Suruj Rambachan—the Member for Tabaquite, when you hear the number of roads all over the country.

Mr. Speaker, this Government understood and continues to understand the importance of tourism, and within months of us becoming a Government, we established the National Tourism Policy of Trinidad and Tobago. You know, under the PNM, tourism only came noted in 1984, because the PNM always thought—they did not understand—that oil and gas would be with us forever. Simple things they did not understand. They always thought that money would be available to us unlimited and that we could waste it, and for them, development is tall buildings; expensive.

Mr. Speaker, the only Government in the world that has delivered every single project with cost overruns, is the PNM. They have not delivered a single, including when they buy food for State functions. Not a single project anywhere—look around Port of Spain—and enormous cost overruns. The Hyatt next door, a good example, two point something billion dollars, four point something billion dollars. Within weeks of us coming into Government, under the Member for Oropouche

East, Dr. Moonilal, we were required to prepare this facility—under your watch, I suspect—and we delivered it within budget and within the time and, today, that story is everywhere we go.

10.00 p.m.

Today, you heard from the Minister of Education, schools that were costing \$100 million under the PNM are being delivered for \$28 million. That is why we can do so many projects. We heard from the Minister with the responsibility for WASA then, Sen. Emmanuel George, a project from Navet in that area, savings of \$113 million. That is why every citizen in this country obtains goods and services from the Government. All families who need help with repairs to their homes are treated with; funeral grants, wheelchairs and the list goes on. A caring Government and I am a very, very proud member of this Government because that is the intention of Government.

You know, this Government in 2010, had to look—as all governments are required to look at what our challenges were. What did the citizens want? What is it that the PNM was not doing. Because we had to tell them and demonstrate that the PNM is not doing things right and we will do them. So the best persons to advise were the housewives of the country, they are the mothers, and mothers are always loving and caring. The mothers said to us, we want to make sure when we wake up on mornings, our spouses, our husbands, have “a work” to go to. Today, the unemployment in this country is 4.90 per cent in less than three years. No other country can boast of that. Every man can go to a job; every one of our citizens who needs to go to work, there is work available. And within the shortest period of us coming into Government, we moved the minimum wage. We extended the maternity leave.

Then, the mothers said to us, we want to make sure our kids, whether kindergarten, elementary school or secondary or university, can go and we made sure we are doing that. Today every child who needs to be in school is in school paid for by the State with meals available, with transport available, with books available, with computers available. No other country can boast of that. They said after, we want to make sure if our loved ones, our children, become ill, we want to make sure that health care is available in the shortest space of time. Today, in every single community, more than 200 or 300 health centres are operational, with every one, under this Government—did not obtain under this PNM—with every single health centre having a doctor on duty. Under the PNM, that did not obtain! Under the People’s Partnership, at every health centre medications are dispensed. That did not obtain—dental care.

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Today, we said to the national community we will take care of your children if and when illness obtains. The PNM, who only loves themselves and do not love the children of this country, refused to support the Children's Life Fund. Today, every child that requires medical aid obtains same, but we did not stop there. Today, every citizen who requires assistance for open heart surgery obtains same; cancer care, whatever it might be, and every one of our health institutions is functioning. The Government continues to make sure that doctors are available. We continue to give scholarships to encourage a supply of professionals, whether in engineering, health care, water resources, teaching.

Mr. Speaker, this is one of the few countries in the world in the shortest space of time—how long from now, Dr. Gopeesingh, we will have a degree teacher in every school?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Only 40 left.

Hon. C. Sharma: Only 40 left!

Dr. Gopeesingh: Out of 7,500.

Hon. C. Sharma: This is a global first in the world, the practice of all our teachers in every elementary school in this country will be teaching with a Bachelors in Education, and that does not happen in many, many countries. So again, if we can do this in three years, the country must be very excited to see what will happen in our second term which I know will come to us, which the country wants us to have. The PNM has not delivered!

Dr. Rambachan: “Yuh talking facts tonight, yuh know!”

Hon. C. Sharma: That is the only thing I know, Sir.

Dr. Rambachan: “Yuh talking facts tonight!”

Mr. Imbert: “Is he speaking as a member of the cabal?”

Dr. Rambachan: I see you have the attention of the Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: He came back to hear you.

Hon. C. Sharma: Mr. Speaker, we go further, this country is a country of culture. In fact, one of our major attractions for all our tourists coming to this country and for visitors, when we were visited by the President of China, the Vice-President of the United States, the President of Cuba and others, they were very, very captured by our cultural practices, and today we encourage that. And

we have established a Ministry of National Diversity and Social Integration supported by other Ministries so that the culture of this country that makes us attractive, that encourages us to live together, continues to be developed and encouraged and cultivated through assistance from the State.

So under the PNM, it was only about Carnival and cost overrun and cost overrun under the PNM on Carnival. Today, whether it is Carnival, Divali, Orisha, Baptist, Christmas—all of it treated with by the State, encouraged by the State. That did not obtain under the PNM. In fact, it was under this administration, and continues today, that the national community is getting more and more involved in all the reflections of our twin-island republic, which is very important.

Mr. Speaker, under the PNM, you would hear about the high cost of food and you would hear about the food import bill. Well, look what we have done, in less than three years, we are treating with the food import bill. And today, the WHO, the World Health Organization, in looking at global best health practices, has observed that many, many countries of the world—the persons there, especially the children, are not eating enough vegetables. Today, through our Ministry of Food Production, vegetables are available at nominal cost. Today, milk is available for our children.

Dr. Rambachan: “Baigan”, 0.50 cents a pound!

Hon. C. Sharma: My good friend, the Member for Tabaquite, who has a large agricultural support group in his community says “baigan” is 0.50 cents a pound. It is good so that every citizen in this country can taste a “baiganeer” at last, whether you live in Port of Spain or you live in Fyzabad. Important—and these are important things; this is what makes our country attractive, this is what keeps our people on the go.

Mr. Speaker, in the last four quarters, we have shown growth and we are doing better than many world economies under this three-year-old administration. That is a first; that is why countries are looking at us. So in this country, everybody can get a breakfast, they can access pipe-borne water, they have electricity, all our kids have computers in the schools, all our medical institutions are working very well. We have a Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources looking after the environment.

Miss Ramdial: Yes, yes! [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Sharma: Very important. Small Trinidad and Tobago, for 40 years, the PNM spent billions of dollars and could not do that because there was a

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disconnect. They pushed away half of the population. Today, Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar has embraced all the people of Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] and that is very important for our future development. So that we are leaving a better Trinidad and Tobago for those who will come after us and whichever governments succeed us 10, 15, 20 years from today, will have some good model to follow, and the electorate then—20, 30 years from today—will demand, because the only Government that they will be able to look back at and say, “This is the one we want you to be like” will be this Government.

Mr. Speaker, many of our Members of Parliament, oftentimes on both sides of the House, wear this Trinidad and Tobago flag, a pin. Today, through the Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar, every single home has a Trinidad and Tobago flag, every school child has a pin reflecting Trinidad and Tobago; that is important, because that says to the people of Trinidad and Tobago that you are the owners of Trinidad and Tobago. This is your country. Together we will do all that is required to be done. That is buy-in. For too long under the PNM, there was that disconnect. It was them in Government and the rest, they treated us however they chose to.

I remember, Mr. Speaker, during the period '91 to '95 when I was first elected here, Ministers of Government would not visit Opposition constituencies, the PNM Members. Today, because I have been in local government, I have been in transport, I have gone to every district in this country including Tobago. Every electoral district when I was in local government, when I went in transport, every area that was serviced, and every Minister of Government on the People's Partnership has done similar. That is important. Because we are the chief servants of the people of Trinidad and Tobago regardless of where you live and regardless of where you vote and for whom and that is important because Government must always look after all its people, and we have done that and continue to do that. That is why anyone of our Ministers can tell you the roads of this country—you can ask Dr. Rambachan about any road in this country, and he will tell what work has happened, what is going to happen. Our Minister of Education could tell you almost all the schools where we have teacher shortages if it obtains or if the school needs repair.

Mr. Speaker, the PNM bad news: during the July/August vacation period, all the schools that were identified for repairs, the repairs were started, 97 per cent success was obtained. There must be human error. So two, three, four or five could not be opened in time, we regret that, but that is all the PNM made noise about. They did not tell the country, “Listen, let us be fair, 97 per cent of the

schools opened on time”. Three per cent did not and the Government regrets that because every child in this country is important to this Government. It is a well-known fact that the Prime Minister loves children being a grandmother herself. But look at the thing the PNM wants to talk about and that is disconnecting, and that is creating mistrust in the society, and we have to really mature. The oath of office that we take here is the same oath of office, not only for those in Opposition and those in Government. We must always remember that we are obligated to add value to people’s lives and at all times not to twist information.

Mr. Speaker, my colleague, the Member for Laventille West who has goodness in his heart—[*Laughter*] it would appear so—but he talks about his inability to buy a water pump for \$2,000. I am not suggesting that he takes the money out of his pocket but to make sure that school does not have the water pump so he can come and talk here, he does not obtain the water pump, because if he had asked any one of us, we would have run “chi-chi” and buy that water pump because the water pump is not for his house, it is for the children of this country. If he had picked up the phone and say to Dr. Gopeesingh, the Minister of Education, “Doctor, I need to get this pump”—

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yes.

Hon. C. Sharma:—the pump would have been there.

Dr. Gopeesingh: And they changed it already, “eh”.

Hon. C. Sharma: So that PNM members pray to the God that there will be a murder so that we could come and talk about it. There will be some kind of activity that would allow them because they are messengers of bad news and they must do everything in their power to maintain being messengers of bad news.

You saw the Member for Diego Martin North/East misleading the House about the arrangement with Venezuela and Trinidad and Tobago, and after it is clarified, he does not come to this House and say, under personal explanations or whatever obtains, “I made an error”.

10.15 p.m.

They continue in that kind of way, trying to cause a divide in the country. You will see the Member for Chaguanas West is doing the same thing. Every day is bad news, about cabals and this and that and misleading the national community, so at the end of the day all this country has is the People’s Partnership Government to stand for them, to work for them, to add value to their lives.

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Mr. Speaker, I was making the point earlier about the importance of tourism. Why is it so important today, in today's world in particular? Mr. Speaker, every country in the world requires some level of tourism regardless of how much money they may be earning or not earning. Trinidad and Tobago generates in excess of 10 per cent of the country's GDP from tourism. That is close to \$14 billion plus and nearly 100,000 jobs.

In fact, the tourism industry, globally, employs more people than any other industry, whether it is the manufacturing industry or any other similar industry. Of course, Tobago alone, it is 37 per cent of its GDP and 50 per cent of all its employment. This is why this Government makes it important to understand the role of Tobago, and treats with Tobago as an equal partner. PNM never did that, never did that. They treated Tobago with contempt. Today, not only out of the budget allocation, but the Ministries that have connections to do work and legal responsibilities discharge that duty, which means additional moneys are being spent in Tobago, and rightfully so; not as a favour, but as an obligation of the Government.

Mr. Speaker, tourism continues to grow and it is expected by 2020, 13 per cent of the GDP would be from tourism and 40 per cent for Tobago alone. The Government, understanding that, as I indicated, in 2010, soon after coming into office, we established the National Tourism Policy of Trinidad and Tobago bringing some of the best minds together to make sure we worked on it.

Mr. Speaker, I want to share some other information. I indicated the GDP contribution from tourism is in excess of 10 per cent, which is \$14 billion and expected to grow continually, every single year; 14.7 per cent of employment, close to 100,000 persons and growing all the time. In fact, it is felt, six years from today—this study looked at up to 2019—one in every 5.7 jobs will be in the tourism sector.

Exports: export earnings from international visitors and tourism goods expected to generate 14.1 per cent of total exports which means close to \$11 billion and growing, of course. By 2019, it is anticipated it will be 19 per cent with a total value of \$25 billion. Mr. Speaker, I raise these figures to indicate the importance of tourism and to further indicate the Government's effort to treat with it.

In the case of Tobago, the contribution of tourism to GDP is expected to be 36.9 per cent—\$1.2 billion and by 2019, to move to 40 per cent, moving the contribution to \$2.5 billion. Employment: the contribution of tourism economy to

employment is expected to rise from 14,000 jobs to 16,000 on an annual basis, an increase of 2,000. In Tobago it is expected that by 2019 one in every two jobs would be in tourism. The PNM would have had this information; this is a study that started in 2009, but look how they treated Tobago: ignoring it totally.

Export earnings from international visitors and tourism goods are expected to generate 98.4 per cent of total exports—this is as it relates to Tobago; a billion-dollar industry—and to move to \$2 billion plus by 2019.

Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago's tourism industry is expected to contribute directly 4.0 per cent to GDP, and growing. The dollar contribution of that is in excess of \$10 billion. Tourism economy contribution should rise from 10.6 per cent to 12.7 per cent, on an annual basis again, by 2 per cent. And in Tobago, which is currently at 37 per cent, to move to 40 per cent.

The Trinidad and Tobago economy is expected to grow by 5.2 per cent per year between 2010 and 2019. Under this Government it has grown.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, when you look at the visitors for last year, it increased beyond the normal—by 64,000 persons coming by air and 38,000 coming by boat. What have we done to make this country so attractive? We have opened the ownership of governance.

We have said to every single citizen: you have an idea, our Government is willing to listen; you need funding to go into business, the Government has a programme for you; you need training, under the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, for the first time—under the PNM it was a secret for the PNM supporters; they used it as political tools—under this Government, we said moneys are available to every citizen regardless of who, where you are, come share your business ideas with us, we will make sure we give to you the business professional thinking and help you in that business.

The repayments have increased. Under the PNM there were persons who took loans, you could not find them. They were told these are political loans, just go, “yuh make sure and vote the PNM, doh worry with de business” a disservice to the people, to the applicants; under Minister—with that responsibility, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, has changed that and today a number of those businesses are successful. In fact the failure rate under the PNM was very, very high. We have changed that under this Government.

Mr. Speaker, as it relates to tourism, I indicated the growth for the Caribbean is 3.4 per cent, for Trinidad and Tobago it is 5.2 per cent. That is very important to note, the reason being that once a Government starts to do good work, it

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continues to attract more and more participation. And that is what people want, people want to know—and you have heard from another presenter saying that the ease to do business in Trinidad and Tobago is becoming easier on a daily basis.

Hon. Member: That is right.

Hon. C. Sharma: In one or two days you can now register your business meeting all the legal requirements. That, previously, was four or five weeks. Today it can be done in two days. And of course the infrastructure of this country, we continue to add value to it.

Mr. Speaker, under this Government the highest number of houses ever sold in Trinidad and Tobago and the highest number of houses constructed is under this administration. Today Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance is 5.1 per cent interest rate—5.1 per cent. Under this Government it is expected to introduce a first-time homeowners' loan at 2 per cent. That will be the cheapest money for housing in any part of the world. That did not obtain under the PNM because they wanted to control everything. PNM is really bad news for this country, horrible news. You have to stay away from them if you want to really develop in this country and you have to be mature about it. Perhaps they meant well but something happened. It is all about bad news; taking advantage of citizens.

Today any citizen of this country can seek employment in the area in which they are qualified; under the PNM “it was friend, family and favours.” The Member for San Fernando West indicated the statistics. All our children coming back from the universities, local and elsewhere, can be treated with. And today the global players are also looking to Trinidad and Tobago to add to their workforce.

I have a young man from my constituency, goes on a scholarship in the United Kingdom, doing a master's in petroleum-related matters. BP Amoco showed interest in him, important. We are also producing for the global community; and we are encouraging it because when these young sons and daughters go out there and they do that, they will come back and add value to our country at a later time and they will be able to say to these international organizations, “I am from Trinidad and Tobago; you want to do business in Trinidad and Tobago? Trinidad and Tobago is open for business.” And when they work that period, for whatever period, and they come back to our country, they will only be bringing back good experiences that we all can benefit from.

Tourism capital investment is estimated to be close to \$2 billion or 10.7 per cent of total investment and by 2019 for which the period has been identified, it is

expected to be \$3.6 billion which means simply that the Government understands the importance of tourism. So while your oil and energy sector—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the Member of Parliament for Fyzabad and the hon. Minister of Tourism has expired.

Motion made: That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Hon. E. McLeod*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: You may continue, hon. Member. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Sharma: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Rowley: “Doh take all.”

Hon. C. Sharma: Mr. Speaker, you know, the Member for Diego Martin West and I have had the good fortune of being elected here the same year, 1991, but it is in the PNM's DNA—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rowley: “Is so long yuh here?”

Hon. C. Sharma: “Yuh surprise I look so young and you look so not so young.”

Dr. Rowley: “So long you around and you eh learn nothing.” [*Laughter*]

Hon. C. Sharma: Yes. Mr. Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin West—it is in the PNM's DNA not to ever treat with any good news. He does not want me to continue to speak, simply because I am presenting the facts that treat with all of Trinidad and Tobago, the good news.

Dr. Rowley: You are a clown.

Mr. Speaker: Please, please Member, you cannot refer to another Member in that way.

Hon. C. Sharma: And when the Member for Diego Martin West spoke, some people said he appeared to be the new clown, but I do not agree with that.

Mr. Speaker: Please, let us not get into that. Please.

Hon. C. Sharma: Mr. Speaker, I was making the point, the understanding of Government's importance. For Tobago, capital investment is expected to be \$268 million or 80.7 per cent of total investment and by 2019 this is expected to move

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to in excess of \$550 million or 83.4 per cent of total. We understand the importance of tourism.

So, if and when oil is not there, there is another area because with tourism, it treats with a number of areas: motor car industry, car rentals, mechanics, hotels, guest houses, construction, across the board. Bed and breakfast—we are encouraging families—because Trinidad and Tobago's attraction, one of the many attractions is the good family life we demonstrate, the love and care and how we embrace and treat with visitors and we are allowing persons to experience that.

So they can come to a family and that family will have an extra bedroom, maybe with washroom facilities and so, which allows that visitor to stay in return for monetary compensation; but in addition to that, growth and development. So there would be opportunities for all of us.

10.30 p.m.

I indicated JetBlue is coming. Other airlines are coming. More passengers are coming. Under the Member for Chaguanas West, he had started a discussion to establish this place as a cruise capital with other Caribbean tourism Ministers and we are going to follow up on that. So currently, if you want to go on a cruise the choice you may have is to take a plane to Miami. Today, you might be able to come to Trinidad and do that if that is allowed to develop and we think it will. There is a huge market out there and Trinidad and Tobago is very, very attractive. As you know, our waters are considered to be the safer waters in this part of the world.

Mr. Speaker, total exports out of tourism is expected to generate 15 per cent, or in excess of \$10 billion and by 2019, it is expected to grow to \$25 billion or 20 per cent of total. That is for Trinidad. Tobago is expected to generate 98.4 per cent; close to \$1 billion and moving in 2019, to approximately 98.7 per cent or \$2 billion plus.

Operating expenditure—this is government—in Trinidad and Tobago is expected to be 4.5 per cent of total government spending. Again, emphasizing the importance of it. That simply means that tourism is with us and the Government will be doing everything in its power to generate and to sustain it and a lot of it will have to take place in Tobago because Tobago depends on it largely and must be assisted by Trinidad. It does not mean that there would not be opportunities in Trinidad. There will be enormous opportunities.

In Tobago, it is expected to be 4.5 per cent of total government spending. Mr.

Speaker, these figures are very important to indicate to the tourism interest groups and the tourism sector that the Government remains very friendly, very open and very business-like. As the Minister with responsibility, I will continue to meet, to treat and to take all the good ideas and to find ways to cultivate the best practices that we can.

We also encourage our citizens—because unlike some countries where tourism obtains, this country has a much wider variety to offer in food—to develop those areas. Community tourism is going to be very important, which I would talk a little bit about to make sure that our local citizens in Trinidad and Tobago—over the last few years in particular, the last three years—have been moving around more, visiting Tobago, visiting the other tourist attractions, going to the beaches because there is a happiness in the country. Under the PNM they had to stay indoors. Under the PNM, they were busy installing burglar proofs and installing water tanks. Today that has changed. They do not have to install burglar poofs and water tanks anymore, so they have more moneys in their pockets to spend for luxury, pleasure; much more.

Today all our restaurants in Port of Spain are very busy. Mr. Speaker, if you go on the Avenue now or at midnight tonight, it is very active. It is a good sign. It is because of Government's policy. Had the PNM been here, all that would not have obtained the least bit. The statistics are there. We have seen the Government with billions of dollars, adding no value to this country; cost overruns on every single thing.

Mr. Speaker, I want to indicate what are some of the tourism areas that we are going to go into, to indicate to the national community. As I indicated, this is Government's policy. Community tourism: that is the new area that has been developed. It simply means that our local residents can access any part of this country for which there is a tourist attraction, whether it is the Caroni River, the beaches, Devil's Woodyard or wherever, and we are going to go into every community. In fact, I am hoping that, in every constituency, as a pilot project, we can go into the constituency, my friends from Diego Martin West, Port of Spain North, identify a project and let us do it as a community effort with the Government lending financial assistance and any other assistance because that is how we are going to develop the community tourism.

Ecotourism, of course, is one of the global challenges now. More and more persons—in fact the global tourist thinkers and policy makers are laying heavy emphasis and we are lending support to that. We think it is very important.

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I have already started discussions with the Minister of Health. One of the new developments is health tourism and Trinidad and Tobago has become very attractive because of our very good health care, whether it is open-heart surgery or whatever may be required. Lots of persons are looking to enquire: “where can we go out there?” In addition to attending to our health needs, we can also obtain some kind of therapy, in terms of places to visit, go to the beach and we are going to be developing that more and more.

Trinidad and Tobago continues to become very attractive to the international tourist. Today, whilst I was at the Ministry of Transport, the airport, of course, falls under the Ministry of Transport, and the international visitors were coming. In fact, in the last two or three years, we would have recorded from visitors in excess of 150 major cities and countries of the world—small Trinidad and Tobago. Strange, under the PNM, that did not obtain. I am sure people came but not that number of countries; because we are generating interest.

When we go out there, when the President of China comes, the global media is following him. When the Vice-President of the United States comes, the President of Cuba and they are looking on. “They saying: ‘aye, where these guys are going? Trinidad? Let us go and see what is there.’” When they go and look on the website they are seeing, “oh this is a country of good governance. This is a country where every citizen can obtain a breakfast. This is a country where it is more than carnival and the PNM is not in government. We can go.” That is important because those are some of the considerations. These are some of the considerations, very important. Of course the PNM do not want to hear that. [*Laughter*] And you hear that?

Mr. Speaker, the Caribbean is also looking to Trinidad and Tobago, not just for the tourist aspect but to make sure that they can see here as a service centre. Coming out of the Panama Canal we are going to be visited by more than 300 additional ships. It means to say there would be enormous business opportunities here. Now, where the islands may not be able to get a container to come, they would be able to have it here and move it up the islands. Maybe in smaller quantities as may be required.

Stopover visitor is a new thing that we are seeing emerging here. Many persons who have to go to the Caribbean from North America, from Europe and elsewhere, they want to stop over here for a day or two, whether they are going to Guyana, to Grenada, where have you. That is a new field that we are developing, making sure when they come here they can conduct business and at the same time enjoy Trinidad and Tobago.

Of course, the Member for Tobago East indicated, for the first time, why did the PNM not do it? We have that ANR Robinson Airport opened almost 24 hours because this is the twin-island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. The Member indicated, if she leaves the Parliament at 1.00 a.m. she would be able to get to the airport and get on a flight. That is important. Why did the PNM not understand that; that you cannot deny the people of Trinidad and Tobago that important connection? And that continues.

Mr. Speaker, as we move on, in terms of tourism, of course, we continue to make sure we encourage best practices. So I indicated the country has 5,000 maxi-taxis and, of course, tourists come and they can travel in those maxi-taxis. A number of those maxi-taxi drivers, on their own accord, have done defensive driving through—and we would lend support to it. They are doing first aid courses and they are becoming—they are also doing training with TDC, so they would know all the places to go. They would know how to access in the event of an emergency and what may be required. If they are taking tourists down to Cedros or to Fyzabad or Laventille or where have you, they would know where the food stops are, the gas stations, where health care can be obtained, where the police station is, where the fire station is. So we are involving them. That is how we do things differently from the PNM. We are engaging all the best practices. So the Public Transport Service Corporation with more than 400 buses is accessible to all in a similar way.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, one of the global challenges that has developed is this area of climate change—of course, climate change is the single most important issue that we face as a global community—Prime Minister Tony Blair, in April of 2004: It continues to be a challenge. In the meantime, the need to reduce global emissions and greenhouse gases is both urgent and critical if we are to avoid the dangerous effects of climate change, such as beach erosions, which we have already seen in Trinidad. Elsewhere—water and food shortages, a global challenge, sea level rise, extreme weather events.

The year 1990 was the warmest period and the year 1998 was the warmest year. These are important things for us to note. The summer of 2003 was Europe's hottest for 500 years. So as we develop here for all the people of Trinidad and Tobago and all our visitors, we have to be aware of what are the global challenges that we are facing.

Mr. Speaker—*[Interruption]*

Mrs. Mc Intosh: I thank you.

Hon. C. Sharma:—global disaster losses increased from \$71 billion in 1960—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Mc Intosh: “Ah learning.”

Hon. C. Sharma:—to \$608 billion in 1990 and it keeps increasing.

Mr. Speaker, land masses are becoming smaller and I say this because Trinidad and Tobago will continue to be attractive and as a result, all our citizens must know what we would be facing or what we are required to participate in. As we open more and more, the services of Trinidad and Tobago, we open it first to our citizens to encourage them to participate, to encourage them to become owners.

When you look at the importance of tourism, in Barbados it is 48 per cent of the GDP; Bahamas is 46 per cent; St. Lucia is 35 per cent; Jamaica is 25 per cent; Grenada is 24 per cent; Trinidad and Tobago is 10 per cent and growing. More and more countries will have to depend on tourism and as a result, we must be prepared and it is not only the Government’s responsibility. Part of the drive of the Ministry of Tourism will be to go out in all the communities and to engage all the stakeholders at all levels.

Of course, Trinidad and Tobago is becoming more and more attractive with 22 million people visiting the Caribbean. That is the arrivals we had in 2010 and there has been an increase in Trinidad and Tobago, as I indicated, for last year alone of 64,000.

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Great job. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Sharma: The cruise tourism industry has demonstrated substantial growth; in fact growing faster than stay-over arrivals. The average annual cruise passenger growth rate for the period 2010, it grew by 3.5 per cent, under this Government; we have been growing every year.

Dr. Ramadharsingh: We would double the growth.

Hon. C. Sharma: Mr. Speaker, we are expecting—in 2012, we saw similar and we saw it increasing and as a result, Trinidad and Tobago continues to forge and maintain partnerships with the Caricom Member States to develop and promote inter-Caribbean tourism. I referred to that earlier. [*Desk thumping*] That is very important because it means to say for tourism to be more and more successful, there must be partnership at the local level and at the Caricom level as well.

10.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the islands of Trinidad and Tobago have different tourist development potential; each island to its own unique selling. I made that point to visit all 41 constituencies—39 in Trinidad and two in Tobago—and to get to the offices of Members of Parliament and the local government practitioners and, the 14 regional corporations here and the THA to identify. It will do two things: one, it will develop community tourism and, of course, by extension it will be open to our international visitors as well. So that the local tourists going—the local community would be involved in the provision of goods and services. It will add value to the communities, it will add the potential of income, and it would allow—where we become more and more receptive to the tourist industry.

Mr. Speaker, the CTO which is the Caribbean body, talks about inadequate tourism awareness, management and planning capacity. For years under the PNM they did very little. The last three years we have created that awareness more and more. In fact, at the University of the West Indies and in addition to that a number of other universities—long-distance degree programmes in tourism and hospitality management, et cetera, limited innovation and product development, marketing and promotion. We will be lending support as a Government—insufficient research and measurement of industry results, standards and indicators and we are making sure we lend support to develop that.

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Research and development.

Hon. C. Sharma: Thank you. Irresponsible use of resources, very important: we have to make sure we understand that water is to be used intelligently and wisely and we cannot have the taps running and electricity the same, we are encouraging more and more of that.

The need for community development, empowerment and economic linkages: now, I made that point. We are going to involve the national community, our school children will become more aware of it; our doctors; our teachers; our taxi drivers; the parlour operators; the food vendors; the need to address safety, security and health of locals and visitors as well as issues of disaster management and readiness and communications. You know, Mr. Speaker, through the ODPM, Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management a lot of work is happening there.

Trade, taxation and employment issues: we must make sure that those who serve in the tourism sector are treated well. And I am sure the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre continues to make sure that all workers in this country are treated well.

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Mr. Speaker, of course, there has been concern about inadequate air access and we have been working on that, and that work will continue through the Ministry of Transport, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and, of course, the Ministry of Tourism. We are negotiating with more and more airlines, more and more countries. You would recall when President—is it Goodluck?

Hon. Member: It is Goodluck, yeah.

Hon. C. Sharma: When President Goodluck came to Trinidad a year ago, one of the areas he identified was that air service agreement, and we are very close to signing that. Of course, the growth of tourism with all its challenges will continue to capture Government's attention and resources.

Of course, we cannot not pay attention to the social issues throughout the Caribbean, North America, the question of crime, HIV and the illegal drug trade, those are matters that we are going to treat with.

The need for human resources and development and education: we are encouraging that more and more through COSTAATT, through the University of Trinidad and Tobago.

In the past, one of the complaints you would have had in this country is that we do not treat our tourists right. Well, we are learning that and we are teaching that, and we are encouraging that more and more.

Mr. Speaker, the national tourism policy of Trinidad and Tobago recognizes the differences between the product offering of each island, and we will build on that diversity and we are going further in each community. So for instance, the two areas in this country that have the Hosay festival, Cedros and St. James, we have to see how we can further encourage and develop that, and some areas would have different festivals—Moruga will have the recreation of Christopher Columbus' coming; in Siparia, we have the Sipari Mai; in the central area, you have the Divali celebrations in a large way; Dow Village in California, you have the Ramleela; in Tobago you have the goat race.

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Possibilities are endless.

Hon. C. Sharma: More than that, as my good friend indicated the possibilities are really encouraging. For this to work, there must be buy-in from all of us. Whereas under the PNM it was a selected few who got hundreds of millions of dollars and there was no accountability for it and nothing to show for it, we are making sure that for every dollar invested in tourism, that all the partners become part of it.

Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, tourism contributed approximately 11 per

cent directly and indirectly to the GDP of Trinidad and Tobago in 2010 and 36 per cent in Tobago for the same period. The tourism industry directly and indirectly contributes to just under half of the jobs in Tobago. At the last count it was 49 per cent of a population of approximately 54,000 and we cannot reemphasize the importance of it and the commitment of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to lend all support that is required. Tourism is also the main export item for Tobago contributing 98.4 per cent of direct exports from the island. And this, of course, is according to the Travel & Tourism Economic Impact Update: Trinidad and Tobago.

As I indicated, community tourism, ecotourism and, of course, sports tourism, that is one of the biggest attractions here in recent times. You would have heard the Minister with responsibility for sport indicating that. You would have seen recently with the cricket that was played here, the attraction it offered not just to locals; a lot of persons came from abroad to witness it and we are going to be lending support. You would have seen within two or three days of my going to the Ministry of Tourism, a cheque in excess of \$1 million was presented to the team going to India.

So we do not only talk, you would have heard from the Minister of Sport every sporting body and individual leaving Trinidad and Tobago to represent the country is encouraged and supported—unlike the PNM that will criticize that we are giving this one and that one too much money. I think the Minister of Sport made the point, in the case of Mr. Gordon, that the global community in excess of 200 million viewers in so many countries were able to see Mr. Gordon for four-point-something minutes. And the State's injection of \$1 million is more than a good gift to give at any time and we will continue to encourage that. So all our sporting people in this country, in the twin island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, will know what is government's policy.

Mr. Speaker, as I wrap up I want to indicate—

Hon. Member: Thank God!

Hon. C. Sharma:—to all the people of Trinidad and Tobago that the Government continues to be of service to all our people across the board. At every community in this country—the country now has 134 electoral districts; every single local government practitioner has been treated with—

Hon. Members: One thirty-six.

Hon. C. Sharma: “It had. Yuh understand de English?”

Mr. Imbert: You said “‘have’, doh try dat”.

Hon. C. Sharma: Thank you for listening.

Mr. Imbert: Right.

Hon. C. Sharma: It has 41 Members of Parliament; everyone is treated with across the board. Every NGO that seeks assistance, every citizen that seeks assistance obtains it and shall continue to do that.

I want to thank the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy for really presenting to us a very important way forward. I want to thank the hon. Prime Minister for continuing to lend this country important leadership, and to all partners in the People’s Partnership, to continue to do the good work they are doing.

To our citizens wherever you are rest assured that a Government that loves you, cares for you, cares about your well-being, about your children; to all our parents, all our mother and fathers out there, the Government is also a foster parent taking care of you and we will continue to do that.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Princes Town and Deputy Speaker.

Mrs. Nela Khan (*Princes Town*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this debate this evening. I want to commend my colleague, the Minister of Finance and the Economy on his sterling contribution and presentation, and well-thought-out budget presentation and to also give full support to the fiscal measures and other associated policies and prescriptions that have been outlined in his budget presentation which could simply be analyzed as the people’s budget.

This budget is one of the people and for the people and there are several forms of social assistance in the form of senior citizens grant, disability grants, social assistance, the people’s card, GATE, CEPEP as well as the largest form of assistance, which comes in the form of fuel subsidy which is a great help to us all in Trinidad and Tobago. Not only are there several measures in place for the average Trinidadian and Tobagonian, but there are many resources which have been put in place to assist the elderly, the differently abled, such as the elderly and differently abled mobile services; the disability assistance grant was increased and there was also an increase in the special child grant allowing more purchasing power to the disabled and children with special needs.

Mr. Speaker, not only are our children with very special needs benefiting, but our nation's children are profiting immensely from the People's Partnership Government, as they are given the opportunity no matter how rich or poor, to be able to use the modern technology which is essential in the area of their development.

For the past three years our Prime Minister had made it her duty to distribute laptops to all children entering high school which is commendable and this will continue to take place. The country has never had a Prime Minister who would have gone to schools and touched the lives of every child that is in that [*Desk thumping*] school, for that I commend our Prime Minister.

In order to prevent crime and to assist impoverished children and teenagers from entering a life of crime, the People's Partnership has begun to take preventative measures by introducing the Hoop of Life Community Basketball league in 2012, which reached several areas in the constituency of Princes Town, and has assisted in providing an avenue for individuals and team playing, of sporting talent and expertise, commitment to healthy sporting and the developing of community, peace, cohesion and prosperity.

The Minister of Finance and the Economy has also indicated intentions of developing a budget whereby financial resources would be allocated in order to achieve gender equality, equity and women's empowerment in all economic and social sectors of Trinidad and Tobago, which is without a doubt an admirable aim which I hope can be attained.

Mr. Speaker, as you would realize, over the past few days much has been said on the debate on both sides of this House. Allow me to turn your attention to the constituency that I represent, the constituency of Princes Town which I am privileged to represent under the People's Partnership Government. Princes Town is a very busy and thriving constituency that sits between the constituencies of Tabaquite, Naparima, Moruga, Tableland and Mayaro, so much so, that some of the Ministries become confused, because when you look at Moruga, Tableland, Tabaquite and Mayaro, they carry the address of Princes Town. So when a chairman of a Board tells me "that you have gotten X amount of grants or services from a particular Ministry", it is not really given to Princes Town in a sense, but all these constituencies that I have outlined to you carry their address as Princes Town. And like those constituencies mentioned by their MPs in respect to rural neglect before we assumed our office, when we assumed office in 2010, I thought that there was some kind of law to neglect people living south of the Caroni Bridge. I could have sworn that there was a law somewhere, hidden somewhere,

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in some clause, to neglect the people south of the Caroni Bridge, Mr. Speaker.

11.00 p.m.

It was rural neglect to the highest and it was blatant, Mr. Speaker, as if people do not live in those constituencies or people do not live south of the Caroni Bridge—as if they were not entitled to goods and services and any other basic amenities from Government. Every time I speak in this House, in this august Chamber, I would remind my colleagues and those opposite, of the neglect of south of the Caroni Bridge. I live there. I understand the people there and I know what has happened and what has taken place over the years.

Like I say, I will remind my colleagues and I will remind others on the other side of how people suffered under the PNM. Today, under the People's Partnership Government and under our visionary Prime Minister many things have become accessible, reachable and important; not just to our southerners, but across Trinidad and Tobago.

Today, I stand here and I feel very happy for the people who live south of the Caroni Bridge. [*Desk thumping*] It is a storm of delivery that those who spoke before me outlined. Rural development is a basis of economic development and information is an important ingredient in the development process. The hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, our Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago and the entire People's Partnership Government recognized the need for development of our people and, as a result, immediately directed our focus on the development of our citizens and the development of Trinidad and Tobago.

Today, Mr. Speaker, the people of the constituency of Princes Town can boast of the many developments that have started under this Government with many, many more to come. You have never seen this ever before south of the Caroni Bridge—and I will reiterate that. You have never seen this no time before south of the Caroni Bridge.

Agricultural access roads, Mr. Speaker: something that we have not seen in Princes Town for a very long time. When you go through those roads—and I said that at another place I was at some point in time—when you go through agricultural access roads, yes, it was built back then for horse carts, mule carts and that kind of thing. I remember having to go in the garden with my parents—my parents were farmers—I remember my father used to have to lift us up on his back to take us in the traces, only because there were so many potholes. It was so dilapidated that my father was scared that one of us would break our foot while walking on the road.

Today those things are no longer, Mr. Speaker. As you know, the south is known as the food basket of this nation and Princes Town contributes a big portion of agricultural growth and development. We work hand-in-hand with all the Ministries, more so the many delivery Ministries for the further growth and development within the constituency of Princes Town.

Agricultural access roads, a justified initiative to assist farmers in their plight, who endure hardship in reaping their produce from their gardens, having to reap your produce and not being able to bring it out—to bring it out meaning to bring it to the road where you can pick it up from on that end. So it is a process where you reap, you bag whatever, you put it on a cart or vehicle or something and you bring it out on the main road where you can take it from there.

I heard the Minister of State in the Ministry of Food Production earlier outline that many achievements for farmers are making life easier for them as we process with the People's Partnership Government. Some of the agricultural roads that have been completed thus far is a total of 20—and I am talking about Princes Town.

I know I heard my colleague from Naparima outline the list as well and I am very, very happy that the Member for Naparima can stand up in this Chamber today, like I can, to boast about the many roads and the many achievements of the People's Partnership Government and I, too, can say the very said thing.

Some of the roads that were developed under the People's Partnership as regards agricultural access roads would be Arch Trace, Morgan Trace, Pascal Road, Cipriani Trace, Mahogany Trace, Julien Trace, Brimage Road, Neama Trace, Maurice Gobin Trace, Junior Trace off Watts Road and, of course, Morgan Trace Branch; also Sancho Branch Road, Khan Avenue 1 and 2, Sadoo Trace, Gaffoor Trace, St. Julien Road, Aldana Street, Rampersad Trace and Rampersad Branch Trace and many, many others that have been developed for farmers in the agricultural area of Princes Town.

Construction of bridges again: to assist farmers and residents who endure hardship in reaping their produce from their gardens, a total number of 15 bridges have been completed: the Fairfield Bridge, the Old Piparo Road Bridge, Nuckchaddy Road, Mantacool Road, Mayaro Sixth Avenue, Gaffoor Extension Trace, Halls Trace, Pascal Road, Grants Hall Trace, Pancho Trace, McSween Road, Sisters Road, Hardbargain; Fourth Company; many bridges have been developed under the People's Partnership Government.

Dr. Ramadharsingh: You had a hard bargain before.

Mrs. N. Khan: It was a hard bargain before. Mr. Speaker, when we came into Government, you should have seen the state and the situation of Princes Town as regards infrastructural development. It is a constituency that is riddled with landslips, like my colleague from Moruga/Tableland.

Mr. Speaker, I want to turn your attention to landslip, the eyesore that plagued my constituency, the constituency of Princes Town. Much works have started; many have been completed to date and there are many more on a listing of proposal to be done and, of course, many more to come.

St. Julien Road: the restoration of 25 landslips out of 32, and I am talking about massive landslips. I am not talking about very small landslips that you will see maybe by a tree or a pole. I am talking about massive landslips that could cut off communications of an entire village.

Buen Intento Road—major landslips; Sisters Road, the M1 Tasker Road, Jeffers Crossing and Brothers Road, a total of 46 landslips have been stabilized out of a total of 120 landslips under the People’s Partnership Government. The infrastructural development work has started and much more to come.

Mr. Speaker, I want to turn your attention to box drains in the constituency of Princes Town. I heard the term mentioned “box drain” from almost every speaker who spoke in this House because it is important to our people. We have completed 39 box drains and with a combined effort of the Ministry of Local Government and at the level of the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure and also at URP: Naparima-Mayaro Road, Buen Intento Road, Sisters Road, Gransaul Trace, Old Piparo Road, Hoseinee Trace, Thomas Ross Road, Tabaquite Road, Nuckchaddy Road, Busy Corner, Guaracara Recreation Ground that falls within that—that is the surrounding of Guaracara Recreation Ground—Sewdath Avenue, Cragnish Village, Cyril Mohan Trace, Paradise Avenue, Eccles Village, Williamsville; Maurice Gobin Park, Williamsville; Robert Village, Tableland, Yankee Dan Road in Williamsville, School Trace, Gangaram Road, Daily Road, Samad Trace, Khans Avenue, La Gloria Settlement, Tableland Branch 1 and 2 and Gaffoor Extension.

Mr. Speaker, I call these names in the Parliament today because I do not believe, for the life of me, that our friends sitting on the opposite side who have been in government for all these years, know where any one of these roads is and that is why I call the names of these roads.

Ridge Road, Fairfield Road, Sancho Road, St. Julien Trace, Hardbargain, Buen Intento, Piparo and its environs, the volcano—

Mr. Imbert: Delhi Road.

Mrs. N. Khan: I do not have a Delhi Road, sorry. No, I do not. The volcano in Piparo, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Imbert: Delhi Road. You cannot even pronounce it properly.

Mrs. N. Khan: To my friend, I do not have a Delhi Road.

Mr. Imbert: Whatever you say.

Mrs. N. Khan: The volcano that erupted in 2000, you would not want to see the situation and the condition that those people had lived in until the People's Partnership came into government and restored that complete area. Rather than taking half an hour reaching at the end of Piparo, Williamsville, to go up into Hoseinee Trace, on to the volcano area—rather than taking 20 minutes, you can now take nothing more than three minutes to reach up on that end, connecting lower Piparo into higher Piparo.

Mr. Speaker, we have delivered. We have delivered as the People's Partnership Government. Only under the People's Partnership Government I am saying, we were able to achieve all of this.

I want to take your attention to some of the road paving as well. Like I said, it is a combined effort of the Ministry of Local Government and, of course, the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure. Like I just mentioned, Old Piparo Road, Hoseinee Trace, Thomas Ross Road, Charlotte Street, Princes Town; Bonanza Street, Princes Town; Cyril Mohan Street, St. Julien Road, which is on the Naparima/Mayaro Road, the Piparo Link Road, Mayaro Sixth Avenue, Tableland, Mayaro Third Avenue, Mayaro Ninth Avenue, Farmers Trace, McClean Street, La Gloria Settlement, Sancho Branch Road, Khan Avenue, and many others, Mr. Speaker. The latest one that was paved very recently, of course, would be the St. Croix Road area that, of course, borders myself and my colleague from Naparima.

Mr. Speaker, of course we continue the construction of footpaths as well. In the constituency of Princes Town, we have constructed so far three footpaths with the measurement of 200 metres on the Naparima Mayaro Road, Hardbargain and, of course, in the Sisters Road.

A bus service: people in this rural area can now depend on the government bus service. These areas that I spoke about, the names of the roads I called just now are really, really dilapidated and you will not get a taxi in there. It is difficult to get a taxi. You have to hike a ride, wait on someone, gauge someone for when they are coming out of their house so that you can get a lift to go somewhere.

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I commend the Minister of Transport for his initiative in giving us a bus in that area. The newest route to join the fleet is the route from Sisters Road, Hardbargain that takes passengers straight into San Fernando and I want to again thank the Minister of Transport for his initiative in affording us the privilege while we await the Minister of Transport to assist us with a service from Garth Road, Williamsville straight into San Fernando.

The consideration of community centres as well: the opening of the Sisters Road Community Centre that was done very recently; the La Gloria Community Centre as well, all under the People's Partnership Government; the completion of seven water projects thus far. We have quite a few more in the pipeline and there are so many other projects that are going on in the constituency of Princes Town. *[Interruption]*

There is the Sixth Avenue, Tableland—I am coming to that—some of the areas in which we have done some water projects as well: Torrib Tabaquite Road, Piparo Extension Road, Piparo Junction Road, Mayaro Sixth Avenue, Sookdeo Trace, Junior Trace, Dougen Trace in the Ridgewood area that borders my colleague from Mayaro. I thank my colleague, the Minister of State in the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources and, of course, the Minister as well. I remember when I applied for the project, Mr. Speaker, I was given quick notice that we would get the project started soon.

I say this because I remember going in that area many years ago, even before we came into power or in government; and I remember the sufferings of those people and I remember taking a good friend of mine and that good friend of mine that I took in those areas would be you, so many years ago. I remember I was talking to those people and I remember tears rolling down the cheeks of these people—300 residents that live in that area call Ridgewood.

I visited the area last week Tuesday on my office day and I assisted them in the trenches laying some pipelines and those people were so, so happy that the People's Partnership had rescued them. They never thought that in all their life that they would see water flowing in a pipe. These people do not know what it is to have water in a tap flowing and, as a result, like I said, they never thought that the day would come that they would see water in a pipe.

I also held consultation and dialogue with the Minister of State, like I said, for more water projects to come into the area, namely, Glenroy Settlement, Nivet Trace, Jagdeo Trace, Nohar Road, Burial Ground Road, McSween Trace, Bhagwantee Trace, Jadoo Trace. Mr. Speaker, like I say, there are many other small projects that we are looking forward to as regards water supply to our

people in the constituency of Princes Town.

I commend the People's Partnership Government as we proceed to make life easier for the people of this country in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

11.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I want to turn your attention to George Village recreation ground and a few of the grounds as well as I enter the recreation ground aspect of it. I want to commend the Minister of Sport as well, for the rehabilitation work done on the Sancho Road recreation ground which is a multi-purpose facility soon to be reopened. The long-awaited Yolande Pompey, Mr. Speaker. I do not know how much you know about the Yolande Pompey recreation ground. [*Interruption*] Exactly, and this is my third year speaking about it, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, you know what? Yolande Pompey ground got started in April of this year. [*Desk thumping*] [*Interruption*] Exactly. I remember serving in another place where I spent 20 years and for the 20 years serving in another place I heard so much about Yolande Pompey. Today I am happy to tell this honourable House [*Desk thumping*] and report to this honourable House that Yolande Pompey ground has finally started. [*Desk thumping*] I want to say thanks to our Minister and the People's Partnership Government. There will be a basketball court—like I say, it is multi-purpose—it is a football field; cricket pitch, swimming pool; netball court and there is a children's play park on the other side as well, Mr. Speaker; and, of course, the Guaracara recreation ground as outlined by the Minister of Local Government.

Housing, Mr. Speaker: housing, as I say, which is on the minds of many people in the constituency of Princes Town, I know that my colleague sitting in front of me, the hon. Minister, is trying his very best and working really hard to assist us as regards housing. Mr. Speaker, the construction of 500 homes under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development in the Fairfield area to cater for housing needs of the many applicants who so qualify; today I commend the Minister. I drove on Fairfield Road very recently and we have finished more than 25 per cent of the housing in that area. [*Desk thumping*] So, Mr. Speaker, like I say, it is 500 homes and I know that there are more to come on the M1 Road as well, as said by the Minister of Housing and Urban Development earlier on.

The social needs, Mr. Speaker, but before I go there, I want to take you to the Ministry of Education. I know my colleague, who would have spoken earlier, spoke about the Ministry and all of the schools that have been built and I also want to add my piece to it. Under the Ministry of Education, the construction of

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the Riversdale Presbyterian School, Brothers Settlement ECCE Centre and Princes Town East Secondary School; and, of course, currently, we are going to get started on the Piparo Presbyterian School as well. So I commend my colleague, the Minister of Education.

The social needs of the people of Princes Town too have been met, more so the underprivileged are also high on the front burner. Applicants for food cards and grants who so quality, and other social matters; wheelchairs; house grants; NSDP projects; electricity to homes; water to individual homes; self-help projects and many more as regards the social aspect, and I commend my colleague, the Minister of the People and Social Development.

Training under the URP: training under the URP in the field of agriculture, we have trained more than 100 persons in the field of agriculture in the constituency of Princes Town, who will not just be able to work alongside farmers but, of course, indeed, Mr. Speaker, they would be able to help themselves as farmers, and they are very happy to be trained under URP in the field of agriculture.

The women's training programme: to assist women in their quest to become marketable in a lifelong skill; the setting up for the first time of an office of on-the-job training in Princes Town [*Desk thumping*] where the youths are making full use of that particular office, who would gain training under the very said office. [*Desk thumping*] After three years, Mr. Speaker, all of this delivery has been given, not just to Princes Town but across Trinidad and Tobago as I listened to my colleagues earlier. What next do we expect in the next 18 months after so much delivery in three and a half years?

Mr. Speaker, sports and other games continue to make waves in Princes Town. As a constituency, football competition within the constituency of Princes Town continues to dominate the games; the cricket games continue; basketball and many other games continue as well. Princes Town, like I say, is thriving; growth and development continues. It might be coming slow, of course, but the deliveries are happening. As we move along in the future development, not just for Princes Town, like I say, but I speak here, when I say, the whole of Trinidad and Tobago; because when you listen to my colleagues in their delivery, you would recognize that so much is happening; so much is going on. This Government is alive [*Desk thumping*] and people must understand that.

Mr. Speaker, URP and CEPEP continue to be a driving component in the enhancement and development of the constituency. Success and progress in

developing countries lie in the development of the rural communities. I say so because we in the People's Partnership believe that. We continue to serve the people. We celebrate all religious holidays. We recently—as my colleague said, sitting on the far right, when he spoke about a food and fruit festival that was held recently by the farmers, the Tableland pineapple farmers, it was a tremendous effort by the farmers. When we put out the food and fruit festival, that was visited by almost 20,000 people across Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Member: It was on Fox News.

Mrs. N. Khan: It was even on Fox News, Mr. Speaker. It was on Fox channel; it made international news. Today I commend the Tableland pineapple farmers [*Desk thumping*] in their hard work and in their effort to keep agriculture alive.

We celebrate all religious holidays, Mr. Speaker; we participate at many functions in the temples, in the mosques, in the churches and all over. Through the constituency we do lots of charitable work in the constituency of Princes Town. We have started—as regards our charity work—to construct two small houses for two single parents who are, of course, not too well; are in bad health, and we have extended out hands to reach out to the families.

Mr. Speaker, I thank every one of my colleagues who are here this evening; who would have contributed as well. I want to say that I remember when we were just elected to office and our Prime Minister had to put boots on when Trinidad was under flood. Every Member sitting on this side of the Benches—every Member sitting here, Mr. Speaker—put their boots on as of this day and they are still on their feet because every Member sitting on this side works really hard to ensure that our people get the service that they so need.

Mr. Speaker, the Government delivery over the past three and a half years can be seen across Trinidad and Tobago. And, let us be real, the People's Partnership Government has delivered on its promises unlike other government in the past, Mr. Speaker. I thank you very much for the opportunity. [*Desk thumping*]

Adjournment

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ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Wednesday, September 18, 2013 at 10.00 a.m. and we will continue debate on the Appropriation (Financial Year 2014) Bill, 2013.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before putting the question, I wish to revert to “Announcements”. I have received communication on behalf of Dr. Amery Browne, Member of Parliament for Diego Martin Central, who has asked to be excused from today’s sitting of the House. The leave which the Member seeks is granted.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 11.24 p.m.