



REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

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**OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)**

THE HONOURABLE WADE MARK
SPEAKER

THE HONOURABLE NELA KHAN
DEPUTY SPEAKER

Monday 8th October, 2012

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Appropriation Bill, 2012

Monday, October 08, 2012

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, October 08, 2012

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2013)

BILL, 2012

[Third Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [October 01, 2012]:
That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs (Hon. Winston Dookeran): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I make my contribution, I would like to join with the hon. Prime Minister and Members of this House in congratulating our West Indies cricket team for a glorious victory. [*Desk thumping*] May I also, Mr. Speaker, congratulate the Minister of Finance and the Economy, Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai, for his maiden presentation in this House, and for bringing to the fore the solutions that are required during the next fiscal year in order to bring about a completion of the preparatory work in order for this country to be set off, once more, into a path of economic recovery and growth. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, as I listened to the Members opposite, and more specifically to the Member for Diego Martin West, I attempted to decipher what was the message that he brought to this Parliament on this very important debate; on a debate in which the country is indeed looking for guidance and looking for directions.

What I sensed the Member for Diego Martin West said, among other things that were not relevant to the issue before us, but in terms of the subject matter that was relevant to us, he said that the Government of the People's Partnership had no plan. He said that when we took office two and a half years ago there was no problem, and he concurred by saying that over the last two and a half years there was no solution.

I want to address those issues today in this honourable Chamber, by outlining clearly what were the elements of the approach and the economic and financial plan that was put into place that has brought us from a financial cliff to a situation

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of financial safety in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] What was the situation two and a half years ago, when the electorate decided to pass the mantle of governance to the People's Partnership? There were many issues and many areas which had to be tackled, and there were great expectations that the new Government would then tackle these issues in a systematic way and with real solutions.

On the fiscal side, and on the economic side, of which I had the honour and privilege to be the Minister of Finance for the first two years, I recognized what were the critical issues facing us. Today, in the United States, as we look on at the debate that is taking place for the presidential elections, you would see the most dominant issue has to do with what has been described as the fiscal cliff facing the United States.

Much commentary and much debate have been on the determination of that, and the way out of it. In the context of that global debate, issues of deficit financing, issues of taxation, issues relating to stability have been on the agenda. So, to some extent, it is argued that that will be the most dominant factor in the determination of voters' preferences in the United States elections. Whether that is so or not we will wait and see, but what is important to recognize is that even a country like United States has acknowledged that there was a serious issue facing them in the financial world.

You would recollect not too long ago that their credit rating was in fact downgraded in response to the deadlock that had developed in the Congress on the issue. I want to put the proposition therefore, that two and a half years ago when we embarked on this responsibility, the fiscal cliff that we were facing was real, and it was necessary for this country to climb down from that fiscal cliff. That was the first requirement of the new Government. What was the nature of that fiscal cliff that I am talking about? The one that has been given high prominence, and the one that has been close to the hearts of the people because of the size of the problem, has been referred to as the Clico situation.

I would not go into the background, the country is aware. Members in this House have, from time to time, debated it. But what was clear before us is that the Clico fiasco posed a tremendous challenge to the fiscal situation of this country. What was clear was that the financial system was at risk, but in addition to that, the fiscal situation could have been put in jeopardy, and therefore, it was required to first of all assess what was the nature of that particular element of the fiscal cliff.

As was pointed out by the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy, that problem has turned out to be, and even though we are still counting, somewhere in the vicinity of 13 per cent of the GDP, and represents \$19.7 billion of public funds in one form or the other. That is a major and significant impact on how this economy could have gone. If that situation had remained unresolved, or if that situation had been allowed to take its own natural course, then the entire economy would have been put at risk in terms of the size of the problem—not only here in Trinidad and Tobago but also in the wider Caribbean. We have recognized the implications of what has happened to the region, for the region is significant to our economic well-being.

So the first aspect of the Clico situation is how do you deal with this problem, in order to restore a sense of fiscal responsibility in the affairs of the country, and at the same time to remove the contagion impact that this is likely to have. But it was much more than that as we found—and as we went and as we delved into the details of that problem, many of our major institutions were somewhat exposed to that particular fiasco, the institutions like the National Insurance Board, the Unit Trust Corporation, the National Gas Company and several others. So it was not only an issue affecting one institution, it was an issue that impaired the balance sheet of many other institutions, and that, therefore, was part of the fiscal situation at the time.

This Government therefore, had to find a solution in order to deal with this problem in such a way that would not allow the balance sheets of the various state enterprises, and perhaps others, to be impaired; and to find a solution that does not put at risk the financial debt of the country which has been the source of great problems, particularly in Europe and, at the same time, to contain any contagion impact that this may have on our internal banking system and, at the same time, in terms of the Caribbean region.

So, to say that there was no problem is, in fact—and I am going to be as generous as I can—a simple misstatement on the part of the Member for Diego Martin West. He wished that there was no problem. The country knew that there was a problem. The country took a decision to put other people in charge, and he continues to be in a sense of denial [*Desk thumping*] that there was no problem. That is what the reality is.

But beyond the Clico situation, Mr. Speaker, when we looked at the fiscal obligations on the part of the Government, the Government owed a lot of people, including the contractors, and there were other creditors. You would recollect in the very first few months of this Government we were faced with these demands,

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and these public demands to meet the obligations of the past, obligations that have been incurred in the previous regime and obligations that had to be met. There were varying figures as to what these obligations were, and it was argued by some that it was in the order of \$7 billion. So, I add to the \$20 billion the \$7 billion as a further obligation. These matters are being adjudicated upon as we move on, but today a large part of that problem has now been resolved, and therefore, the obligations to the creditors, including the contractors, while not complete, have been a source of problems in climbing down from the fiscal cliff.

The third area, Mr. Speaker, in which there was a problem, had to do with our obligations to the banking sector. Many of the buildings that went up during the boom period were based on loan financing, and they were based on short-term loan financing, and it was necessary for this Government therefore, to rationalize the financing programme that we had in fact started this journey on. And the order of that figure was also in the vicinity of, near to \$7 billion.

That therefore, was the state of affairs with respect to the fiscal situation, and that is why I argue that if this fiscal cliff was not climbed down in an orderly manner, then this country would have been in the debt of a serious, enduring and unsustainable fiscal crisis.

And that is the nature of the problem. But in addition to that, Mr. Speaker, the cash flow position had also deteriorated.

10.15 a.m.

In 2010—and I said it in this Parliament, I believe in my first budget presentation—the cash position of the country had climbed down from \$17 billion to near \$5 billion. [*Desk thumping*] Therefore, not only did we have a fiscal problem to resolve, we had to ensure that the cash position did not become chronic. When you add that up, Mr. Speaker, you would see that the fiscal cliff that we had in fact found when we got there, reflected by the demands on the Clico solution, reflected by demands on the creditors to the Government, reflected on the fact that our obligations to the banks had to be rationalized and reflected on the fact that the cash flow position of the country was, in fact, deteriorated. That had come in the aftermath of a falling growth of the economy, and that represents, in a nutshell, the size of that fiscal cliff.

Our job, therefore, and our first job was to climb down from that fiscal cliff, and climb down in a way that kept the public finances intact. Climbing down is fine, but if you were to climb down by putting at risk the public finances, then we would have been in a much more difficult position, and climbing down from that

fiscal cliff became our major concern. After two and a half years, it is very clear today that we in this Government have been able to climb down from that fiscal cliff, and today, Trinidad and Tobago's fiscal equation is solid and is stable and it is one that we can now use to build upon. [*Desk thumping*]

So, when the Member for Diego Martin West purported that there was no problem then, obviously, he was in a state of—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: Denial.

Hon. W. Dookeran:—denial. I used the best word I can.

Dr. Moonilal: Yes. [*Laughter*]

Hon. W. Dookeran: He was in a state of denial and half of his speech was based on that premise that there was no problem.

He went on to say, and I recollect this very well, that the credit rating of the country was always at the A grade—even before—and he is right in that sense, but he failed to say that by 2010, the credit rating had become positive—had remained “A”, but was a negative outlook as opposed to a positive outlook. In other words, international observers began to recognize that it was quite possible that if this country did not deal with its fiscal cliff situation, then the chances of downgrade would have risen, and therefore, the outlook was negative at that point in time. So, I think he was equating the issue of credit rating as an evidence to the fact that there was no problem.

But, when we look at all the comments that have been made by the credit rating agencies over the last two years, you would see they continue to identify the ability of the Government to solve its fiscal problem as the risk number one. Within recent times this has been removed from the comments of the rating agencies, and they continue to give us a good rating in terms of credit worthiness, because there are some aspects of the economy that were strong and remain strong. There were the foreign exchange reserves of the country, that, although they began to decline were at a relatively high level, and there were other areas that we had to ensure that remained at a good level. So, there was indeed a problem, and that problem, Mr. Speaker, was also accentuated by the fact that Trinidad and Tobago, having recognized this situation, had to negotiate in a global environment that was now becoming adverse.

It first reflected itself through its own transmission from Europe into the regional economy and we had to do this when the headwinds facing us were in fact serious headwinds. So, it was not climbing down the fiscal cliff in a situation

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of growth, or in a situation of world recovery, but in a situation where the entire world was faced with its own problems. Many countries in the world had to revise their growth rates and, on the last occasion, I indicated a list of all the countries that had projected a growth rate and had to revise it downwards in every case. We, in fact, did project a growth rate of 2.5 per cent in 2011 and 1.7 per cent in 2012. We did not achieve the growth rate of 2.5 per cent in 2011. In fact we had effectively flat rate, 0.1 per cent.

In 2012, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance and the Economy said it, based, I am sure on the figures that he had received—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Flat in 2011?

Hon. W. Dookeran: Zero.

Mr. Imbert: That is what he just said.

Hon. W. Dookeran:—0.1 per cent. The Minister of Finance and the Economy, indicated in 2012 that he projects, and he is right, based on CSO figures, that the expected rate of growth of 1.7 per cent will, perhaps, be about 1.2 per cent.

Now, when you project something it is not going to be always accurate, but it certainly has shown that there has been a turnaround from negative growth over the last few years to the beginning of that positive growth that has started in 2012—[*Desk thumping*—and the Minister of Finance and the Economy indicated that, and I am sure the CSO would have provided that kind of information. As much as we have problems in trying to rectify the CSO and its ability to project, it remains the institution which informs the Government's position.

So, here we were with a problem that could have created havoc in this country. The economy could have gone haywire; the fiscal situation could have found itself in a much deeper crisis; the external factors were there and we had to head off those winds, and therefore, we began to look at the situation. We developed a plan. A plan is not a document. My friends opposite used to raise the 2020 document and call it a plan. That was a document. That was not a plan. A plan is specific strategies to achieve specific targets and to deliver on those targets, and that is what we began to do.

We began to develop a strategic approach to this problem and, as I indicated to you, the first demand was: how do we climb down and keep our debt situation manageable? How do we climb down and ensure that there is still stimulus in the economy to promote some growth? How do we climb down and ensure that in so

doing, we created a sense of stability? Those were really the basic premises of the plan. And it is in that context therefore that we were able to add on expenses in the order of almost \$30 billion which is about half of the budget, without affecting the expenditure of this Government to meet its social obligations and going beyond that, by adding support to the social equation at the same time. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, when you look back at it, you wonder sometimes if that was some kind of magic. To have been able to meet these things and at the end of it maintain your level of expenditure and now increase it, we have been able to deal with this problem irrespective of the demands it had on the Treasury.

So, in terms of the results, it is there for everyone to see. We have to move in steps and in stages to go beyond that but, clearly, while the risk is not all gone, because every day we read of more and more tremors in the world economy. Even as late as last night, listening to the news, I saw the real problems developing in Spain now; problems that have been preceded by problems in Greece. Even the Government in France that came in on a populist support began now to retract in terms of the financial equation. These things are not unimportant. No island is an island in today's world. We are all part of a global system in which we are going to be affected directly or indirectly. The transmission of those developments affects the region first because they are more vulnerable, and I say the region excluding Trinidad, than we are.

We are fortunate that the next stage in developing our plan, apart from climbing down, was to build the domestic buffers so that we can insulate the economy from these external factors as well as to give it a self-sustaining part. So, building the domestic buffers was the next step. How do we create those domestic buffers to insulate the economy, so not only did we have to climb down from the fiscal cliff, but we had to set in motion instruments to insulate the economy. But how do you insulate the economy? We recognize that the foreign exchange position was a positive one and we ensured that that should remain so.

I remember that during the debate there was a lot of call in the public that we should raid the Heritage and Stabilization Fund to meet the obligations of the contractors. As Minister of Finance then, I said we would have nothing to do with that. [*Desk thumping*] Building the buffers in Heritage and Stabilization Fund is really a choice for the next generation, and we would not put at risk the next generation to satisfy the demands of the past generation. [*Desk thumping*]

These were very deliberate choices that we had to make in order to build the buffers, and it was reported that that fund continues to perform well in a difficult

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situation. [*Interruption*] It is recognized our foreign exchange position remains intact and it is recognized that the flow of funds between the external world and the internal world had to be addressed. That is why we took the initiative then to open up a new dialogue with international financial institutions with respect to their windows of support for small economies, and particularly, for the Caribbean economies.

I argued that they were premised on the basis that external shock is a temporary phenomenon. The truth is, Caribbean economies have always been subject to shocks. Our economic history has been how do we deal with shocks? And, therefore, it was misdiagnosis on the part of the international financial institutions to assume that our shocks were temporary in the Caribbean, and therefore, the measures they had put into place were not relevant to the situation before them. We argued that.

We argued that and that culminated in the end to a meeting that took place in Port of Spain which the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy chaired recently by the International Monetary Fund to examine these issues to say, yes. In the region they have misdiagnosed the situation, and if it affects the region, it affects Trinidad and Tobago, and they have embarked on a programme in order to try and rectify that problem. And as I speak here now, I know that steps are being taken to, at least, reappraise the view with respect to this notion, that the Caribbean is subject to temporary shocks. From immemorial you know that; from the days of the sugar industry.

The strength of the Caribbean economies has been its resilience to deal with shocks. Shocks are a permanent part or phenomenon and they, too, felt it was temporary, but they did not diagnose what the real structures of the problems were, so we began to build these buffers: build the buffers internally, build the buffers externally so that we would build a wall against the possibility that such developments would affect us negatively.

10.30 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, what was the result of these measures? On November 21, 2011, a well-recognized commentator, Oppenheimer had this to say, and I want to quote:

“Trinidad and Tobago—It’s the Balance Sheet.

We live in a world where strong balance sheets are all-important. In this context, Trinidad”—and Tobago “appears to be a clear winner, especially

when measured against its Caribbean neighbors. [*Desk thumping*] While most of the Caribbean is suffering under low growth and bad balance sheet dynamics ... Trinidad”—and Tobago—“thanks to its natural endowment of hydrocarbons that the world continues to need, looks solid and stable on a relative basis. Although growth is slow and the fiscal deficit has spiked, the debt burden is low, the financial system is stable, and the country’s ability to withstand further global economic weakness is, in my view, the best in the region.”

That was the outcome of a commentary on this strategy. So, the plan we talk about is made up of strategies, and the strategy of climbing down was one. The strategy of building buffers was a next one, and then we went on. We said that we cannot, therefore, only have strong balance sheets. We must now build the basis for the economy to recover and for growth to become possible. It is in that context we began and framed our fiscal situation in the context of what I call expanding economic space.

We recognized that the economy was built on a very narrow base, physically and sectorially, and we recognized that energy, as important as it is, must have less of a dominant role on our equation. Therefore, it was necessary to find more economic space. If this country and this economy were not to expand its space, then it will never be able to achieve high growth in the future, and that is a more longer-term strategy. That is why we announced the growth pole strategy and some said no growth no pole. Well, you do not have growth by announcing it, you have growth by doing something—[*Laughter*]—about the announcement. [*Desk thumping*] And what have we done?

We said the south-west peninsula is an area for expansion, that the economic activities in the south-west peninsula—and the Member for La Brea will understand this, is a room for expansion, and hence our decision to move towards bringing about the creation of the highway to Point Fortin, to expand that, to create a growth pole. [*Desk thumping*] It is the action you take that will in fact bring about the growth in the future. But if you talk about instant economics, then you have to talk to the Member for Diego Martin West. [*Laughter and desk thumping*] But beyond that, Mr. Speaker, we said that we needed to—and in the other areas there are steps that have been taken.

In East Port of Spain which was another growth pole, we commissioned a study and a commitment on the part of the Inter-American Development Bank to, first of all, identify Trinidad as one of the four sustainable cities of the future.

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They will provide the funds in due course together with our own funds. We identified to them that East Port of Spain must be the centrepiece for the sustainable cities programme. That work has been done. The technical work has been done and a full report has now been laid before the Government.

The Minister of Finance and the Economy made reference to it, and therefore the programme for East Port of Spain—and I promised the Member for Laventille West to let them have a copy of the report—as outlined, how we intend to bring in the beginnings of the growth dynamics of East Port of Spain. But it is based on studies; it is based on serious work, it is based on many people coming and doing their input; it is based on encouraging people from the University of the West Indies to get involved and all that has been done.

Today—and I would hope that we could even circulate that report for Members to see—that was another attempt to deal with the East Port of Spain growth pole, and the others, they are at different stages of development. But the fundamental strategy was to expand our economic space, and over the next medium-term have a bigger economy even in spatial terms, and not only in spatial terms but also in sectorial terms. The Minister of Trade and Industry in his former capacity began a programme to encourage investment in new sectors. They are at different stages of development, but it is all part of an overall strategy.

So to suggest that there was no plan is to ignore the fact that a plan is made up of several strategies. You can put it all together as we have done in many documents, but we would not fool ourselves to believe that raising 2020 and saying this is a plan and therefore we have a plan, that that is a plan. [*Laughter and desk thumping*] I believe the Member for Diego Martin West, when called upon, to say what are the elements of the plan, he said, “The Rapid Rail is the key instrument in this economic plan of the future.” We have to deal with the transport problem, but we also recognize, Mr. Speaker, that in developing the space we also need new fiscal space.

We recognize that the revenues of the country, even though we tinker with a reform process, will always be at a short end in dealing with our expenditure demands. And while we change our expenditure to satisfy our basic needs, the Member for Caroni Central made many protestations to that effect.

We also know that we have to look for financing in the long term. We went to the international market, we explored it, and we said we can search for the future of financing the development of Trinidad and Tobago. We were very successful

in negotiating with the Inter-American Development Bank, major programmes of financial space for the development of Trinidad and Tobago which included many non-reimbursable technical support, and that programme has been laid there. It is still being looked at, but now we have the benefit of having a new injection of capital from a multilateral institution whose terms of loans are very favourable in today's environment. I believe the last time I looked at it, we had something in the order of US \$1.3 billion earmarked for financing Trinidad and Tobago's development in the future, and that will roll out as we go on each year and maintain all the standards.

What we also recognized, is that we are facing problems in the multilateral institutions that they were not giving us what we demanded and they had other competing claims. They had claims in all of Latin America. So we decided we would not rely only on the Caribbean Development Bank. We took the deliberate decision, in this Parliament in the last debate, to allocate funds to become a full member of the Andean Development Bank and that provides now another source of financing for the future. Therefore, our strategy was to get the financing platform in place.

While we fixed what we have in terms of domestic revenue and expenditure, we also provide financing for the long-term financing of Trinidad and Tobago through these institutions.

We at one stage wanted to go to the international capital market, but we decided eventually not to go that route but to remain on the multilaterals, because the cost of financing was lower although the time frame is sometimes longer. It was a deliberate decision not to overexpose ourselves to the international financial system. So financing spaces are also what we began to work on.

Then, Mr. Speaker, we recognized also that this country's long-term sustainability depends on how capital is formed and whether we could rely on the traditional private sector, and we could rely on the orthodox public sector as the main sources for which we will introduce capital in the country. We recognized that the state sector had reached a stage where it needed some major restructuring. And therefore, the Minister of Finance and the Economy announced it in greater detail that I am able to say here today, that he embraced two new developments that are in the making because each one requires a fair amount of preparatory work.

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The public offerings programme will bring about the sharing of the benefits of that sector and also bring about efficiency at the same time. Therefore, our strategy was to widen the ability to create capital in the future, so that we would not tie up our capital in inefficient productions for all times. That is the plan of the past. The plan of the future is to lease the capital for a new life and for an expansion of the economy.

In addition to that, we decided that we will also embrace more seriously the issue of private/public sector partnership, sharing of risk: a unit was set up in the Ministry of Finance that did a lot of preparatory work in this regard and is ready to start processing these things in a manner that will ensure that procurement processes transparency become the hallmark of the decision-making process. The Minister of Finance and the Economy in his presentation made reference to some extent to the issue of public offerings, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, on the issue of the private/public sector initiatives.

I want to go a little further because we are looking at a changing world and we are looking at a Caribbean region that is changing, and we recognize that there are now new areas of entry that are required in the Caribbean region. Apart from Caricom, the Prime Minister made the historic visit to Panama. With the opening of the Panama Canal, with the economic opportunities that that will provide for us in due course, and began a dialogue with the Panama President who returned by coming here to Trinidad to identify a different dimension to a Caribbean process, Panama being one.

The second one has to do with Suriname and Guyana, where we began to talk about developing a capital market so that the financing resources of Trinidad can be used with our Caribbean countries to develop their mineral resources, and therefore, we will be able to, in the next generation, have these possibilities. Work has already been done and the regional aluminium smelter is already being looked at. In that context, Guyana and Suriname are key players in this matter because they have the mineral rich resources of the country and they would not be able to face the risk that we face here.

The third area has to do with even Cuba at a political level. Cuba is a big market. The world is changing, and at the General Assembly which I attended last week, we made a strong statement on Cuba in which we said very clearly that the time has come for us to deal with this situation on economic grounds, because you

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have a large population taking place in—if you permit me, Mr. Speaker, to quote the paragraph which I said at the General Assembly which outlined our foreign policy position on a number of things. I said:

“The completion of Cuba reintegration as a full...and equal partner into the international system is an issue close to the Caribbean.

Over the years, this policy has been given practical content through the establishment of a wide ranging dialogue and in specific cooperation agreements in a variety of sectors of development interest to the Caribbean, as part of the Caribbean convergence initiative”—of which I have been speaking about.

10.45 a.m.

“In the view of Trinidad and Tobago, the imperative of this initiative impels us to regard the economic blockade against Cuba as an anachronism. We therefore call, yet again, for its removal.” [*Desk thumping*]

You see, Mr. Speaker, a plan is not only about dealing with what goes on in the press today; a plan is dealing with the security of the generations for the future, [*Desk thumping*] and that is not in the press today. It is in that context, widening our economic space requires us to look at a new Caribbean convergence model. At the foreign Ministers meeting held in Castries, we opened the discussion. This will take time, because it requires a lot of diplomacy; a lot of technical work, but it is to tell you what the strategy is in terms of this new economic space that we are talking about.

Mr. Speaker, these various strategic interventions from climbing down from the fiscal cliff; from ensuring that there is the emergence of real financial buffers; from creating sustainable balance sheets; for expanding our domestic economic space here in Trinidad and Tobago; for embracing financing opportunities for the future to finance the growth that must come; for building on the capital formation process by widening the scope of capital investment; and for looking at new dimensions to positioning Trinidad and Tobago in the region and beyond the region—

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. W. Dookeran: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and may I thank Members of the honourable House.

So, Mr. Speaker, I just want to complete this argument about there is no plan. If there was ever a plan in Trinidad and Tobago for its economic recovery, it is the plan of the People's Partnership Government over the last few years! [*Desk thumping*] If ever there were solutions that were in sight; if ever there were, in fact, green shoots that the Member tried to make joke about, it is the beginning, and that is why you are beginning to see that process taking place.

Now, admittedly, the Opposition forces would like to deny the positive results of the Government's economic plan—and perhaps that is your job in trying to create a different perception—but I will tell you, do not lose the opportunity. You had a great opportunity. You cannot deny this plan by going back to a plan that has failed in the past; you can only enhance this plan by looking at how you can move further, and I believe the Leader of the Opposition may have lost an opportunity in not taking this country to look beyond—to look beyond—where we are, and to build on what has happened. You see, every political party will be judged in the context of its political times, and when your political times have gone, you have got to recognize that and create new political times. [*Desk thumping*] So, Mr. Speaker, I say this to put the strategic pillars of the economic and financial plan. There are other areas that I am sure the Members will be looking at.

Now, there were two areas in which we did not achieve as much results as were expected, and I think these areas need to be addressed in an incubator way, one of which had to do with new investments in the energy sector, and while plans are in place and the pipeline is there, that is an area I saw the Minister of Finance and the Economy spent quite a few pages in his document on that particular issue. So we have recognized that is an area that requires new focus. I am not talking about investment in exploration. There has been great success in that area. That will have its benefits in five, six, seven or 10 years, but even new investment in the energy sector has been one of the challenges which the Minister identified very clearly in the document.

The other area—and he talked about it in terms of value for money in the effectiveness of public sector investment. He said steps will have to be taken to improve the effectiveness of public sector investment. The term that the Minister used was “the effectiveness”. But, clearly, that is an issue that remains with us and it is an issue that must be tackled. They are not simple issues as to simply announce them; you have to do them.

So, Mr. Speaker, those are the two areas that have not been met so far in the context of Trinidad and Tobago. Now, you may say that what I am saying is the result of my interpretation of events and, clearly, it is, but it is also informed by independent analysis that has been done on Trinidad and Tobago. The last Article IV, Consultation by the IMF on Trinidad and Tobago is in this document—all the details are here. I would not go into that, but they said the key issues— and I will just quote a summary of them. This is they speaking. They are not my views, although they discuss things with us, as they always do.

“Supporting a Recovery: The economy is turning the corner and growth is expected to resume in 2012.”

Which is exactly what the Minister of Finance and the Economy said:

“The recovery comes after an extended slowdown lasting three years. Supportive fiscal and monetary policies and restoring financial confidence are essential.

Implementing Fiscal Stimulus:..”

There is a lot to talk about deficit financing. The truth is that when we projected deficit financing of \$7billion, somewhere in the order of 5 per cent of the GDP, the reality is that we did not really have to rely to that great extent. There were two reasons, and they were outlined in the *Review of the Economy*. There were some increases in the revenue side earlier on, especially with respect to the tax revenue with the steps that were taken earlier on to have an amnesty, and then there were some rises, and then there were some less than expected results on the expenditure side. So the actual fiscal deficit was lower than we had projected.

Now that, in one sense, is good, but I want to maintain, that was done without putting at risk the social sector support programme. In fact, from the people’s perspective, Mr. Speaker, we increased the social sector support programme at the same time and, therefore, we were able to achieve a fiscal stimulus. Mr. Speaker, I leave it for Members to read, because there is significant confirmation of what I have said in terms of where we are.

Now we come to the 2013 budget, and the Minister of Finance introduced some new, bold measures, and it is all outlined and I am sure it will become part of this debate: tax incentives for the housing development; tax incentives for the construction of commercial buildings. Now, you see, we are zeroing in now: incentives to support the building of the financial services industry; incentives for light manufacturing; incentives for the creative industry.

Appropriation Bill, 2012
[HON. W. DOOKERAN]

Monday, October 08, 2012

If I want to describe this budget in my own terms, I will say it is a budget about drilling down for development! Drilling down for development! [*Desk thumping*] Having set the stage in place; having removed the clouds in the past, we have now begun the process of drilling down for development, and these measures are aimed just to do that. But the population and its hardships were not ignored. At all times there must be a balance between the economic returns and the population.

So the Minister went on to introduce four basic initiatives: one, in his review, and lowering of the value added tax on essential foods; two, on his improving of the benefits on the national insurance programme; three, on the tax exemption on the CCTV for security purposes; and four, the intention to develop the constituency development fund so they can take the benefits of this development to the people of the land. [*Desk thumping*]

So the policy is well thought out. While you build those things, you ensure that the benefits of development comes back to the people of the country, and these measures of protection satisfy the basic needs of the people and it is an attempt to further improve their well-being, apart from what has to be done by the different services.

On the fiscal side, the Minister talked about beginning to look at the fuel subsidy, and he also looked at the gaming industry. May I also point out that in dealing with the Clico situation—and he announced the Clico Investment Fund which was, in fact, part of the overall programme. Now he has moved it to the stage of giving it legal manifestation, and that will come into place from November 01, I believe. So the legal hurdles that had to be crossed in that strategy are now being put into place, and it is in that context that he introduced the Clico Investment Fund, which was part of the overall programme.

Mr. Speaker, on the fiscal side we ensured that we maintained fiscal sustainability. So this budget has bold measures to drill down for development in new sectors; has additive measures to support the plight of the working people in this country to continue to improve their situation, and has sustainability measures to keep the fiscal equation intact. And it is for that reason I said, when I started, that the Minister of Finance and the Economy has to be complimented for getting the balance of all these things together in providing the responsibility for the next three years. [*Desk thumping*]

There are two issues that have been raised—which I will just make reference to because they are part of it—have to do with the need now to look at the whole

tax system and the inclusion of property tax, which he has mentioned, in a reformed programme for the future. I know people will come and say, “property tax, something you opposed”, but in the reform of the tax system, which is what he is suggesting, there is need now to look at that, and including energy, because there are serious challenges there, and you have got to do this in a very significant way and we had undertaken to do just that and to relook at the situation, because we are not planning to satisfy the neglect of the past; we are planning to be able to meet the demands of the future. [*Desk thumping*] And throughout this you will see that this is really the strategy; this is really the programme that is being worked upon.

There are, Mr. Speaker, a number of broad issues that remain issues that we must address. But before I do that, I just want to introduce for the Member for Diego Martin West—I promised him a copy of this report: “The Executive Summary of the Emerging Sustainable Cities Platform in Port of Spain”. I will get you a copy. They brought one copy for me. This deals with the East Port of Spain plan, and I raise it because we cannot move from announcement to plan without going through all this analysis and implementation schemes, and financing schemes.

Mr. Imbert: That is your excuse?

Hon. W. Dookeran: It is not an excuse; it is reality. You moved from announcement to plan and even that you do not achieve! [*Desk thumping and laughter*] Neither the announcement nor the plan has any credibility in it, Member for Diego Martin North/East. [*Crosstalk*]

11.00 a.m.

There are two issues.

Hon. Member: That is where you are now. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. W. Dookeran: Well, I always pity my friend opposite when he is not able to respond to the substance of the discussion with a response to the rhetoric of the situation but that is where he has an expertise. [*Desk thumping*] We must use his expertise to help us negotiate a new deal for Trinidad and Tobago. But, do not take me to task because you do not agree or you do not agree with the substance. This is a Parliament, and in a Parliament we must debate freely and openly. We must not be able to hide in any way, form or fashion our thinking about public policy or the interpretation of that. This is what Parliament is all about and I am happy to see that the Member is willing to engage. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: On rhetoric.

Hon. W. Dookeran: What we require now, is what has been described as high energy politics. This country needs to rise to high energy politics. What the Member for Diego Martin North/East said confirms to me, that we must not become subsumed with low energy politics. We must rise to high energy politics. [*Desk thumping and laughter*] That is the challenge now. Having fixed the economic equation, we must fix the political equation to high energy politics in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] The Opposition will be well advised to rise to the high energy politics of this nation. [*Desk thumping*] Then the contribution of the People's Partnership for the long-term development of this country will be seen in its context. We do not know what the future is going to be—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rowley: New politics!

Hon. W. Dookeran:—but we know what is existing now.

So, Mr. Speaker, there is an interesting debate, I would not go into it here today on the issue of equality. There is a recent publication by Nobel Prize winner in economics, Joseph Stiglitz talking about the United States, *The Price of Inequality* and he asked certain questions about whether the market system can in fact deliver equality, asked certain questions about whether the political system can in fact meet the economic requirements.

Those are issues that we must address as a Parliament and as the Government in order to create the high energy politics that I am talking about. You could not talk about those things without putting your house in order. What I can say now on the financial and economic side, we have put our house in order and we must now move into that high energy politics to take this country to where it has to go. [*Desk thumping*]

We started our presentation on the two and half years. The Minister made mention of it, talking about in our first budget speech of the People's Partnership, facing the issues directly. In the second issue, moving "From Steady Foundation to Economic Transformation", safety, jobs and investment.

Now, as I said, as we drill down into development, "Stimulating Growth, Generating Prosperity". [*Desk thumping*] How did the Minister end this budget speech, because in the final analysis, it is all about confidence. We know that. Confidence is the result of having the right policies. Confidence is the result of having the right implementation. Confidence is about ensuring the right values in

the process of public management are always maintained. Confidence is about creating a sense of hope, that those in charge are going to use the office they have for the purposes of the common good all the time and for the benefit of the total nation. [*Desk thumping*]

It is in that context, I think the Minister was quite right in deciding, and I want to quote his last two paragraphs on the issue of confidence.

“We would balance the need for creating the confidence and trust of our citizens in our fiscal position with the need for supporting growth and development, and for generating quality jobs and prosperity. Our state enterprise sector will have to do more with less resources. They must do so through a greater focus and higher performance standards and higher worker productivity.

The maintenance of stimulus would underpin our growth dynamics which are being anchored on an increasing private sector involvement in the economy and improving competitiveness. Central to this process is our commitment to consultation with all our stakeholders. Growth will be further supported by high education standards, by an increased credit flow from our financial institutions, and generally, by a commitment of our national community to hard work, discipline and increased productivity.”

Mr. Speaker, there was a problem, there is a plan and there are solutions. I commend the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy for bringing those solutions to bear in this debate. [*Desk thumping*] I thank you.

Mr. Colm Imbert (*Diego Martin North/East*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I sat listening to the last speaker, I concluded that political “tabanca” is a terrible thing. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: That is what you have.

Mr. C. Imbert: I will deal with the substance of what he said or the lack of substance, in a very short while. The fact of the matter is that the Member for Tunapuna is no longer the Minister of Finance and the Economy. When I listened to him speak for almost 75 minutes, and not utter one word on his new portfolio, which would mercifully keep him away, I hope, from the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, I thought to myself that this is the first time I agree with an action taken by the hon. Prime Minister, and that action was to remove this individual from the Ministry of Finance and the Economy. [*Desk thumping*]

Appropriation Bill, 2012
[MR. IMBERT]

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Mr. Speaker, the kindest description I can give for the Member is that he is deluded. I heard him utter all sorts of things. The thing that struck me the most is when he said we achieved flat economic growth in 2011. He said it twice. I said to myself this man is confused. This hon. Member is living in cloud cuckoo land. So, I said are you sure you know what you are saying. Now, this is a former Minister of Finance and as he spoke about things which have no connection to reality, the Members opposite banged the table, they too live in fantasy land. I said to myself what is wrong with this hon. Member for Tunapuna.

Let us go to the *Review of the Economy* laid in this Parliament by the hon. Minister of Finance and Economy—the new one. Page 15 summary of the macroeconomic performance of the Trinidad and Tobago economy:

“Trinidad and Tobago’s economy is expected to resume growth of 1.2 per cent in 2012, following a 2.6 % decline in 2011.”

If we go to the next page, page 17:

“Following its contraction of 2.6 % in real terms in 2011, Trinidad and Tobago is expected to return to...economic growth...in 2012.”

Where does the Member for Tunapuna live? What country does he live in? Where we had this flat economy and this 0.1 per cent economic growth in 2011, when every single document laid in this Parliament by the Minister confirms there was a decline of 2.6 per cent in the economy of 2011?

I am glad they are sending him off to foreign lands. I am glad they are sending him away, because he has no understanding of reality and the rest of them bang the table, as he uttered this craziness. [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Rhetoric.

Mr. C. Imbert: Now, let me just deal with the fantasy—it is not rhetoric, it is fact. When a former Minister of Finance gets up in this Parliament and says that there was flat economic growth during his tenure and the reality is a decline of 2.6 per cent, you have to question his sanity.

Now let us go to the budget of 2010/2011. You see this Government is famous for saying things that sounds nice but there is no connection with reality. I am looking now at the budget statement of 2011, presented by the Member for Tunapuna on September 8, 2010. I took some time to go through every single promise made in this document. This is the first budget of that Government 2010 to 2011. Let us see what they promised.

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In security and justice, they would establish a youth mentoring programme. What happened? Not done! They will implement a national security operation centre, so that police officers on patrol can log into a new information network and get all the necessary information on individuals such as drivers' permits and licence plate numbers to allow a response time of 10 minutes by the police. Not done! They would introduce bicycle patrols by police in communities. Not done! They would establish a victim of crime support programme. Not done!

When I say not done, I do not mean not done in 2011, I mean not done until today. Establish special criminal court to deal with firearms, kidnapping and narcotic offences. Not done! Construct the Sangre Grande Magistrates' Court and Arima judicial complex—not done!

So every single promise made by the Member for Tunapuna with respect to security and justice in the 2010 presentation has not materialized. Nothing! [*Desk thumping*]

Let us go to social welfare. Proclaim homes for elder persons legislation, launch shuttle service for the elderly, introduce individual savings incentive for retirement—not done! None of them! Home ownership: establish the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Bank—not done. Offer an IPO for the TTMB on the stock exchange—not done! Restructure the mortgage portfolios of HMB, HDC, NIB and TTMF—not done!

Sport: promote sports tourism in Trinidad and Tobago by targeting foreign teams—not done! Energy: increase energy production—not done! Aggressively support the use of alternative energy—not done! Export energy services—not done! [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Not done.

Mr. C. Imbert: Restructuring the economy: design and implement a business incubator programme—not done! Develop a shipbuilding and repair industry—not done. Develop offshore medical and educational outsourcing programmes—not done. Create a national heroes policy, hall of fame, house of music—not done. Develop a local fashion industry that can internationally—not done. Develop a local film and entertainment industry—not done. Establish a recycling industry—not done. Establish an international business centre to replace the International Financial Center. These are all things announced with pious glee by the Member for Tunapuna in his 2010 presentation. Not one of them has been done! [*Desk thumping*]

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Let us go to health care. Construct the Point Fortin hospital—not done.
[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Not done.

Mr. C. Imbert: Construct a new wing at the San Fernando General Hospital—not done! Construct the national oncology centre—not done! Construct the Chaguanas District Health Facility—not done! Construct the Sangre Grande enhanced health facility—not done! Establish four trauma clinics in Trinidad and Tobago—not done. [*Crosstalk*] All of these things, every single one of these things I have listed, was announced by the Minister for implementation in the 2010/2011 fiscal year.

Hon. Member: Not done, not done!

Mr. C. Imbert: Agriculture: make agriculture profitable. What a joke. Not done. Achieve food sovereignty.

Hon. Member: Not done!

Mr. C. Imbert: Not done! Fast track deeds for farmers—not done. Construct and develop greenhouses—not done.

Hon. Member: Not done!

11.15 a.m.

Mr. C. Imbert: Tourism: create jobs and increase the contribution of tourism to GDP—not done. Upgrade local tourism sites—not done. Establish a sugar heritage village and museum.

Hon. Members: Not done.

Mr. C. Imbert: Where is the museum? Facilitate the construction of a 250-room Radisson Hotel at Piarco—not done. Stock exchange: restructure NAL—not done. New Securities Act—not done. List methanol holdings on local and foreign stock exchange—not done. Place the Unit Trust under the Central Bank—not done. Sort out all issues with Clico to allow bondholders to trade their units for more than their face value on the stock exchange—not done.

Let us look at infrastructure. Construct new container terminal at Port of Spain—not done! Establish motor vehicle authority in Caroni; well, we are still waiting for that. Transform licencing office using Canadian business process—not done. Establish drainage and irrigation authority—not done. Construct the Mammoral Dam—not done. Construct sentiment traps—not done. Develop five

growth poles in Central Trinidad, east Port of Spain, south-west, north—never happened. Establish a port in Felicity, Chaguanas, Science Park—not done. Construct a new industrial estate in La Brea, Point Fortin—not done. Restore east Port of Spain to a heritage city like Old Havana—not done.

Hon. Members: Not done.

Mr. C. Imbert: Construct a tunnel to Maracas—tunnel gone! [*Laughter*] Provide special incentives for persons to invest in north-east Tobago—never happened. Allow the private sector to manage industrial estates—not done.

Tobago, and this is the third time I am hearing this “yuh know”. I will go to this year’s budget speech in a short while. Tobago: establish an integrated campus for UWI, UTT and COSTAATT in Tobago—not done. Economic growth: produce economic growth of 2 per cent in 2011. “Two per cent eh!” First, he said it was minus 1.2 per cent and now the new Minister said it was really minus 2.6 per cent, and as I indicated, when I began, he believes it is zero. I am shocked!

Let us go to fiscal year 2011/2012. The Member for Tunapuna still the Minister of Finance—security and justice: establish street and community patrols—“this is in addition to all dem other thing dey ent do eh!”—using 250 new motorcycle patrol officers—not done.

Miss Cox: Where the motorcycles?

Mr. C. Imbert: Where are these 250 new motorcycle patrol officers? “Dey in Tobago.” Implement a city surveillance network in San Fernando—not done. Enact legislation to strengthen the capability of the private security industry: the Prisons Rules, the Defence Act—not done. Strengthen the CSO so that they can provide real time statistics to international standards—well that has to be the joke of the year! We are still using 2011 labour and unemployment statistics in 2012; 2012 almost finished and we cannot get January figures for unemployment in Trinidad and Tobago.

Social welfare: provide grants to single mothers who look after special children.

Miss Cox: Not done!

Mr. C. Imbert: “You do that?”

Miss Cox: Only central.

Mr. C. Imbert: Automatically qualify differently-abled persons for food cards. “Yuh ha tuh be kidding me!” Land use—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Where? In Trinidad and Tobago?

Mr. C. Imbert: Revise and update the 1984 Fiscal Development Plan—not done. Complete a land use policy—not done. Procurement—this is what they promised last year—enact new procurement legislation together with regulations and guidelines. “Where the regulations? Where the guidelines? Where the legislation?” Not done! Insurance: modify the Insurance Act to strengthen regulatory oversight—not done.

Hon. Member: “Still coming.”

Mr. C. Imbert: Agriculture: increase greenhouse production—not a single greenhouse. Environment: establish a recycling industry—not done. Tourism: create jobs in the tourism sector, encourage foreign investment in hotels from international chains—not done. Public offerings stock exchange again: establish Clico Trust Fund, list Clico Trust Fund on stock exchange so that bonds can be traded for more than their face value—not done! The new Minister, for the third year in a row, is promising to do what this Minister promised to do in 2010 and 2011 with respect to Clico.

Amend the corporation tax to allow income and dividends of the trust to be exempt from tax—not done and the new Minister is promising to do that too. Create the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Bank: supposed to be done since 2010—not done. Create a third tier on the stock exchange for small and medium enterprises—not done.

Let us go to infrastructure. New intersections at UWI, Pasea, Macoya, Piarco, Munroe Road and Endeavour—pie in the sky; dreamland—not one done! [Laughter] Construct the San Fernando to Princes Town highway. Where? Not done! Establish a bus rapid transit system, park and ride, and inner city bus service—not done.

Hon. Members: Not done!

Mr. C. Imbert: Convert PTSC fleet to CNG, and for the third year in a row, the new Minister is saying he is going to convert PTSC fleet to CNG—not done. Convert fast ferries and water taxis to CNG—not done. Establish a national infrastructure bank to finance infrastructure projects—not done. And for the second year and now for the third year in a row—[Interruption]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: “All yuh should be ashamed!”

Mr. C. Imbert:—develop east Port of Spain as a heritage city.

Hon. Members: Not done!

Mr. C. Imbert: Said that in 2010, he said that in 2011, and the new Minister said it in 2012. Not done!

Provide high speed broadband Internet services throughout Trinidad and Tobago—not done. [*Crosstalk*] Tobago, here we go again. Construct an integrated campus for UWI, UTT and COSTAATT in Tobago—not done.

Hon. Members: Not done!

Mr. C. Imbert: Produce real economic growth of 1 per cent over 2011 figures—not done.

Dr. Khan: Open the Scarborough Hospital—not done. [*Laughter*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Ha, ha, ha, ha. Let us go now to the promises made by the new Minister. Let us see what he is promising. Just cut and paste, “yuh know”.

Hon. Member: Yeah, cut and paste!

Mr. C. Imbert: Just cut and paste! We will be reintroducing dedicated highway patrols and establishing three community police units. Big joke! We are going to start the construction and outfitting of a national security training academy. “Hmmm! Ah doh think we will live to see dat!” We will extend the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway from Cumuto to Sangre Grande. What about the San Fernando to Princes Town highway? “Wha happen to dat?”

Mrs. Mc Intosh: “Dat gone out.”

Mr. C. Imbert: An additional access from Cocorite to Chaguaramas. Pie in the sky!

The Ministry of Justice will build four building complexes for accommodating High Courts in Trincity, Carlsen Field. Same old, same old! “Dats what dey say last year.” An integrated campus in Tobago to house various public training institutions—UWI, COSTAATT, UTT—third year in a row; third year in a row, Mr. Speaker. [*Crosstalk*]

But, what bothered me in the Minister’s speech—I will deal with the economic data in a short while—is the fact that he has just been given something to read. He has no idea what he is saying. He just says things. [*Desk thumping*] Listen to this comment on page 28 about tourism. We are:

“committed to building a”—diverse—“and”—dynamic—“tourism sector.

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The fact that such a...sector has not been achieved...results from a lack of investment in time and energy. With the appointment of our new Minister of Tourism, this has changed.”

So what happened to the old Minister of Tourism?

Hon. Member: Insulting.

Mr. C. Imbert: “Wha he was doing?” So a new Minister of Tourism come in and all of a sudden the tourism sector will explode! And hear what the tourism Minister will do:

“He has...commenced”—on the—“development and implementation of a multifaceted programme to achieve the goal of making Trinidad and Tobago the number one location in the region for tourist arrivals.”

Now come on! [*Laughter*]

The Minister is a seasoned banker. During his tenure, he would have had, at some point in time in the last 30 years or so, to evaluate the tourism sector in Trinidad and Tobago, and he will know the following statistics. These are the tourist stopover arrivals in the Caribbean, Mr. Speaker, published by the Caribbean Tourism Organization.

The Bahamas receives 1,370,000 tourist arrivals; Barbados, 532,000; British Virgin Islands, 330,000; Cancun, 2.1 million; Cuba, 2.5 million. The Dominican Republic receives 4.1 million; Jamaica, 1.92, almost 2 million tourist arrivals. Martinique, 479,000; Puerto Rico, 1.3 million, St. Maarten, 443,000 and the US Virgin Islands, 691,000, Mr. Speaker. Do you know how much Trinidad and Tobago receives? Three hundred and thirty thousand.

Jamaica getting 2 million tourist arrivals; Barbados, 500,000, but with the miraculous stroke of a wand—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Blame the PNM!

Mr. C. Imbert: And Mr. Speaker, this is what has been happening for the last 20 years in the tourism sector in the Caribbean. The largest island within Caricom that receives tourism arrivals is Jamaica. The second largest is Barbados. It has been so for the last 20 years; it will be so for the next 20 years. But the Minister of Finance and the Economy tells us that because they waved a wand and the Member for Chaguanas East is now the Minister of Tourism, we will miraculously, magically become the number one destination for tourist arrivals. So we will go from 388,000 to over 1.9million. How are we doing that?

Now, let us deal with—it is all pie in the sky and fantasy, Mr. Speaker. Let us deal with the reality, Mr. Speaker. Let us go to the *Review in the Economy* and let us see what happened last year under this brilliant Government that according to the Member for Tunapuna, turn the economy around.

Tourism, page 28 of the *Review of the Economy*. According to the latest forecast from the Central Statistical Office, Trinidad and Tobago is expected to receive 357 air visitors during calendar year 2012, a decline of 4.8 per cent. So, while in the budget speech, he said the new Minister will magically make us the number one destination, in his review—“well, he cyah lie too much”—sorry, Mr. Speaker—he cannot peddle too much misinformation, he said the visitor arrivals will decline by 4.8 per cent.

Let us take a look at cruise ship arrivals. The number of cruise ships berthing in Trinidad and Tobago fell to 59 vessels in 2011, under them, from 83 vessels in 2010 representing a decrease of 30.6 per cent. Trinidad received 15,654 passengers in 2011, a decline of 60.9 per cent, whilst Tobago received 44,000, a decline of 27.8 per cent and this is in 2011.

Hon. Members: Blame the PNM!

Mr. C. Imbert: But with that dismal performance where tourism arrivals declining by 30, 40, 50, 60 per cent, we are almost the lowest in terms of tourist arrivals in the whole Caribbean, but the Minister said the new Minister of Tourism will turn Trinidad and Tobago into the number one destination. Steups! “Dey just saying things, Mr. Speaker! Dey pull dem out of a hat.”

Now, let us deal with the Gross Domestic Product of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, when one examines the *Review of the Economy* for the year 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012, what do we see? “Yuh know what we see?” They change the GDP figures every single year.

In 2011, the hon. Member for Tunapuna projected real GDP for the year 2011 to be \$88 billion, and that is contained in the *Review of the Economy 2011* on page 48 where the GDP was projected by the former Minister of Finance to be \$88.06 billion. What has the new Minister done? He has adjusted the figure. So he is now telling us that the 2011 GDP was not \$88 billion; it was, in fact, \$86.7 billion, Mr. Speaker, and that is contained on page 54 of the *Review of the Economy 2012*.

11.30 a.m.

The new Minister tells us that the old Minister got his sums wrong. It is no wonder if he thought it was zero per cent and it was really minus 2.6 per cent. We

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understand that. But, the old Minister told us the GDP in 2011 would be \$88 billion and he said that represented a decline in the economy—he cannot remember what he said last year—of minus 1.4 per cent. The new Minister come and say: “No, no, all the figures are all wrong man, I going and change all. Ah revising 2011, ah changing 2010, ah changing 2009, ah changing 2008.” They have gone all the way back to 2008, changed all the figures. The effect of all of that is that when you reduce the GDP figure for 2011, from \$88 billion down to \$86.7 billion and then you put imaginary growth of 1.2 per cent on the lower figure, you come back up to a figure which is actually lower than the GDP predicted by the Minister of Finance in 2011. Because you know what we are being told, Mr. Speaker? The GDP for 2012 will be \$87.8 billion. But the Minister last year told us the GDP for 2011 was \$88 billion. “Like he eh read de document. Maybe dahs wey he get de zero ting in his head. He eh realize dat de new Minister of Finance” cut his figure by \$1.3 billion and send it down to \$86.7 billion.

What kind of government changes every single GDP figure going back four years? What are they doing that for?

Hon. Member: Just imagine that.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: It is shameful.

Dr. Rowley: Leveraging confidence.

Mr. C. Imbert: It is—how can any investor—

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Dishonest.

Mr. C. Imbert:—have any confidence in Government of Trinidad and Tobago when they manipulate the figures in this way—[*Desk thumping*] when they depressed last year’s GDP to create an illusion of growth in 2012 and they did not even bother—they were not clever enough—to make the projected figure for 2012 higher than the projected figure for 2011? So, we have a situation here, where the GDP in 2009 was \$88.8 billion, according to the new Minister’s figures; the GDP in 2010, \$89 billion; the GDP in 2011 somehow gone down to \$86.7 billion and the GDP in 2012, \$87.8 billion.

Now, all of us went to school, 2008 GDP, \$92.9 billion; 2009, \$88.8 billion; 2010, \$89.0; 2012, \$87.8 billion. Eighty-seven point eight billion is less than \$89 billion in 2010, less than \$88 billion in 2009 and less than \$92 billion in 2008. These are the Minister’s own figures I am quoting. Where is the growth? What

growth? “Yuh sink de GDP down to such ah low figure and then yuh pull it up using smoke and mirrors to tell us we have growth. But yuh forget to make sure dat the new GDP figure is higher than the four previous years.”

Dr. Rowley: “Dey get ketch.”

Mr. C. Imbert: “Yuh get ketch with yuh own manipulation.”

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Shameful. Shameful

Mr. C. Imbert: Now, let us go into the sectors of the economy, because the way they adjust figures, they adjust 2011, 2010, 2009, 2008. They would do it again next year. Next year they would adjust the GDP figures again and that is why we can have no confidence in the projected 1.2 per cent growth in the economy, which has already been discredited and dismissed by independent economists in this country.

Let us go to the productive sectors of the economy. The petroleum industry is projected by the Minister to decline by 1 per cent in 2012. The agriculture sector is projected to decline by 4.9 per cent, almost 5 per cent; the manufacturing sector is projected to decline by 0.4 per cent. So, all the productive sectors of the economy: petroleum, manufacturing, agriculture that generate economic activity, that create growth, that create income, are projected by the Minister to decline in 2012. This is what the economists have seen. That is why the figure of 1.2 per cent is a fantasy. So, where is the growth?

The sectors that are projected to increase, check this one: finance insurance and real estate. But finance insurance and real estate are consumers of income. That is not the productive sector, that is the non-productive sector. That does not generate income; it eats up income. If you have a decline in petroleum, a decline in agriculture, a decline in manufacturing, how “yuh go have ah” growth in financial services? It is just gobbledygook. They are just making up numbers. These numbers have already been dismissed by all of the independent economists in the country.

Look at construction and quarrying. Construction and quarrying is projected to decline by 2 per cent in 2012. “So, construction going down, manufacturing going down, agriculture going down, petroleum going down wey yuh getting dis 1.2 per cent growth?” It is being manufactured out of thin air and just like the imaginary 1.4 per cent decline that the Minister told us occurred in 2011, which miraculously changing thumb at 2.6 per cent decline, this 1.2 per cent growth will evaporate when the true figures for 2013 are produced.

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Let us look at what is projected to happen in all our sectors. Natural gas production, 41,000 million cubic metres in 2007; 42,000 million cubic metres in 2008; 42,000 million cubic metres in 2009; 45,000 million cubic metres in 2010; 45,000 million cubic metres of natural gas production in 2011. How much for 2012? Twenty-seven. Natural gas production is projected to decline from its 2010 figure by almost 30 per cent. “Wey yuh getting dis growth from” if natural gas production going down from 45,000 cubic metres in 2010 to 27,000 cubic metres in 2012? I am using the Minister’s own figures.

Let us look at the production of steel, 2 million tons of steel produced in 2007; 2 million in 2008; 950 in 2009; 1.8 million in 2010 down to 1.2 million in 2012. So, the production of iron and steel is almost 30 per cent lower projected in 2012.

Let us look at petrochemicals. Let me just pull the 2010 figure, petrochemicals, 5 million tons of ammonia in 2010; 3.8 million tons of ammonia in 2012. Urea, 700,000 tons of production in 2010; 410,000 tons of production in 2012. Methanol, 6.10 million tons, down to 4.1. Every single productive sector of the economy is projected to have lower production in 2012. But, this Minister somehow is pulling growth out of a hat.

Let us look at the labour figures, again smoke and mirrors, just making joke. “Dey feel people cyah read.” Let us look at the number of persons employed in 2009, 588,000; number of persons employed in 2006, 586,000; number of persons employed in 2008, 597,000; number of persons employed projected for 2012, 585,000. Less! It is a lower figure. They have less people employed. But, check this, at the top of this table—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: He is not reading it.

Mr. C. Imbert:—they have the population increasing every year, you know. They have the population in 2006 at 1.29; the population in 2007, 1.3; 2008, 1.31; 2009 again, 1.31 million people in Trinidad and Tobago; 2010, 1.317; 2011, 1.32 and 2012, projected 1.33 million people in Trinidad and Tobago. They have an increase in population in Trinidad and Tobago, but the number of employed persons is lower—[*Interruption*] You could say what you want, I am using the Minister’s figures.

Dr. Moonilal: What is the review page?

Mr. C. Imbert: Page 65:

“Appendix 12

Population, labour force and employment (mid-year)”

Population at the end of 2011, which is the figure the Minister is using—I made the point earlier on that the CSO is so woefully inadequate and so behind and so stuck in the Iron Age that we are getting 2011 statistics of employment in 2012. “We cyah get” 2012 employment statistics and the figures on page 65 in the *Review of the Economy* tell us that at the end of 2011, which is the last time that labour figures were available, 585,000 persons were employed. The same page tells us in 2008, 597,000 persons were employed. In 2009, 588,000 persons were employed. [Interruption]

Dr. Moonilal: “What page 31 telling yuh?”

Mr. C. Imbert: Look, what you trying to tell me, that page 65—how could you have job creation? You see the kind of things that they utter, Mr. Speaker? I am dealing with absolute numbers.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: That is what they would come with.

Mr. C. Imbert: You talking about job creation? If there were 597,000 persons employed in 2008 and there are now 585,000 persons, when I went to school 597 was more than 585. “Doh tell me yuh create jobs.” [Desk thumping] If you create five jobs you lose 10. That is what has happened. You have to look at the overall numbers.

Dr. Moonilal: “Yuh talking rubbish.”

Mr. C. Imbert: “Yeah” really.

Mr. Speaker: Please, Member.

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, the *Review of the Economy*, which tells us there are less people employed now than there were 2009, is rubbish, according to him. “I quoting from de man document.”

Let us move on. Let us look at what this Government has done. [Interruption] He? I would not waste my time on him. Let us deal with—[Interruption]

Dr. Moonilal: “Ah bet yuh yuh run when the”—[Inaudible]

Mr. Speaker: All right, Member, please.

Mr. C. Imbert:—the fuel subsidy. These Ministers opposite think that this budget debate is an opportunity to “bus mark”, to create scandal and to attack people who do not have an opportunity to reply, to abuse parliamentary privilege. That is what they think this budget debate is all about.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: All the debates.

Mr. C. Imbert: But I am not going there. I was sent all kind of documents about all the irregularities in all the state enterprises, all the bid rigging and all the breaches of tender procedures that are taking place across the board in the state enterprises, hard evidence. I am not going to waste time today. I will speak about that on another occasion. Today, we are dealing with the budget numbers and we are dealing with the budgetary measures. [*Desk thumping*] If the Ministers over so want to spend all their time “bussing mark”, let them. If they figure that endears them to the population, let them go ahead.

Let me deal now with the fuel subsidy. I am not even sure if the new Minister of Finance and the Economy is aware that in Trinidad and Tobago we have a piece of legislation called the Petroleum Production Levy and Subsidy Act, Chap. 62:02, Act No. 14 of 1974. This was enacted when you had the Yom Kippur War, when you had Israel expanding its borders in the 1973 period and the Arab countries that formed the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), decided to retaliate by banning oil exports to the United States and other countries that they felt were supporting Israel at the time in its expansionist policies in the Middle East.

As a consequence of that decision of the petroleum exporting countries—I would just go into some brief detail—members of the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries in October 1973, decided to cut oil production by 25 per cent until Israel withdrew to the 1949 Armistice lines. OPEC also decided to cut off oil to the United States and the Netherlands because of US military and Dutch political support for Israel. As a result of that development, the price of petroleum products in Trinidad and Tobago rose sharply, suddenly and substantially. In fact, it quadrupled. The price of oil quadrupled in 1973. The government of the day, a PNM Government, was unwilling to allow external factors to influence prices and the impact of this external shock on citizens.

11.45 a.m.

Government took the position that petroleum was a natural resource belonging to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, and it was being exploited by foreign international oil companies for the benefit of their home countries. In 1974, the Petroleum Production Levy and Subsidy Act, 1974 was introduced to buffer the large increases to consumers in petroleum prices, stem inflation and provide a general level of stability to promote economic development.

The Act provides for the collection of levy from oil producing companies and payment of a subsidy to the wholesale marketing company operating in Trinidad

and Tobago. So, what did the PNM Government Dr. Eric Williams do in the 1973 era? They enacted the Petroleum Production Levy and Subsidy Act, and what does this Act mean? Because the Members opposite, I wonder if they ever read anything, Mr. Speaker? I am really concerned at the fact that they say things that have no basis in reality.

It is like the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara saying that brush cutters, locally known as "wackers", operate on regular gas, and he reads out some document saying that Stihl brush cutters operate on an octane rating of 89. He does not even know what he is talking about, Mr. Speaker. I will come to that in a little while. But in the Petroleum Production Levy and Subsidy Act, section 5:

- “(1) There is hereby established for the purposes of this Act a Petroleum Products Subsidy Fund...and the Fund shall be managed by the Minister of Finance.
- (2) Subject to this Act...the Minister is authorised to cause advances to be made from the Fund for the purpose of subsidising the prices at which petroleum products are sold by persons carrying on marketing business in accordance with...Orders made by the Minister...
- (1) The subsidy shall be computed monthly in respect of sales of each petroleum product...”

And that word “each” is what is important in the Schedule.

“...by a person carrying on marketing business...”

So, what did Dr. Eric Williams do in 1974? He enacted a law imposing a levy of 4 per cent of oil production on oil companies, and that 4 per cent, that money earned from that petroleum levy, which is not paid by taxpayers of this country, but paid by the oil companies, was used to create a subsidy fund which was used then to cushion the effect of oil prices and to subsidize the price of gasoline.

What hon. Members opposite will not tell you is that out of the \$4 billion fuel subsidy, over a billion dollars is paid by the oil companies and not by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. And what the Minister is supposed to do, he is supposed to pass on the benefits of the oil levy on to consumers.

I will now come to the price for premium gasoline. Because, Mr. Speaker, I remember in July 2012, the Energy Chamber had indicated what the subsidy was on each grade of gasoline. If you go to the Pricewaterhouse budget memorandum, if you go to page 22, you will see that the subsidy on premium gas is 73 cents; the

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subsidy on super gas is \$1.83 and the subsidy on diesel is \$2.71. What this means is the true cost of premium gasoline is \$4.73. Why is the Minister making consumers pay \$5.75 for premium gas when the real price should be \$4.73 or \$4.75? Why is he taking the petroleum levy that is levied on oil companies to be used to subsidize all brands of gasoline, whether it is premium, whether it is regular, and all fuels, whether it is diesel, whether it is LPG? That petroleum levy was developed to cushion the people of Trinidad and Tobago from energy prices; that petroleum levy is supposed to be applied to each grade of gasoline. The true price of premium gas is about \$4.73. Why is the Minister charging people of Trinidad and Tobago \$5.75? [*Desk thumping*] I dare say that the Minister is in breach of the Petroleum Production Levy and Subsidy Act—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: “Oh good!”

Mr. C. Imbert:—because the subsidy is supposed to be used to offset the price of gasoline. I want the Minister to tell me why? Why are you taking the petroleum levy that the oil companies are paying—not taxpayers—and not applying it to subsidize the price of premium gas? What are you doing? You are breaking the law. [*Desk thumping*] And that law was put in place for a very good reason, to help poor people in this country.

Hon. Member: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

Mr. C. Imbert: Let us go now to this whole question of increasing—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: “Like is ah habit?”

Mr. C. Imbert:—the price of premium gas to way beyond the subsidized level. And what do we hear? All sorts of figures pulled out of a hat, that it is only 6 per cent of drivers use premium, when the real figure is 10 per cent. But what is going to be the effect of this increase from \$4 to \$5.75, this unlawful arbitrary increase? What will happen? Fifty per cent at least of premium users will switch to super, at least, because if you read the data, approximately 4 per cent of cars in Trinidad and Tobago require premium to be used, only 4 per cent, Mr. Speaker, all of the other cars can use the super unleaded.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East has expired.

Motion made: That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Miss M. Mc Donald*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: You may continue, hon. Member. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: As I was indicating, Mr. Speaker, at least half of premium users will switch to super, it occurred in 2008. In 2008, the price of premium was \$3 a litre, it was raised to \$4 in March 2008. In 2008, one-third of all cars, one-third of all fuel consumed in Trinidad and Tobago was consumed by cars using premium gasoline; one-third, 33 per cent. As soon as the price of premium went from \$3 to \$4, that figure dropped from 33 per cent to its current 10 per cent. Now that it has gone from \$4 to \$5.75, it will drop to 5 per cent, because at most only 5 per cent of vehicles imported into Trinidad and Tobago require as a mandatory requirement the use of premium gasoline. So what is going to happen?

Super gas is subsidized at a rate of \$1.73 per litre. Premium gas is subsidized at a rate of 73 cents per litre. So when you switch from premium to super, the Government has to pay a higher subsidy on every gallon of gas that is purchased and, therefore, the net effect of the change in price from \$4 to \$5.75 for premium will be an increase in the fuel subsidy paid by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Now, for those of you over there who do not understand, let me go through it again. Premium gas is subsidized at a rate of 73 cents a litre. Super gas is subsidized at a rate of \$1.73 a litre, so for every litre of premium gas, the Government pays 73 cents in subsidy. So when they switch from super to premium, the Government has to pay an additional \$1 per litre in subsidy when you switch from premium to super. So all that will happen with this switch [*Crosstalk*] “wey dey say dey going to save money”, they are estimating they will save \$100 million, they will save no money, because the additional quantity of super unleaded that is going to be purchased when half of the premium users switch to super, will increase the subsidy way beyond the volume of subsidy paid on premium users, Mr. Speaker. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: “Dat is no presumption”—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Presumption? You know, Mr. Speaker, I am hearing noises behind me. Let me deal with facts. Let us deal with facts.

In 2008, 33 per cent of drivers in Trinidad and Tobago used premium gas. The cost of premium was raised from \$3 a litre to \$4 a litre in 2008. The number of premium users dropped immediately from 33 per cent to 10 per cent. Now, in 2012 they have increased the price from \$4 to \$5.75, what do you expect to happen? The usage of premium will drop to the level where it is only people who believe that they must use premium in their car would buy premium. Why would

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anybody buy premium? Super gas is retailing at \$2.70 a litre; premium gas is retailing at \$5.75 a litre. Only a mad man would buy gas at \$5.75 a litre when he could buy gas at \$2.70 a litre. The mathematics is simple. The equation is elementary. It is obvious—I mean, I do not understand who comes up with these policies from these people on the other side.

In the first place they have unlawfully imposed a cost on consumers of gasoline in breach of the Petroleum Production Levy and Subsidy Act, where the petroleum levy paid by oil companies is supposed to protect citizens from the high cost of petroleum products. And in the second instance, all they will do is cause a shift from premium to super, Mr. Speaker, and it is all outside there in the public domain; all there in the public domain. As soon as this ridiculous shift in the price of premium from \$4 to \$5.75 came into being, we had all sorts of information out there in the public domain. Let us use the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs' own statements.

This is an article in the *Express*, which was published just a few days ago on October 02, 2012. According to Ramnarine, as of August 2012, data showed that 6 per cent of the subsidy was attributable to premium gasoline; 32 per cent to diesel; 41 per cent to super and 1 per cent to other fuels. He added that some 9 per cent of all the fuel consumed in Trinidad and Tobago was attributable to premium gas. Information from one new car dealer indicates that 5 per cent of new vehicles are classified as premium compelled. Information from another dealer indicates that 3 to 4 per cent of new vehicles must use premium.

So, the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs is telling us that 4 per cent of vehicles in Trinidad and Tobago must use premium, but at this time 9.7 per cent or at least until the budget, 9.7 per cent of vehicle users used premium. So, if only 3—4 per cent have to use it, and if 10 per cent were using it before the budget, it must drop to 3—4 per cent. And when I went to school, if 10 drops to four that is a reduction of more than 50 per cent for those of you in the back there who cannot understand basic mathematics. [*Crosstalk*]

So we will have a situation where more than half of the users of premium are going to switch to super, and when you go into the literature, Mr. Speaker, if you do not have to use super, if you do not have to use premium in your car, there is absolutely no need to use it. It is popular mythology that if you use gasoline with a higher octane rating, your car will run better, the fuel is cleaner, you get better economy, not true. If a vehicle is designed to run on regular gasoline, then putting premium in it just wastes money, you get no increase in mileage, no increase in performance, no increase in the cleanliness of your engine. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: What about performance?

Hon. Member: “Yuh cyar do dat! Yuh cyar do dat!”

Mr. C. Imbert: But let me just—before I move off this gasoline thing, let me just deal with the misinformation put into the system by the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara. The Member for Diego Martin Central pointed out that people who use brush cutters, “wacker men”, have to use premium gasoline in their machines. Of course, it is a two-stroke engine. High compression two-stroke engines require a higher octane number in order to produce the required performance from these machines. The Minister of Sport—“yuh know dey say ah little knowledge is ah bad thing, but no knowledge, the absence of knowledge is ah terrible thing.” “He comes and he reads out” a brochure that tells us that some brand name of brush cutter—Stihl, I believe—uses 89 octane.

Well, Mr. Speaker, let me just educate Members opposite. There are two types of octane numbers. In Trinidad and Tobago, we use the research octane number; that is how you get the acronym RON. So if you go and look on the pump you will see 95 RON or 92 RON. That is the research octane number and it is a number derived from using a vehicle under normal operating conditions. But there is another number called the motor operating number, or MON, and this is when you put the vehicle under greater stress than normal operating conditions.

12.00 noon

In the United States—let me just read—the number posted is according to R plus M over 2. It is simply the average of the RON number and the MON number. So, would the MON number typically be lower than the RON? The answer is, yes. The motor octane number is typically 10 points lower than the research octane number. What does this mean, Mr. Speaker? When you go to the pump in the United States and—that brochure the Member was reading was from an American magazine—and you look at the pump, you are not going to see RON. You will see 87, you will see 89, you will see 91 and you might see 92. You are not seeing any RON there.

Do you know why? The octane rating on the pumps in the United States is five points lower than the octane ratings in Trinidad and Tobago and the rest of the world because we use the research octane number. Let me give you an example. Eighty-seven octane in the USA is 92 RON in Europe; 89 octane in the USA is 94 RON in Europe. So the United States uses a completely different classification system. That is why they call premium over there 91 octane, which is really our 95 RON.

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So the brush cutter which is required to use 89 octane in the USA is required to use 94 RON in Trinidad and Tobago, which is premium gasoline. Just let me put that to rest. “All you wacker men outside there, doh listen to foolishness. Yuh better put premium in yuh machine otherwise it go mash it up” because it is a high compression engine and it is designed to work on premium gasoline with a minimum research octane number of 94. So I hope Members opposite now understand what is really going on.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at the price of gasoline in England and you look at the price of gasoline in the United States, we will see—here we have something from the United Kingdom, “Understanding Pump Prices”—the pump price of 1.33 pence or 1.33 pounds per litre in the United Kingdom. Hear how it is broken down:

- 80 pence for duty and VAT;
- 45 pence for the cost of the product; and
- 7 pence for the retail and ex-refinery spread.

This tells us that the true cost of gasoline in the United Kingdom, excluding duty and VAT, is \$4.75. You go to the United States, again, 60 per cent is the cost of crude oil, 14 per cent the cost of refining, 14 per cent the cost of distribution and marketing, and 12 per cent the cost of taxes. The true cost of gasoline in the United States before taxes are put on, \$4.75. The true cost of premium gas in Trinidad and Tobago, \$4.75.

So the Minister had better explain why he is charging the population \$5.75 for gas when the real cost is \$4.75. [*Desk thumping*] How has this country moved from a situation where we have a petroleum levy to help poor people to deal with the price of petroleum products, where you subsidize it by a levy on the oil companies who have plenty money? How have we moved from that philosophy to a situation where you are punishing consumers and charging them a dollar more than you should be charging them for the price of gas?

The Minister has signalled in his budget speech that is not the end of it. When you go to what he says he is going to do to this population, he tells us he is going to be systematically increasing the price of other grades of gasoline—super gasoline and diesel—in 2013. Look at what he says, starting on page 31 going onto page 32:

“An interministerial team...will review additional measures aimed at further addressing and reducing the current levels of subsidy. These measures will be progressively introduced during the fiscal year 2013.”

Now fiscal year 2013 started on October 01, 2012 and ends on September 30, 2013. So he is telling us that between now and next year September he is going to remove the subsidy on super gas and he is going to remove the subsidy on diesel, and if he does what he did in this budget and he unlawfully takes away the petroleum levy from the citizens of this country, he is going you make you pay more than the cost price of these fuels. What kind of Government is that? Why are you punishing people like this? Why are you doing these illegal things?

The petroleum subsidy was put in for a reason. It was put in to protect people, to help them to deal with the high cost of petroleum products. There are very few countries in the world that have a petroleum levy Act, Mr. Speaker. They do comparisons to other countries. They talk about the cost of gas in the Caribbean, they talk about the cost of gas in the United Kingdom, but they do not tell you that none of those countries has a Petroleum Production Levy and Subsidy Act where the oil companies are taxed on behalf of the people in order to reduce the cost of petroleum products. They just give you half the story. Typical!

Let me deal with the energy sector. Mr. Speaker, all we heard from the Minister is pie in the sky. The last Minister announced all sorts of energy projects for Trinidad and Tobago: a UAM plant; a melamine plant; a CariSal plant to create chromium dioxide; a whole pipeline of projects in the energy sector that was supposed to flow and turn the economy around. All of it announced in his 2010 budget. Not a single one of these projects has come to pass. There is no UAM 2, there is no CariSal plant. None of the projects announced by the Minister has happened. [*Desk thumping*] It has all been a figment of the Minister's imagination. A figment of his imagination!

Hon. Member: Reliance.

Mr. C. Imbert: Reliance! All of them. There is a long list that they called out in the 2010 budget. Not one! And what is happening in the meantime? Oil production has dropped from 100,000 barrels per day in May 2010 when the PNM demitted office, to 80,000 barrels a day in October 2012 with this Government in office. There has been a—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Twenty per cent less.

Mr. C. Imbert:—20 per cent reduction in oil production. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, it is not me saying so, you know. When you look at the energy experts, people like David Renwick and so on who have been writing on energy for years, he pointed out that the level of oil production in Trinidad and Tobago, in this year 2012, is the lowest it has ever been in the history of Trinidad and

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Tobago, the lowest ever, and we hear about the drilling wells. Do you know how long it takes from the time you drill a well to the time that you get into production and the time the Government earns revenue? Seven years. So if we are drilling wells in 2012, the Government will not get revenue from new oil production until the year 2019.

Hon. Member: That is right.

Mr. C. Imbert: “Who dey fooling?” Who are they fooling? We have a situation where our oil production is just dropping; there are no measures being put in by this Government to deal with our declining oil production. It is just consistently dropping day after day. The energy sector is where this Government is getting its money from, you know. If oil prices were not at high levels, we would have had a shortfall in revenue last year.

Let us go to the *Draft Estimates of Revenue*, page 5. What was the anticipated revenue from royalties in 2011? The anticipated revenue in this fiscal year 2012, from royalties on oil production, was \$1.9 billion. The actual royalties collected from the oil companies was \$2.5 billion. We got \$500 million more last year from oil production just because of enhanced oil prices. It has nothing to do with them. They are not doing anything about oil production; it is falling like a stone. They are not doing anything about gas production, it is declining. There are maintenance breakdowns and there are closures in all the gas producers throughout Trinidad. It is affecting plants like the Yara plant which is shutting down. This is what is happening in this country.

The Point Lisas industries cannot run their companies at maximum production because they are not ensured of a gas supply. That is what is going on in this country, and yet they come and tell us we turned the corner, that we stabilized the economy with a lower GDP in 2012 than it was in 2010 and 2009. “What corner yuh turn? What corner yuh turn?” You turn backwards. You have declining oil production and the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs is clueless, the Government is clueless. They have no answers. They cannot do anything about declining oil production. What they should do but they are not able, is to deal with enhanced oil recovery methods. Use carbon dioxide and other gases to stimulate secondary recovery of oil. That is what you should be doing. That is what you should have been doing for the last two and a half years, but you are not doing it. Just talking foolishness. We are coming here and all we are hearing is empty words, empty words. I went through about 100 promises of this Government over the last two years and not a single one has been implemented; not a single one!

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Let us look at this next joke about the reduction in VAT. Mr. Speaker, all basic foodstuffs are already exempt from VAT. Do you want to hear what they are? Unprocessed food—that means every single item in the market—rice, flour, milk, margarine, bread, baby formula, cheese, corned beef, fresh butter, curry, table salt, sardines, herrings, yeast, baking powder, pasta, cane sugar, coffee, mauby, orange juice. All unprocessed foods in Trinidad and Tobago are exempt from VAT—all basic foods in Trinidad and Tobago. All meat, poultry, vegetables, all exempt from VAT. This is as a result of policies of successive Governments over the last 25 years, but they want to remove VAT from 7,000 items.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Which are the 7,000?

Mr. C. Imbert: What are these 7,000 items, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Member: Read it out.

Mr. C. Imbert: What are they? Maple syrup, pancakes, pancake mix—
[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: “Pholourie mix.”

Mr. C. Imbert: “Yeah, yeah, yeah.” I had a list here. I will find it—pigtail, barbecue sauce, jellies. Let us go through it. Here is it. Pancake mixes, pancake syrups, creamers, cakes, custard power, breadcrumbs, almond essence, canned fruit, fruit cocktail, olives, pickles, french fries, processed meats, ice cream, yogurt. This is why you had one of their own people, social activist Hazel Brown, describing the Government’s VAT-free list of foods as ridiculous. Let us read from Ms. Hazel Brown:

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“Social activist Hazel Brown”—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: Hazel nut?

Hon. Member: Mr. Speaker, I want to her the contribution.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, okay. You have my protection. Go ahead.

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

“Social activist Hazel Brown has described Government’s VAT-free list of foods as ‘ridiculous’ and ‘a cheap political gimmick’.

Brown also accused the Government of being ill-advised in compiling the list and insisted that Prime Minister...Bissessar should explain the policy...behind it.”

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Said Brown:

“This is mind-boggling. It is obscene and it is ill-advised. What was Government thinking when they made up this list? Who came up with this? Are they for real?

She...called on the Government to ascertain clearly what”—foods—“poor people consumed and called for greater consultation...”

12.15 p.m.

“How much poor people really buy pancakes and maple syrup? The people who can afford these items can buy it anyway...”

Hon. Member: What is the nutritional value of that?

Mr. C. Imbert:

“I cannot buy pancake mix.”

is what she is talking about.

“I make my own jam and my pancakes with cassava flour.’

She also questioned the health value of the list, saying most of the items were encouraging people to eat unhealthily and buy imported goods rather than home-grown items.”

It is a fact. From the time you reduce the VAT on imported goods, you will have competition with local farmers and local producers of goods.

“Brown said that would result in a greater increase in lifestyle diseases and also would have a negative effect on children.

She added: ‘Why would I want to buy canned fruit cocktail and canned vegetables when there is fresh produce in the market?’

What is the Government encouraging people to buy and eat?’”

They will have to build a new hospital after people eat all of this. She said adults should not be encouraged to consume canned fruits and vegetables and parents should not be encouraged to feed that to their children.

“‘This is abuse to children,’...‘It says a lot about the Government’”—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Point Fortin, Member for Caroni South, I am hearing you all very clearly and you all are [*Interruption*]—Couva South rather—disturbing the Member who is speaking and, of course, the Hansard reporters. So could I ask you to be silent, in accordance with the Standing Orders, when a Member is on his legs? Continue, hon. Member.

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Brown was appointed by the Prime Minister in March of last year as a special envoy for women’s and children’s issues. So you have someone appointed by the present administration as a special envoy for women’s and children’s issues, describing the removal of VAT on pancake, cake, breadcrumbs and fruit cocktail as obscene. I could not have put it better myself, Mr. Speaker. [*Interruption*]

It does not matter; she is speaking truth. That is the whole point. You are not listening. She asked the question: Whose crazy idea was this? Why are you removing VAT from imported canned food? What is the benefit of that to the average man? Have you looked at the typical basket of goods that a typical household buys? Do you know what people eat? If you knew what people ate, you would not be removing VAT from maple syrup. That is the point she is making.

You know; this is one “harden” Government, you know, Mr. Speaker. It is one “harden” Government. You have two years of the Member for Tunapuna boasting about how he solved the Clico problem when in fact we have a judgment in the High Court obtained by the United Policyholders Group—and I am just going to read the conclusion; just the conclusion. This is where United Policyholders Group sued the Prime Minister and the Cabinet for implementing the Clico plan. They filed for judicial review and asked the court to reverse that evil plan. Hear what the judge had to say:

“In all the circumstances, I am satisfied that the...Applicants have raised several arguable grounds for Judicial Review with a realistic prospect of success. Accordingly, leave is granted to the Intended Applicants to file for Judicial Review.”

This is a judgment delivered on April 19, 2012.

So, the policyholders, they are not bothering with the Government and their “ole talk”. They have already won a victory in court and they are going ahead for judicial review to reverse the Clico plan and to make sure that they are paid the full amount of their moneys. But 2010/2011, the previous Minister said he solved the Clico problem; 2012, the new Minister says he will solve the Clico problem. “How yuh go solve it when dey have yuh in court? How yuh go solve it?”

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Mr. Speaker, if I can now just summarize; the budget numbers are cooked. The budget figures are fraudulent. There will be no growth in 2012 because all the Minister has done is manipulated the figures by changing the previous-year figure, making it smaller to create an illusion of growth.

His own document shows that there will be no growth in agriculture; there will be no growth in the petroleum sector; and there will be no growth in manufacturing. Yet he has manufactured, out of thin air—pulled out of a hat like Houdini—a projected economic growth of 1.2 per cent. Yet when we look at what this Government has done over the last three years, every single year, they have revised the budget figures to make a nonsense out of budget arithmetic.

So the Minister's 1.2 per cent—

Hon. Member: Shameful.

Mr. C. Imbert: Yes, is just shameful; it is a sleight of hand. You cannot tell me the economy went so low; “it gone way, way down since you come in and now it go creep back up by 1 per cent and you boasin’ about dat”, when the GDP in 2012 is going to be lower than it was when the PNM demitted office? It is just empty words, Mr. Speaker.

I call on the Minister to explain why, when the true cost of premium gas is \$4.73, he has imposed a price of \$5.75 on the population. Explain that! Explain what you have done with the \$1 in subsidy paid by the oil companies, which is supposed to be given back to consumers to reduce the price of gasoline; and when you increase the price of super and the price of diesel in the coming months, which you say you are going to do, explain what you are going to do about the petroleum Act. Are you going to abolish the Petroleum Production Levy and Subsidy Act?

So, Mr. Speaker, this budget is a deception. The budget arithmetic is bogus; the measures are ridiculous; and the Minister should be ashamed of himself.

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

Mr. Speaker: Before I call on the next speaker, I want to take this opportunity once again, without interrupting Members when they are on their legs, to remind Members that hon. Members of this House are not dishonest. [*Interruption*] Not you; it was across the floor. So I want to indicate that Members of this honourable House are not dishonest; Members of this honourable House do not speak foolishness. No Member comes to this House to speak foolishness so I want to ask Members that, with your alertness, we together will determine whether our Standing Orders are being breached or violated.

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May I again remind Members to be very careful. Of course, context and nature are always critical when we use language. When you refer to Members' speaking as foolishness, that context is wrong and, therefore, it is unparliamentary and I so rule that the word "foolishness" is unparliamentary, and Members are not permitted in the future to use that word in this honourable House.

The hon. Member for Chaguanas West, Minister of National Security. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Jack Warner): Mr. Speaker, I had not planned to spend any time on the Member for Diego Martin North/East. I had planned to spend most of my time on the Member for Diego Martin West and the Member for Laventille West, in that order; and then to tell this House briefly of some of the initiatives and measures which the Government intends to put in place in the fight against crime.

I will make a slight change in my plan and I will go after some of the issues raised by the last speaker, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, and then I will briefly mention the Member for Laventille West and then the Member for Diego Martin West and I shall have a healthy session.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin North/East began in sound and fury: Not done! Not done! Not done! He said over 100, the same kind of maths they got for the petition—25,000; so he said he called 100.

I do not have as much time to go through all of the things which, in their time, were not done and specifically which, under him, were not done. [*Interruption*] I sat here; I listened to you; I did not say a single word, Member.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, I would protect you.

Hon. J. Warner: Mr. Speaker, his memory is short—not surprisingly. Let me, of course, remind him of some things which his Government did not do.

Fifty-six years ago, his Government promised to build a highway to Point Fortin.

Dr. Moonilal: Not done!

Hon. J. Warner: Not done 56 years ago, but begun by this Government. [*Desk thumping*] In 2003, his Government promised to give lands to the Caroni workers, having shut down Caroni—not done! It was done by this Government. [*Desk thumping*]

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Fourteen years ago, they promised to build a fire station in Mayaro—not done! This Government started it. [*Desk thumping*]

In 2005, they said they would take the Navet trunk main, 29 kilometres long and, of course, carry the main to the deep south. That was 2005—not done, Mr. Speaker; this Government did it. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, if you remember clearly, when you were going up to the east, to Mayaro and Sangre Grande and so, you had mounds and mounds of aggregate on the side of the highway. For six years, they promised to complete the dualling of the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway, from O'Meara to Santa Rosa. For six years, not done and worse yet, they appealed a case that we could not have been won in any case and we paid \$38 million for a case that we could have paid \$5 million for. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Diego Martin North/East and Member for Diego Martin Central, I think both of you all spoke and both of you all demanded the attention of this honourable House. I want to protect the Member for Chaguanas West and Minister of National Security. If both of you all do not want to listen, you can exit the Chamber, but I do not think it is fair for you all to carry on a conversation while another Member is on his legs. Even if you want to do it briefly, I have no objection; but it cannot be a running commentary. You are disturbing the House and you are creating disorder, so I ask you to pay attention to the hon. Member and if you do not want to do so, kindly exit the Chamber, but do not disturb. [*Interruption*]

Member for Diego Martin North/East, you are speaking while I am speaking.

Mr. Imbert: I am so sorry.

Mr. Speaker: I am asking you, particularly, to be silent and just listen. Thank you very much. Hon. Member for Chaguanas West, continue please.

Hon. J. Warner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and thank you for your protection. Whenever I speak after him, he normally walks out of the Chamber and, therefore, I guess it is difficult for him to sit and listen; but thank you again, Mr. Speaker.

I will continue. That highway, which at the time was under him as Minister of Works and Transport, took six years, more than aggregate—not done—and that was from O'Meara to Santa Rosa. That was done under this Government. [*Desk thumping*]

The Scarborough Hospital, you heard the Member for Barataria/San Juan, began in 2003 during their time. At the time the estimated cost was \$150 million. The cost escalated to \$735 million and was only opened in 2012 under this Government. It was done under this Government. [*Desk thumping*]

Public servants' wages—all those contracts and workers and so on; those workers' wages were allowed to languish for years at a time of plenty; at a time when they hosted CHOGM and all kinds of international conferences—those big conferences. They built big buildings. They did not pay the workers their salaries. They paid public servants. That was done under this Government. To come here and to “flim and to flam” as if this Government is impotent while theirs worked is totally untrue.

12.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the Member talked about the National Oncology Centre. That centre was launched in November 2005 by Minister of Health, John Rahael.

Hon. Member: Oooh!

Hon. J. Warner: I say again the Member for Diego Martin North/East's memory is very short, and that is understandable. The fact is this; the PNM never completed it, Mr. Speaker; we are now doing it.

The Shouter Baptist School on the highway; the Baptists have been asking for a school. They refused to give them the school. That school was done and completed by this Government, thanks to the Minister of Education. [*Desk thumping*] In fact, under them, they were closing schools. They closed the Biche High School for 11 years. When they left office, in fact, when we pushed them out of office, we opened the Biche High School. To this day, not one child has gotten sick. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I want to take some things which come directly under the remit of the last speaker. Because the Maraval roundabout, which was completed by this Government, was begun by them and under him, took 11 years. [*Crosstalk*] Eleven years to build the Maraval roundabout!

Dr. Moonilal: What?

Hon. J. Warner: It was done by this Government in nine months. [*Desk thumping*] Traffic wardens—[*Crosstalk*] Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Leader of the Opposition, I am appealing to you—not you in terms of you speaking—as Leader of the Opposition to appeal to the Member for

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Diego Martin North/East. You know the reason why I am doing that? I do not want to ask him to exit the Chamber. I am asking you to ask him to control himself. This is the second time I am on my legs asking the Member for Diego Martin North/East to listen in silence and if he does not want to do so, exit the Chamber. I cannot be rising all the time because he is interrupting and he is disregarding the authority of the Chair. I am appealing to the Leader of the Opposition to make sure that I not rise a third time. Continue, hon. Member for Chaguanas West.

Hon. J. Warner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Moonilal: Rise a third time!

Hon. J. Warner: Mr. Speaker, the PNM Government had planned to institute traffic wardens in this country.

Dr. Moonilal: Send him to the naughty boy corner.

Hon. J. Warner: For 18 years the PNM Government said, they bringing traffic wardens.

Dr. Moonilal: “Eh-heh”

Hon. J. Warner: When we came into office, it came in 18 months. [*Desk thumping*]

It is all good to come here and to “flim and flam” as I said, Mr. Speaker. I go further, one of their strongest constituencies has been Arima. For 28 years they could not build the Mount Pleasant Bridge—for 28 years! When this Government came the Mount Pleasant Bridge became a reality and was built, done. [*Desk thumping*] To come here with a list of things and say 100 things have not been done. Many of those things which he listed, many of them are in process, they are being done now.

The Sugar Heritage Museum for example, the secretariat has been formed 2011. That committee is headed by Dr. Brinsley Samaroo, and they are working as well. We have, of course, again, what I would call the mentorship programme under my Ministry, Mr. Speaker. These things are being done. So, to come here and talk and say it has not been done, is not true. [*Interruption*]

The St. Helena bypass, and the Couva/Preysal interchange were things which they promised to do which we did in record time. The list goes on and on and on. Let me tell you what was done by them? A few things! You know what was done? A rapid rail study for \$485 million in a box, under a desk I used to occupy. That was done.

Dr. Moonilal: “It was a peerhaa.”

Hon. J. Warner: The MV *Su* too, that they bought, that never sailed one day, that, done. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Moonilal: The boat that never float!

Hon. J. Warner: Mr. Speaker, I will come back to this just now. Mastrofski Report, \$80 million.

Dr. Moonilal: That?

Hon. J. Warner: Ah coming to this just now, \$80 million. Major Ross report, \$3.1 million, fight against crime.

Dr. Moonilal: That?

Hon. J. Warner: To fight crime, two reports, Mr. Speaker, \$86 million, and crime soared. That is done! The list goes on and on. I am saying therefore, to come here, and to posture and pretend, and to behave, of course, as if this is some Government that does not achieve its objectives, is not true.

You know something; he talks about integrated campus in Tobago. That has been the business of a land issue and year after year because the land issue had not been resolved. The appropriate Minister will talk more about that. My whole aim is to show the level of hypocrisy in terms of the last speaker.

In fact, the last speaker comes with a list of statistics from the CTO. He says that in Trinidad and Tobago, the tourism number is 388,000. He says that in Jamaica, the figure is 1.9 million and so on. He does not even give the reason for that. You know something, one of the reasons why tourism here has been so low, and why Jamaica—[*Inaudible*—]—was crime. We had reached at a point in time where the murder rate here was over 500. People were not coming here anymore. That was under them. If even—I want to be generous and to bypass that—let me take the very same book which he read from, and where he showed a decline in tourism and airline arrivals; a decline in cruise ship arrivals. If one was to be fair, all he had to do was to turn the page. Here is where he spoke. [*Holds up book*] On this page here, all you have to do is turn the page and this page says, in the first quarter of fiscal 2012 the number of persons employed rose to 596,100 from 578,000 in the fourth quarter of the fiscal. That is all, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Moonilal: Aah!

Hon. J. Warner: So show the country where the employment rate rose. The same book! Almost the same page! [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Moonilal: “Why yuh do that?”

Hon. J. Warner: But that is the nature of the Member for Diego Martin North/East.

I heard the last speaker as well as the Leader of the Opposition from Diego Martin West almost using verbatim, words alleged to be from Mariano Browne and Lester Henry. Let me read some of it for you. I will tell you why I am doing this.

Dr. Moonilal: Mariano Browne and Lester Henry are the two experts.

Hon. J. Warner: I will tell you why I am doing this.

Dr. Moonilal: “Da is de expert ‘Maureeno’ Browne!”

Hon. J. Warner: Mr. Speaker, in the *Express* on Tuesday October 04, a package without a plan—listen, of course, Sen. Dr. Lester Henry of the People’s National Movement. He criticized the fiscal measures saying:

“Howai’s first and the Government’s second biggest—”—budget— “was a package...”

I thought it was the biggest. I thought he said biggest last time? Anyhow:

“—second biggest budget—”—“was a package that came ‘from the same people who were crying squandermania’...”

Those words sound familiar. I heard that used in Belmont a couple days ago. He says:

“To continue in this way...even with fiscal space...is”—somewhat— “worrying.”

Lester Henry! Listen to Mariano Browne, former Minister of Trade and Minister in the Ministry of Finance. Another guest speaker.

“He questioned”—listen good!—” where the US \$3 billion a year in energy investment was coming from—adding, that the biggest flow in the budget was that it was a package without a plan; same familiar words—“he cautioned against what the budget document suggested would be unprecedented levels of energy investment...”

I mean, the least one could do is to quote your sources and say those are not my words, they are Mariano Browne’s. They are not my words. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Please, Member for Diego Martin North/East.

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Hon. J. Warner: They are not my words, they are from Lester Henry. Let me fast-track quickly. [*Crosstalk*] I went up on the “Net”—you see this is a Government that put a lawyer as Minister of Finance the last time, you know. The same lawyer who went at the break of dawn to remove her money from Clico, you know. This is the Government that does that, a lawyer as Minister of Finance.

Dr. Moonilal: Yeah!

Hon. J. Warner: This is a Government that says a man could be Minister of National Security, all he needs is a level head and common sense you know, and they appoint him as Minister of National Security for nine months. This is a Government that believed that you can be an engineer and be a Minister of Energy at the same time, and be a Minister of Finance at the same time.

I went down on my Google and I checked the biography, according to the Parliament website, of the Member for Diego Martin North/East. He owns a Masters degree in Maritime Civil Engineering from the University of Manchester England, and a Master of Laws Degree in Construction Law and Arbitration. Mr. Speaker, nothing about finance. [*Laughter and crosstalk*] Now, I ask you to tell me how do you put that against somebody who is the present Minister of Finance, who has a Bachelors degree in Economics—

Dr. Moonilal: What?

Hon. J. Warner:—who is a certified management accountant and is a Fellow of the Institute of Banking of Trinidad and Tobago. Even if this was bad, how do you, of course, weigh what has been said by the last speaker against the Member for Tunapuna, Mr. Dookeran? Mr. Dookeran is a world renowned economist. [*Desk thumping*] I am coming to hear—

Dr. Moonilal: You got a tutorial—

Hon. J. Warner: An engineer—“I doh want to be ting”, but I have nothing to show where his records as a—“let meh say nothing eh”—because you see I was going to Grenada, I was going to talk about wall fall down and so on, but I would not say that. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, I am saying that as far as we here are concerned, Minister Howai is very competent in his field. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Dookeran—very competent in his field. If even by chance they were not, listen to what other people are saying, people who should know better. October 02 headline:

“Sando business body gives Howai thumbs-up.”

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President of the San Fernando Business Association Daphne Bartlett says yesterday's budget was good."—viewing the budget as good and so on; she is—"pleased with plans to have an aquatic center and"—so on and so on. "Da is Daphne Bartlett", the President of the San Fernando Business Association.

Mr. Speaker, go to AmCham on October 02 in the *Express*. In case some people do not know what AmCham means, I will say what AmCham means. AmCham means the American Chamber of Commerce. They said:

"The American Chamber of Commerce has commended Government on the country's positive macroeconomic indicators coming out of the"—budget—"2012/2013..."

"We also find the estimates of oil and gas prices in the national budget to be reasonably conservative,"—

What they want again, Mr. Speaker? The American Chamber of Commerce, they are saying:

"We also find the estimates of oil and gas prices, in the national budget to be reasonably conservative,"

Minister, you might need this for another place, you better hold that. NATUC, they, of course, praised the budget. They welcomed the labour plans in the *Guardian* September 03, 2012. Even those letters in the newspapers—one ring out, Williams, happy with Howai! Another one, of course, Jeewan Jaimungal: At last the economy in good hands. Another one, J Danraj: TT on the rise.

But the Member for Diego Martin North/East, an engineer of some repute, of course, says the budget is bad. An engineer against an economist, both of whom tried and trusted. I am the proudest man today to sit between these two men. Proudest man today! [*Desk thumping*] I believe I can learn.

12.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, you know, at the end of the day, we have been asked the question by the last speaker: why is the Minister charging the people of Trinidad and Tobago \$5.75 for gas? The Minister of Finance and the Economy would respond in due course, I imagine. He said: what kind of Government is this? This is a Government that is here, and you are an ex-government that is there. He said: what kind of Government is this? Why are we punishing people like this? I want to laugh! "Look who is talking nah!" Why are we punishing people like this?

Mr. Speaker, let me tell this House today, the price of premium gasoline without subsidy would have been \$6.21.

Mr. Imbert: Not true!

Hon. J. Warner: The most we are charging the public is \$5.75 as against \$6.21. Mr. Speaker, without subsidy, super would have been \$6.48 and diesel \$6.38. Who is fooling whom? Who is punishing whom? Your Government has punished this country for over 10 years. [*Desk thumping*] That is why you are where you are forever and we are where we are forever. [*Desk thumping*] He came with some bogus figures. It is the same way he went to Biche and say Biche has “deoun and lagahoo”. That is “deoun and lagahoo maths”; that is “deoun and lagahoo arithmetic”, not for this House and, definitely, not for the Minister of Finance and the Economy.

And then he says very patronizingly, why do you all not drill wells? He said if we had drilled wells and used carbon dioxide and recovering materials, Union Hall would have had gas today. If you all had drilled, we would have had oil today. Why do you all not drill he says, but why did they not drill? If they had drilled, then we would have had it today. He is admitting to the fact that if we drill, not until 2019, will we know what is happening. If they had drilled when they were there using the same carbon dioxide and the same recovering materials, today we would be better off, but they did not do it. I would not talk, because I am quite sure the Minister of Finance and the Economy would answer him.

He comes here, this quasi-lawyer [*Crosstalk*] and says that we have broken the petroleum Act. It is illegal and so on, and we are wicked people. Mr. Speaker, in 2008—

Mr. Imbert: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 33(4).

Mr. Speaker: Continue to speak.

Hon. J. Warner: In 2008, the People’s National Movement Government increased the price of premium. Did they not break the Act then? [*Laughter*] Mr. Speaker, did they not break the law then? We just build on the price which they put in 2008. So, the price in 2008, today, we put a little more. That is all we did. So, if they did not break the law then, how could we be breaking it now? That is the hypocrisy of the man! [*Desk thumping*] That is the hypocrisy that they want! [*Desk thumping*] And the list goes on and on, but then again, he ends by saying the budget numbers are cooked, the budget numbers are fraudulent.

I would just end by saying, if they are cooked, and if they are fraudulent, as the last speaker has said, the public would judge when they compare the competence of him to say so, vis-à-vis the Minister of Finance and the Economy.

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The public would judge when they compare his competence to say so, vis- à-vis, Minister Winston Dookeran. I leave the rest to the public. They will be the best person to judge who, of course, has the competence to make that statement.

Now, I go to the Member for Laventille West. Mr. Speaker, I would not stay long on the Member for Laventille West, because I am still in a state of shock. I cannot understand how the Member for Laventille West could come to this House, as the MP for Laventille West, and fight to take a murder from Beetham Estate to put in Laventille, and to say that, of course, Laventille had a murder.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what is so wrong and bad about this? At a time when every constituency is boasting about its scholars, its teachers and its professionals, he wants to take a murder from Beetham and say, “I had a murder in Laventille”.

Dr. Moonilal: He moved the body!

Hon. J. Warner: Mr. Speaker, what is even worse—

Hon. Member: “He moving around with corpse.”

Hon. J. Warner:—on October 03, 2012, “Warner vows to step up fight against crime”. A picture is here in the *Guardian* dated October 03, 2012 where the AG and I are giving a gift to a young girl, Chantelle Jacob, for her success in the recent CXC exams during my visit to Trou Macaque, Laventille yesterday. Looking on from left are the AG, Anand Ramlogan and the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Mervyn Richardson. We went to Laventille to tell that girl congrats, “take this gift Miss, you have done well”, but her MP is saying, the murder did not happen in Beetham, it happened in Laventille, and denigrating a whole constituency. It is unthinkable and it is unpardonable as well.

Mr. Speaker, that might not be so bad. Do you know what is happening? When we were in Trou Macaque last Tuesday, we received a message from the media telling us that the people and the MP from the area said that there was a murder in Laventille. I had to call the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Mervyn Richardson, to go on the PA system to tell the people who were there, do not be dismayed, Laventille had no murder. I know there are those in this House who would be happy if the crime rate does not go down. There are those who would be happy if it goes up and up and up.

Let me give you some figures. Mervyn Richardson is the Deputy Commissioner of Police for Crime. I would tell you the last eight days. October 01—now, every morning he gives me a report of the crime in the country and

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what is happening and so on, especially in the hotspots. I would take this month, but it could go as far as September 09, 2012.

On October 01, 2012 he said:

A pleasant morning all and God's peace. October 1, there were no murders or serious wounding as a result of shooting for the past 24 hours.

That is music to our ears. I guess it is grief on that side.

On October 02, 2012, again, Mervyn Richardson says:

Dear Sir,

A pleasant good morning to all and God's richest blessing. There was one murder over the past 24 hours which occurred in Tobago.

Again, even one murder is bad. I guess if some people could have taken the Tobago murder and put it in Laventille they would have put it too, but it cannot be done, but that was good for us—the 2nd, one murder in Tobago.

On October 03, 2012:

Blessings and God's peace. There were two murders over the past 24 hours both in the Port of Spain area, nothing in Laventille.

October 04, 2012:

Greetings and peace. There have been no murders or serious reports of wounding due to shootings over the past 24 hours.

No murders over the past 24 hours! When the PNM was in office, that was unheard of. In fact, the Leader of the Opposition, when he went on his platform talking to a few hundred people which I would come to just now, said there is a murder every four hours. That is what he was saying. He was revelling and telling people crime is out of control and the country has fallen into pieces, murder left, right and centre, but the facts are facts, you cannot run from them. That is the October 04, 2012.

October 05, 2012: There were no murders, however, there were two woundings as a result of shooting in the Morvant district and Diego Martin.

October 06, 2012:

A pleasant and productive day to you. There were no murders for the past 24 hours. However, there are three major incidents that I wish to bring to your attention and he lists them.

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October 07, 2012:

“Good morning and peace to you. There was one murder, a Chinese national at Barataria, for the past 24 hours.

One murder again is too many—by a Chinese national in Barataria for the past 24 hours.

October 08, 2012—which is today:

Greetings and peace to you. Over the past 24 hours, there was one murder in Northern Division not involving the use of firearms, but nothing in Laventille and the other hotspots.

Mr. Speaker, on this side, that is music to our ears; on that side, that is grief. [*Desk thumping*] I have never heard in my life in any country anywhere—not even in Saddam time in Iraq—that a people or a Government will grieve, because there are no murders. I am ashamed.

Let me give you some data now. So far Laventille has had 81 murders. The Member, of course, who wanted to give them the Beetham murder would have made it 82, “but he ain’t get it there”. The last murder occurred on September 09, 2012 in Laventille. Never before in this country’s history that has ever happened! I did not have Mastrofski and I did not have Cross. I did not have, of course, two Canadians. What we had were people who were committed to change and I want to go there [*Desk thumping*] and to publicly commend the people of Laventille. [*Desk thumping*] I publicly commend them.

Mr. Speaker, I look toward the day—I would come to that when I come to talk about my crime initiatives—when, of course, murder in this country will be a thing of the past. It may be a long way off, but it is worth looking towards. Laventille had 81 murders, and the last one was on September 09, 2012.

Four Roads, Diego Martin, another hotspot, 10 murders to date. The last one was on September 09, 2012. Diego Martin, West End, 14 murders to date. The last one occurred on September 10, 2012. In Carenage, four murders to date. The last one was on June 16, 2012. Of course, I do not know if everybody knows about that, but they should know now that even in Carenage crime is down. [*Desk thumping*] And you are coming here to tell me that Laventille had a murder. I was so ashamed, I could not believe it. In Chaguanas West I am looking for scholarships for people and giving them books and bags and so on, and the MP is looking for murder. [*Laughter*] Shameful!

In Tobago, there were four murders. The last murder occurred on September 20, 2012. Doubt these figures! They came from the police this morning. I waited until this morning, because do you know why? I know they were hoping and praying that something would have happened over the weekend. Nothing happened so I got this this morning and you come here to talk about a murder in Laventille.

I go further to tell him, a talk does go on the net with some guy Phillip Alexander who writes for the *Mirror*—I would come to him just now too and Fixin T&T—he said that the Government and the Minister, in particular, we are paying the gang leaders \$10,000 a person, up to \$20,000 not to commit murders. These things go all over the world.

The Minister of Tourism is “katching his nennen” to bring people here, and we have people here who are bent on destruction in this country giving it a bad name, and writing letters all over the place to international organizations. Mr. Speaker, you see where I have this pin here [*Holds pin on jacket*] this pin, this here, means something for me; national pride, national pride. [*Desk thumping*] And men would write thing all over the world to talk this country bad in the worst possible way. I would come to that, again, just now, not now. While that is happening, the Minister has to bring people here, bring guests here and diversify the economy. It cannot be right. I would come to that just now when I come to talk about the Member for Diego Martin West.

So, therefore, the point I am making, therefore, is that it is difficult for me to sit here and listen to the other side. Everything is bent on doom and destruction; everything is bent to bring this country down by the “hook and/or the crook”, and if they cannot do it one way, they would do it the next and that is wrong. So, before my time run out, let me go on to the Member for Diego Martin West.

Mr. Speaker, I listened to the Member for Diego Martin West when he spoke on this budget. He spoke last Friday on the budget and I listened to him. When he spoke, I saw hate; I saw bitterness; I saw acrimony; I saw animosity; I saw a man completely out of control; and I saw a raging bull. [*Desk thumping*]

Those words which were said by Mr. Patrick Manning on October 21, 2009 are as relevant today as they were then [*Desk thumping*] and that Member, for Diego Martin West, wants to lead this country, he wants to become Prime Minister—another “wannabee”, but I would come to that just now. I am saying that Mr. Manning’s words—and God I hope he gets better quickly to bring some sanity back to this organization—are as relevant today as they ever were, Mr. Speaker.

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1.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, let me first say, I want to thank the Minister of Finance and the Economy because I believe that what he gave this House, this country, was a well balanced budget. Mr. Speaker, this is not a budget for haters; this is a budget for dreamers; this is not a budget for people who wish this country doom and gloom; this is a budget for sustained growth and development. I also want to make the point that—in fact, before I say that, let me also thank Mr. Dookeran, the Member for Tunapuna, for his tutorial in economics—his lesson. [*Desk thumping*] I sat here and listened to Mr. Dookeran and I thought I was at university, I was so moved—it was a continuity. He explained the fiscal policies which he had set and how the present Minister of Finance and the Economy is building upon them. It was pretty to listen to him, contrary to the last speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, therefore, I am saying that they may preach doom and gloom, they may say all things negative about us on this side, but I want to read another quotation. This time I am going to the *Bible*. I want to tell the other side that no weapon formed against this Government shall prosper [*Desk thumping*] and every tongue that shall rise against this Government, in judgment, God shall condemn.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, you could sit here and listen to them, speaker after speaker, there is nothing that we could say here could change their mind. There is nothing that we could say here could change how they already plan to vote. They plan to vote not even hearing us. Without even having heard us, done already know how they voting. Mr. Speaker, he referred during his contribution, the Member for Diego Martin West, referred to the Member for St. Joseph, Mr. Volney. And he said, Mr. Volney—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I just want to guide you. We do not mention Members of Parliament by name, but by their electoral district or constituency or ministerial office.

Hon. J. Warner: Thank you, Sir. He spoke about the Member for St. Joseph and the way he is sitting. Let me tell this honourable House that the Member for St. Joseph is sitting where he sits without being a raging bull. Mr. Speaker, I want to also say, without being vilified by his Prime Minister or anybody on this side, without being ostracized by his colleagues. I recall a time when the Member for Diego Martin West sat across there and nobody spoke with him.

Dr. Moonilal: Ramesh had to extend time.

Hon. J. Warner: Mr. Speaker—I am coming to that—to get more time to speak, it was Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj had to move a Motion to give him more to speak, of the 27 persons here, not one spoke to his favour. I was looking at the tape last night where Mr. Manning spoke about the raging bull, and behind Mr. Manning, sitting just behind him where Mrs. Khan is now there, was Port of Spain South.

Mr. Sharma: “She breakdown the table.”

Hon. J. Warner: I had never seen a person thump the table so in my life—

Dr. Moonilal: “Needed ah carpenter.”

Hon. J. Warner:—when Mr. Manning was speaking. I was saying, “Madam, is that you?” Today, what has changed? Nothing has changed. So, therefore, I am saying, to look at the Member for St. Joseph and to try to ridicule and mamaguy him, we on this side, we “doh” do that. We “doh” do that because in life what goes around comes around, Mr. Speaker, and therefore all I am saying to him, as far as we are concerned—in fact, last Friday I saw a picture where the Member for Couva North hugged him and kissed him and embraced him, and I had done the same, many a time. I have gone to his home and had a beverage with him a couple of times—so what?

So to try to cause any “kuchur” or division between us here makes no sense, and I read somewhere where somebody wants to have election in St. Joseph. There are two things they would not see—that and God face. [*Desk thumping*] Those are the two things they would not see. So, they could do what they want—Mr. Volney—sorry—the Member for St. Joseph is made of sterner stuff.

Having said so, Mr. Speaker, I want to move quickly to the point where I remember, you know, as I said, that no one wanted to talk to the Member for Diego Martin West, I want to remind him, even when he was ostracized, I was told by Gary Hunt, the former Minister of Sport, not to even give him a football ticket. Let him say now. I called him and say, “Gary Hunt cannot stop me from giving you a football ticket” and I carried it for him.

Dr. Moonilal: Today he said you undermining—

Hon. J. Warner: So, today he say I undermining his security. I will come to that just now. I do not understand people, something has to be wrong. And he said I undermining football—I will come to that just now. But he forgot when Hunt say, “Doh give him ah football ticket”, I carried it for him. Let him tell this House, now.

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Mr. Speaker, in his contribution, the Member for Diego Martin West said that 31,000 persons applied for SRP jobs, and therefore he has put the figure of 4.6 per cent unemployment, because if that was the case, he would never have 31,000 persons looking for SRP jobs. Oh gosh, something has to be wrong. Mr. Speaker, does it mean that 31,000 persons were unemployed? Does it mean that they want something better for themselves and therefore the SRP is now being viewed as a better opportunity for them, as such? Why take those figures and say that the Minister has retorted 4.6 per cent because if not, I mean, something has to be wrong. I call that flawed thinking. In fact, I call that “donkey logic”.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, more and more I listened to the contribution of the Member for Diego Martin West, I got the impression that the Member has a contempt for anything resembling facts, truth and reality. In fact, if ever there was an Opposition Leader who seemed unequipped and ill-prepared for a debate, the Member for Diego Martin West was that person. He fumbled through, he read badly, he talked worse than I am doing at the moment, and I am saying that something has to be wrong—as if he was not properly prepared, and it is always bad to get a speech mere minutes before you have to read it. It is always bad, but then again Lester Henry is a busy man, and so too is Mariano Browne. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, in his attack on the budget, the Member for Diego Martin West said that he referred to education and said, I quote:

The PNM has had a sustained approach to support education.

I want to say it again.

The PNM has had a sustained approach to support education.

If that were the case, why it took the present Prime Minister, when she was Minister of Education to say—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Chaguanas West and Minister of National Security 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: Before you rise, hon. Member, I think this is a good time when we could take lunch.

Hon. Member: Let him finish.

Mr. Speaker: No! No! I would like to suggest we take lunch at this time. Hon. Members, at this time this sitting is now suspended until 2.10 p.m.

1.09 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

2.10 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Chaguanas West, Minister of National Security.

Hon. J. Warner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had planned to raise several issues here today, but due to the time constraint, I shall just raise three of those before I tackle the anti-crime fighting measures. Mr. Speaker, one of issues I had planned to raise concerned the Annestine Sealey Commission of Enquiry Report, which has been discussed here at length by several of us here in Parliament, but not in a way that pleases me to some extent. Mr. Speaker, therefore, I would be saying to this House today, that I will ask the Cabinet on Thursday to make what before was a secret document to put it as a parliamentary paper before this House at [*Desk thumping*] some suitable time.

The public must see this document, and I want just to read one section from this report on page 28. This is Annestine Sealey, Commission of Enquiry Report on the Landate issue with regard to materials removed from the Scarborough Hospital. It was laid in Parliament November 2005, I believe, but I will check and see, and if not, then I will ask that it be laid if it was not laid.

But, Mr. Speaker, there is one section here which says:

“Nevertheless there was an abundance of evidence that materials and machinery were removed from the Scarborough Hospital site to the Land Date Development from 1st October, 2003 to 16th October, 2004.”

On page 29, it says:

“The Commission is of the view that having regard to his ministerial position, whatever part Dr. Rowley played, it displayed a total lack of discretion and the Commission advises that he should be more sanguine in his relations in matters concerning the development of the project as further issues of impropriety may be raised especially because he had a beneficial interest to which he has admitted.”

And it goes on.

I say this, Mr. Speaker, insofar as, when I checked last with the AG, he was still very much following this report, and he said to me that the report is not dead,

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it is open. So, I am telling “Mr. Integrity”, as he calls himself, the Member for Diego Martin West, that this issue is not dead.

Dr. Moonilal: “He say he clean?”

Hon. J. Warner: He is clean, like a whistle. Mr. Speaker, I go to another issue and that concerns Tobago. A lot of hullabaloo had been raised here about Tobago being starved for funds. Mr. Speaker, it was shown by subsequent speakers on this side that is not the case, and that Tobago got 4.09 per cent by law as it were, and after you check the other Ministries, it will well surpass 5 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, I find it difficult to be able to be asking for money for Tobago, as the Member for Diego Martin West has been asking, and he is not asking Tobago to account for the money given to them. It is over four years now Tobago has been unable to account for the money given to them by the Ministry of Finance, and yet Tobago House of Assembly is swimming in a sea of corruption, which I shall discuss on the platform on Saturday in Tobago, [*Desk thumping*] because I do not want to come here to get any parliamentary privilege, as it were, to talk, but in Tobago on Saturday I shall talk.

Mr. Speaker, there is one point I want to raise here concerning a property in Plymouth. A property in Plymouth was originally owned by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, through the Regional Health Act, it was then vested in the Tobago Regional Health Authority and, by extension, therefore, became the property of Tobago House of Assembly. On this piece of land which is overlooking the Caribbean Sea, blue waters, soft breeze, this piece of land—if you see it—the Tobago House of Assembly excised a lot from this land that would have belonged to the Government, was vested in the Regional Health Authority, as such, the THA, they cut a piece, a lot, and they gave it to one of their party associates, Irma Eastman—and they give her the lot for 99 years at \$50 a year.

2.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, that is \$4 a month, that is one “doubles”. So all she asked for is one “doubles” she pays in worth, and she pays that per month for one of the best choice lots in Tobago. When I talk on Saturday I hope all Tobagonians listen, because this thing must stop. And to come here year after year and to posture and to pander as if Tobago is being overlooked. Tobago never had it so good as it has it under this Government. They never had it so good. [*Desk thumping*] That must stop. The corruption must stop, but I will say more about that then. So I will not pursue that.

The other matter I want to raise here today concerns the issue of security. You heard the Member for Diego Martin West say that I compromised his security, how of course he thought to even tell his wife and how he said to me, “Keep your distance.” [*In a deep voice*] I was shocked. Mr. Speaker, what are the facts? [*Crosstalk*]

I got a brief that the Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Diego Martin West, had a death threat. As he himself said, death threats are nothing new to him. In fact, since he left Tobago as a young man, he left under threats I imagine. [*Laughter*] He said that he has had several threats. I felt that the thing to do as Minister of National Security was to call me and say, “Listen, colleague, you have a death threat, we shall look into it”, and so on and so on, “with the appropriate authorities, but I have heard about it. I too have had this, nothing to worry about.” So I called him, but I did not get him.

Mr. Speaker, I was talking at Trou Macaque the very same afternoon. In Trou Macaque, where they have said is another hot spot, about 12 persons were there, and they had just said to the Deputy Commissioner of Police that there were two murders in Trou Macaque. At that time I asked the Deputy Commissioner of Police to tell the audience that there was no murder in Trou Macaque, there was no murder in Laventille, unless you dragged the body from the Beetham. I said, “Deputy Commissioner of Police, tell the audience what is being bandied about, I am advised by the PNM in Laventille is not true”, which he did.

When he finished, I said, “Listen, what you heard is not true.” “Let me tell you something, that people these days are throwing death threats left, right and centre.” I said that Basdeo Panday had gotten death threats, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar got death threats and Mr. Robinson got death threats. I said down to Patrick Manning got death threats. I said all of us, the AG and all got death threats. But I said, “We shall not be cowed by these death threats, if they are true.”

To make sure I said so, let me read for you from the newspaper. Wednesday, October 03, *Newsday*:

“Death threat for Rowley”

What did I say?

“National Security Minister Jack Warner yesterday confirmed that Opposition People’s National Movement...leader Dr. Keith Rowley has received a death threat from persons unknown.

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Delivering the feature address at a...meeting in Trou Macaque, Laventille, Warner said he was advised that Dr. Rowley, who is also the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West, had recently received a threat against his life', a threat which the police are actively investigating.

'I am advised today that the Opposition Leader has got a death threat.

I have been so advised. And while that is not in the remit of the Ministry of National Security nor of course is it within my immediate jurisdiction, I can say that the police are investigating the matter closely and they will deal with'...'—the matter in due course.

"However, Warner said as a Member of Parliament, such threats ought not to deter any MP from doing his/her national duties.

'The Opposition Leader has gotten a death threat, the Attorney General...has gotten several death threats and I myself have received several. But I tell you today, as far as I am concerned those death threats will not cower us.'"—from doing our duty.

Mr. Speaker, tell me in God's name, what have I said to take that vitriolic attack from the Leader of the Opposition, "Keep your distance?" [*Speaking loudly*] The company I put him in, Mrs. Persad-Bissessar, Basdeo Panday, Manning, the AG, I thought that I was putting him in an elite group of people that received death threats, and telling him that he has no cause to worry.

He comes here in his raging bull attitude, "Keep your distance." [*Speaking in deep voice*] Well, I want to tell him, I will send a message for him: I will keep my security distance; I will keep my social distance, but one thing, I am saying here publicly, I shall also keep my political distance, because that is not a way one who wants to be a political leader, a Prime Minister, behaves.

He wants to be Prime Minister of this country. No Prime Minister behaves that way. He wants to be Prime Minister—so Mrs. Persad-Bissessar hosted a reception for Independence in Woodford Square, he hosted one in Balisier House. Mrs. Persad-Bissessar gives an address to the nation for Independence, he gives one also. But when flood in Diego Martin, and Mrs. Persad-Bissessar puts on her boots and goes to Diego Martin, he goes to the US to play golf. Yes, he goes to the US to play golf.

Dr. Moonilal: Golf?

Hon. J. Warner: G-O-L-F. He wants to be a leader. That is the man who is their leader. Last Friday we are here in this Parliament, the highest forum in the

land, and he leaves here, Diego Martin West colleague, leaves this House, his Members speaking, total disrespect, and goes to Belmont to talk to a few hundred people, and leaves the people's business. It was the first time we have met in about two or three months and he leaves this House. He wants to be a leader.

I will tell you something, Mr. Speaker. You see me, I will do everything possible to ensure that this country is saved from that. [*Desk thumping*] "In fact, before I forget, since this death threat ting, it going all over de place." The newest member of the PNM, a "fella" called Justin Phelps—

Dr. Moonilal: "Where he come from?"

Hon. J. Warner: "Outta de blue, Justin Phelps, some lawyer from some place. Mr. Speaker, yuh know something? Yuh know, he get death threat too. He say he get death threat too."

Dr. Moonilal: "Nobody eh know he to threaten him."

Hon. J. Warner: "Well, I mean, I want to tell the Member for Arouca/Maloney, if you geh one too, lemme know, because this ting going left, right and centre. Darling, de way death threat going, you may get one too." [*Crosstalk*] [*Laughter*] So if you get one, just—"dat is all".

Dr. Moonilal: You could get one for \$4.

Hon. J. Warner: "Death threat going left, right and centre."

Mr. Speaker, I come now to the football issue. A letter was read here last week that sought to implicate me in the issue where the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs is alleged to have kept back funding from the federation, because of a letter Jack Warner wrote to him. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Furthermore, I was told in this House that I was banned from football. I am not banned from football anywhere, by anyone, at any time. No one has banned me from football. I have been in football for 29 consecutive years. I have gone to over 166 countries, some of them several times over, due to football. Everything I have done in my life has been to lift the football of this country and, by extension, the Caribbean. [*Desk thumping*]

In all humility, I am saying nobody before me has done more than I have done for football in this country, and it would take a long time for anybody after me to do that. In doing so, at no point in time have I ever tried to make money on football in Trinidad and Tobago, despite the naysayers. They are there and they would say what they want about me. They would write in their favourite

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newspaper and so on. I have never taken [*Inaudible*] from Trinidad and Tobago. When I saw the attack made on me last week, and then the Saturday morning after hearing the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara—and he made a revelation of a big racket in Tobago with a 320 Rahael deal, I said, “Who”. Then I looked at the next newspaper, which of course is Dr. Rowley's favourite newspaper and his favourite journalist, I saw:

“Zinger on Jack”

That was more important than this:

“Zinger on Jack”

His favourite newspaper and his favorite journalist. What are the facts?

Very succinctly, in April of last year the FIFA arranged to pick up the entire Caribbean and carry them to Hungary to vote for members of the CFU. The CFU is over 32 years old; it was formed on August 14, 1978, in Haiti, by Andre Kamperveen and me. It is almost 40 years old. For the first time, all the members lifted from the Caribbean and carried to Prague in Hungary to vote, to pick the officers of the region. By the way, I will also tell you, that moves were made to pick people who they wanted to, so as to reduce the influence of Trinidad and Tobago in the Caribbean and ultimately FIFA. I was able to get one Harold Taylor to go up for office, and I felt if he went for office at least we would have a toehold in the Caribbean.

The local federation leadership, based on the advice which they received from Zurich and elsewhere, refused to support Harold Taylor, and Harold Taylor could only have gone up if he got their support. Down to the very last minute, the general secretary of the EFA went begging them to support Harold Taylor; the last minute. I then wrote the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, and said, “Listen, you cannot subscribe to this because if you do not support Harold Taylor [*Inaudible*], Trinidad and Tobago would lose its influence in the Caribbean, and therefore I would suggest to you that you tell them the gravity of the situation, it may even affect their funding.” I cannot stay here after 40 years in football locally, and see football just given away as it is today. So what happened?

As happened, at the last minute, Taylor got support, they went to Hungary and they conspired that people should not support him and he lost. History is that the football has now left Trinidad, they lost the FIFA development office, they lost the UFA office, they lost the FDO, they lost everything in football here. Everything has now gone to another island in the Caribbean. Okay, fine, that is what they want, okay, but that happened.

Then they went to play against Guyana to qualify for the next round. They could not beat Guyana. In my days, St. Augustine Senior Comprehensive School would have beaten Guyana twice on the same day—in my days—but they could not do that. [*Laughter*] Therefore, they were knocked out the World Cup.

The Cabinet, unlike previous Cabinets, even before they start, it said, “We shall vote \$55 million for you for your programme, and if you go the next round you will get more money.” Never before, no Government has ever done that. That was voted and \$11 million was given to them to run their first campaign, and they gave Mr. Harford from All Sports Promotions to manage their affairs. Harford runs All Sports Promotions, and he was given, right, that company to manage the affairs of the federation. He charged them 15 per cent of \$11 million. Then he said as a favour he would not take \$2 million, he would take \$1 million. Mr. Speaker, I said that was wrong.

Nidco manages billions of dollars. Nidco is building the highway to Point Fortin from Golconda for \$7.2 billion. Nidco has charged 4 per cent to manage the highway to Point Fortin. Other work they have done, some billions, they charge 4 per cent. Nipdec, again, manages billions for this Government, they charge one and a half to 3 per cent. MTS, billions of dollars for this country, and they charge between 2 and 4 per cent. I thought it was wrong, and still is wrong, to charge 15 per cent to do that account for the federation. I thought that was wrong, and I still believe so, and therefore, that letter was here. Whatever anybody says, it is wrong. The fact is that football would not go far because of the level of leadership it has up to today, and that has to change. I said so. So to come here and to make me look indifferent, cannot make sense.

Worse yet, you say that I am banned from football. My family and I own a club called Joe Public for the last 10 years. In the last 10 years we have spent \$27 million on Joe Public employing workers and players from the family. Up to today, we are still with Joe Public.

2.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, up to last week, we were still talking to officials and so on and getting advice. For four years, until two months ago, my family—my sons and I—all of us agreed that the federation would not pay any rent for any house on Dundonald Street. For four years, what happened, Mr. Speaker? Their manager, Mr. Harford, two months ago, took them from there and put them at Ana Street, Woodbrook, to pay rent at \$46,000 a month, and the list goes on and on. So, to come here and try to use that letter to embarrass me is disingenuous.

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He does not know anything about football. He has not even given a “halay filay” or a “kaiser ball” to any football club. He does not know anything about football anywhere, not even in Tobago, and he comes here using Parliament to try to discredit me. It just cannot make sense. I would say much more, but I would say it out of here because I do not want people to feel I am using privilege here, in any way. I have the facts, the figures, and let them tell me what I say here is not true. The attacks would come at me again and again for football. I would take them as they come—whether in the court or out of the court—but the fact is—I want to say one thing—that nobody could undo what I have done for football in this country. [*Desk thumping*] Nobody! Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I come now to the anti-crime measures. Because of the time constraints, I would go quickly and tell you that when we came here we inherited a regiment that was demoralized, a coast guard that was demoralized and a police force that had no vehicles and was demoralized. In the short time that we are here, we have to build up their morale, and we are doing so in several different ways, and the measures which have been approved to fight crime have been accepted by the National Security Council (NSC) last Thursday at its meeting. I cannot give all the measures here, obviously; it does not make sense, but I would tell you two or three measures.

First of all, when we were here in 1995, Mr. Panday had formed a unit called the Joint Operations Unit, and that unit was under Rear Admiral Kelshall, and that unit was to help to look for drugs and so on throughout the country, and to stop the leak in various ports that we had. Mr. Speaker, you would recall the murder of Selwyn Richardson; that was because of drugs. You recall the murder of WPC Bernadette James, October 1987; again, that was because of drugs.

So, therefore, Mr. Speaker, when Mr. Panday’s Government came into being, he formed this unit so as to fight the drug situation. What happened? What happened, Mr. Speaker? When the PNM came into office after the UNC, they dismantled the Joint Operations Unit. They dismantled it! They formed something called the National Incident Committee and, therefore, as a result, drugs came in here like wildfire. That was the era of Rama the Jammer, Dole Chadee and Naya and these guys. They removed the Joint Operations Unit, and they downgraded it to what became a National Incident Committee. [*Interruption*] I will talk just now, thank you.

As such, we found ourselves now having to go back and to form coastal stations in Point Galeota, in Cedros and in Toco. [*Crosstalk*] Thank you. “But you very good man.” [*Laughter*] And this Joint Operations unit, during its time,

1995—2001, this unit was able to intercept \$14 billion in narcotics; and that was dismantled by the Manning Government—by the Government that he had gotten as his legacy. I want to say something else, but “ ah change meh mind.”

I am saying, therefore, they formed the National Incident Command Centre to respond to national incidents. What is that? We found ourselves now, having to—again, they had SAUTT. SAUTT was a runaway horse, and they did not pay taxes of any kind and so on, and all of these things had to be fixed. So we dismantled SAUTT. We formed the National Security Operations Centre, and we are going to put in joint command centres.

We are having, of course, also—you heard the Minister of Finance and the Economy where the taxes on CCTVs shall be removed and, therefore, every division of the police shall now have an operation centre—this centre in each division—and people can now have their own CCTV, and they can take a feed direct to the police link, and they shall be manned by civilians and, therefore, we shall have all our eyes and ears on them. Unprecedented! Mr. Speaker, and this begins in Port of Spain before Christmas or by Christmas, and then these divisions would then have a national centre where they shall be looked at.

Since 2007, the army salary has remained unchanged. That too, of course, is what they left and had to be fixed. So, therefore, all this is happening. We are having a highway patrol unit with a rebranded version, so to speak. Where before, you could drive from Port of Spain to Moruga and you would not see a police or highway patrol member, that too would be changed, and would be changed before Christmas.

We have SRPs: we are building 32 community outreach centres, where the police and community shall work hand in hand. In November 2011, we are having a family day in Laventille, Soogrim Trace, where we are calling all the people in Laventille and we are calling all the top firms, and they will be putting booths and so on and telling the people in Laventille, they can give them jobs to do this, to do that and to do the other, and giving the people in Laventille, particularly, the respect that they deserve. So, therefore, you are giving them dignity and respect.

We are putting cadets and scouts in every school. I spoke to the Minister of Education and he has agreed. Every school! Just last week or two weeks ago, at Vishnu Boys we had cadets in the school there, and next week in Siparia—the cadet force in schools—to teach them discipline. Schools must now sing the anthem and say the national pledge on mornings and so on. It is a whole collaborative effort where all the Ministries are coming together—the Ministry of

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Housing, Land and Marine Affairs, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure—all of us working together towards this common goal.
[*Desk thumping*]

In the end, we will not succeed overnight, but I would tell you this, Mr. Speaker, the trends have shown and are showing that success is in the air. At the end of day, what we have to do is to make this country safe once again. I would have thought that this could have been done with the help of those on that side and us on this side because crime affects all of us. Crime is everybody's business, but it seems to me that while some gloat over a rise in crime—hopefully that is revised—we, of course here, have to take the slack, and if that is the case, we shall do so.

At the end of the day, I want to end—I know my time is up—the way I began. I want to end by saying—give me two seconds, Mr. Speaker. I cannot find it, but it is all right—at the end of the day, the fight against crime is not our business or even theirs. The fight against crime is the collective responsibility of all of us [*Desk thumping*] and this country would rise or fall depending on how each of us assumes our responsibility.

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

Miss Donna Cox (*Laventille East/Morvant*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wish to congratulate the new Minister of Finance and the Economy on the delivery of his maiden national budget statement. But before I move on, I just want to refer to a few points made by the hon. Minister of National Security. The Minister mentioned that the Member for Laventille West spoke about Beetham and spoke as if he was happy that there was a murder in Beetham. But, the Minister of National Security actually started off the debate by twisting the words of the Member for Laventille West. [*Desk thumping*] Because the Member for Laventille West spoke about the fact that Beetham is indeed a part of Laventille, and that is what he was trying to say, because we are hearing about no murders in Laventille, and Beetham is indeed a part of Laventille. I just want to move on—I will speak about this later in the debate.

The Minister of National Security made some comments concerning the death threat. I would like to say to the Minister of National Security that as the Minister of National Security every death threat should be taken seriously. It is not a point to make light of.

Hon. Member: That is right.

Miss D. Cox: If someone does not put into the public domain that they received a death threat, then the Minister of National Security has no right to put that into the public domain. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: Correct.

Hon. Member: Irresponsible.

Miss D. Cox: He made comments about keeping his security distance. I would like the Minister to explain; what he means by that? Because I want him to remember that as Minister of National Security, you are the Minister for all the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Member: Um hmm.

Miss D. Cox: So, what does keeping security distance mean? The Minister mentioned that the Members of Parliament for Diego Martin West and Diego Martin North/East left here to attend a public meeting on Friday. But, Mr. Speaker, I was here when Members opposite left here to attend a function at the Divali Nagar last year. So, I am trying to figure out what is the connection really? What is the problem. Because I feel that the people of Trinidad and Tobago are being fooled to believe that the Members just left to go to some meeting, but yet this is a norm with the Government. So, this is nothing new. I move on to the debate on the budget.

Mr. Speaker, yes, I wish to congratulate the new Minister of Finance and the Economy on the delivery of his maiden national budget statement, and I genuinely would have liked to be more complimentary on the content of his presentation but, unfortunately, for a gentleman whose career as a commercial banker I had followed with some admiration, I must admit that I was rather disappointed with his presentation.

You see, Mr. Speaker, with the Minister's assumption to office as the new Minister of Finance and the Economy, I was eagerly looking forward to a breath of fresh air that would have emanated from the seat of the Minister of Finance and the Economy. After all, his predecessor in each of the two budgets that he presented was guilty of confusing us on this side, and I am sure many of them on that side during his presentation. But at least he had the decency not to allow himself to be goaded into that shameful and scandalous soap opera entitled a pre-budget rally.

So, this current Minister of Finance and the Economy has distinguished himself and will go down in history as perhaps the only Minister of Finance in the

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world to have participated in a pre-budget rally, a mere 48 hours before his presentation to the nation's Parliament of his first national budget.

If I could have advised the goodly Minister, I would have said to him, "who want to go could go", but for you as Minister of Finance and the Economy it is grossly unethical to make public statements about the budget content on the eve of its presentation in the Parliament.

You see, Mr. Speaker, the Parliament comprises representatives of all the people of Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] and when a Minister of Finance and the Economy decides to make pronouncements to a partisan crowd, 48 hours before his official presentation, I believe he has compromised himself. Mr. Speaker, let me also caution the Minister, his presentation is replete with statements which sound like this, and I quote: "...it will be undertaken in consultation with the affected stakeholders..." And there is another quote: "After consultations with the relevant and affected stakeholders I intend to obtain additional financing..."

2.45 p.m.

Let me remind him that there was a Minister, who, in this Parliament, trumpeted the mantra of consultation with all relevant stakeholders he has now been confined to the Back Bench. So, Mr. Minister of Finance and the Economy; I would urge you to be wary of the use of that statement.

With specific reference to the 2012/2013 budget, I am sure that you would recall that when this Government was in Opposition, they accused the PNM administration of wanton and extravagant spending over the past eight years. They shouted to the high heavens that the then Government was wasting the patrimony of the country, and for many of them they built a political career on condemning the PNM for its spending.

Let us, therefore, look at the spending record of this Government since they assumed office. Each year they come with a larger and larger budgeted expenditure and, like Oliver Twist, even came back to Parliament for more during the fiscal year. Let us look at their record: according to the Minister, for fiscal 2013, total expenditure net of capital repayments and sinking fund contributions is \$58.405 billion. In fact, if you include capital repayments and sinking fund contributions as representing the overall claims on the finances of the State, the gross expenditure for the year will cross the \$60 billion mark to \$61.4 billion.

This, Mr. Speaker, represents an increase of 11.6 per cent on the previous record high expenditure of \$55 billion in respect of 2012. Hence, in the three

budgets presented by this Government to date, total expenses have exceeded \$170 billion already. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, do you know what that means? Let me tell you. The expenditure levels of the three budgets presented by this Government combined, would have covered, on a current basis, the expenditure of the following budgets: 2002/2003—the year 2002/2003—\$16.6 billion; 2003, \$20.7 billion; 2004, \$27.2 billion; 2005, \$37 billion; 2006, \$39.8 billion; and a considerable part of 2007, \$53.9 billion.

In other words, Mr. Speaker, this Government, in three years, would have spent what the PNM took six years to spend. [*Interruption*] In fact, given the track record of this Government, by next year when the Minister of Finance and the Economy, if he is still here, presents his 2013 budget, I can wager that in four years they would have outspent the PNM's eight years of budgetary and financial rectitude. This Government is on a spending spree and one would have thought that an experienced banker would have brought some sober thought and sanity to this madness.

Mr. Speaker, the question is, can they afford it? Can we afford it? What do we have before us? We have a situation where this Government would have budgeted three successive years of budget deficits, which would mean that this year's budget is the fourth deficit in a row. And one would have thought that, as a consequence, one of the urgent policy imperatives must be to bring expenditure in line with revenue as quickly as possible. And what is the Minister's response to this? He says, and I quote:

“We propose to achieve our target of a balanced budget by establishing a reduction in the equivalent of a minimum of 1 per cent of GDP per”—year—
“over the next four years.”

You know what that means, Mr. Speaker? It means that the Minister of Finance is prepared to subject this country to eight successive years of deficit budgeting. In other words, he is prepared to do the following: continue with the reckless spending spree; [*Desk thumping*] consciously disregard the relationship between expenditure and revenue; [*Desk thumping*] and continue to fund the deficit by high levels of borrowing. [*Desk thumping*] With respect to the latter, that is funding the deficit by borrowing, I have noticed with some concern the growing significance of loan financing to meet the gap created by the revenue shortfall.

Mr. Speaker, confidence levels are at an all-time low in this country and much work needs to be done to encourage investment undertakings in Trinidad and Tobago. The construction and energy sectors are still in major declines and are

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likely to continue. The Minister stated that unemployment is now 4.9 per cent, and under normal economic conditions, full employment is normally accompanied by buoyant, economic growth levels. And therefore, there is a major inconsistency with that full employment figure and our current economic stagnation. When one looks around there really is no evidence of a full employment situation in Trinidad and Tobago. It is that the Government, in accounting for these statistics—I would like to know if they have included URP, CEPEP, and other programmes like CCC—[*Interruption*]—because, if so, we really need to see the clear picture and the true picture of the situation, as the full employment statement is not translating itself into real productivity of goods and services.

Has the CSO published the statistics to reflect the reported 4.9 per cent unemployment figure, when and where were these figures published? If the economy is now at full employment levels as reported, on what basis would the country be in a position to undergo a construction and building boom? Would we have the capacity? Would we have to import labour? The Government needs to level with the public about this. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Finance and the Economy has indicated that the Clico matter has dragged on for too long and intends to bring this matter to a close by the end of 2012. The Minister needs to clarify whether it is the intention of the Government to now seek to immediately divest assets of Clico/CL Financial, and whether it is proposed that there will still be Government intervention into the major assets of CL Financial going forward into 2013? A full accounting to the public of the status of Clico/CL Financial since May 2010 is necessary. The Minister has indicated that the Clico matter has cost taxpayers some \$19 billion. This is not quite telling the truth and the proper picture, since the Government has taken control of major assets of Clico and CL Financial; when this is taken into account, the picture now is much more different. We certainly need to find out what is happening with all the Clico and CL Financial assets since their intervention? Are the assets being properly managed? Is divestment of assets taking place in a transparent manner and above board? Are there proper governance practices taking place throughout the group now?

Mr. Speaker, a lot was said about the fuel subsidy so I will just not deal with that at this time, but I just want to ask if the fuel subsidy includes that of Caribbean Airlines. Interestingly, absolutely no mention was made of Caribbean Airlines in the budget statement. Is it being proposed that CAL be self-sufficient in

the short term? What exactly are the plans for CAL to be self-sufficient? Is there going to be put in place a solid board and management structure that will see positive results for CAL?

I move to the land and building tax. The Minister has indicated that during the next fiscal year a framework for implementation of a land and building tax regime that will cover residential, commercial, agricultural and industrial lands would be put in place, and we hope that the relevant consultations will take place that will lead to an equitable implementation.

Stimulating the construction sector: the Minister of Finance and the Economy hopes to create a construction boom in the country, primarily via the use of tax incentives and tax exemptions. What about the procurement legislation, Mr. Speaker? With a pending construction boom, I think it is time that this be moved forward. I am extremely doubtful that decisions to invest capital in large projects by the private sector are driven primarily by tax incentives. Decisions to invest are driven by investor confidence and long-term rates of projected growth, income generation and capital appreciation. It will therefore be very interesting to see if by next year this time there will be any positive take-off as a result of this initiative, because, when financial institutions lend money, the driving force is not a tax incentive, but is whether the project makes economic sense.

No targets were mentioned in the budget statement in terms of planned housing starts and completions in the coming fiscal year. A budget statement should always set some level of targets and in the following year a comparative analysis is done to determine what was achieved and what was not achieved. This budget statement was totally void of any comparative analysis throughout. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, GATE has been the subject of much discussion and certainly requires a rethink. Mr. Speaker, I am informed that many local private institutions have been making a killing off of GATE, and also some students have simply taken GATE for granted. However, it worries me that the programme will now refocus on the areas of priority study necessary to support the strategy for economic and industrial development. This is what was stated in the budget. Who, therefore, is going to determine what these new areas of priority study will be? Is law and medicine a priority? Is a degree in social work priority? Is a degree in international relations priority? Information technology, is that priority? Is finance priority? Is a degree in tourism and hospitality a priority?

Hon. Member: Yes.

Miss D. Cox: These are answers we need to get as it can be a bit dangerous that priorities are only determined when a critical or crisis factor faces us, and whether long-term planning will take place. We have to hope that it is not determined that only the sciences, for example, are deemed to be a priority, and that the study of humanities, for example, will not qualify, [*Crosstalk*] which is so essential for a developed society. This area needs a lot of thought before implementation.

The question needs to be asked about what will happen to those students who just enrolled in a programme that previously qualified for GATE, but now will not, because it is no longer considered a priority. So, these students will need some quick answers for planning purposes.

Mr. Speaker, I move to sports. I see the Member of Parliament for D'Abadie/O'Meara is not here, but I guess he is listening. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, I must start with football, it is topical at this time. Mr. Speaker, football is one of the most popular sports in Trinidad and Tobago. It is a grass-root sport and you will agree that sport plays an important role in the fight against crime.

The Leader of the Opposition raised a serious concern with regard to a lack of funding of the Trinidad and Tobago football team, and in the Minister's response, he stated that there were some discrepancies and lack of information with regard to \$11 million which was disbursed to Mr. Anthony Harford, chairman of a committee that the Minister put in place to handle funds given to the Trinidad and Tobago Football Federation. This authorization committee was to be accountable for public funds.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Chaguanas West spoke about the situation, also; he spoke about Mr. Harford charging 15 per cent to administrate the funds and so on, but the point that we need to note is that this was agreed to before. When Mr. Harford was hired, this was agreed to before—the 15 per cent was agreed to, [*Desk thumping*] so at this point in time we cannot come here now and lay blame on anyone. The Minister of Sport has to take blame for what is happening. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, whatever the management issues are surrounding Trinidad and Tobago football, we are holding the Minister of Sport totally responsible for what has transpired. [*Desk thumping*]

3.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, our young people must not be held hostage for the misconduct of the Minister, the Ministry or any of their agents. The People's National Movement is not prepared to tolerate that, whether it be football, netball,

basketball, cricket or swimming. [*Desk thumping*] Our young people must not be caught in the middle of management issues and whatever these issues may be.

The Minister has to take the full blame for what is presently taking place and what has been taking place in the football fraternity, because he is ultimately responsible. I am aware that the Ministry of Sport did not initially approve a request from the Trinidad and Tobago Football Federation for funding of the senior national team to play in the Caribbean Cup in St. Kitts/Nevis. In a letter from the Ministry to the TTF, the reason given for not approving the \$423,000 was the abysmal performance of the team. So, if this is a basis on which payments are made, then why is the Minister of Sport being paid? Then why is the Cabinet being paid? What performance could be as abysmal as theirs? [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I understand that Mr. Anthony Harford was earmarked for the position of Minister of Sport in the last reshuffle.

Miss Mc Donald: “Ey-ey.”

Miss D. Cox: Does this have anything to do with what is happening now in the football fraternity?

Miss Mc Donald: What!

Dr. Rowley: Mmmmh.

Miss Mc Donald: Talk more. I want to hear more.

Miss D. Cox: Mr. Speaker, I move to another concern raised by the Opposition Leader, because while the TTF was being starved for funds, the Minister spent \$20 million—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rowley: In eight weeks.

Miss D. Cox:—for an eight-week programme called LIFEsport. I wish to read the report concerning this programme, Mr. Speaker. This is a report—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rowley: From one of the areas.

Miss D. Cox:—from one of the areas. This is a report from the Mayaro area. Member of Parliament for Mayaro is here? Okay. It is a letter from Ms. Akeela Rodriguez addressed to Mrs. Ruth Marchan.

“To: Mrs. Ruth Marchan

Assistant Director of Physical Education and Sport

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From: Ms. Akeela Rodriguez

Manager-Mayaro Indoor Sport Facility

Date: 5th August, 2012.

Subject: Report of incidences since the inception of the Life Sport Programme

A pleasant good day to you and hope this letter reaches you in good health. This letter serves to formally enlighten you of the occurrences that took place since Life Sport Programme started. The programme is scheduled each day to begin at 9.00 a.m. and finish at 5.00 p.m. Monday to Friday, with classroom sessions from 9.00 a.m. to 2.00 p.m. and practical from 2.00 p.m. to 5.00 p.m. Since its inception, there are no tutors for the morning sessions which leave the students to loiter and get themselves in all sorts of mischief. There is a lack of proper supervision and the Coordinator has proven to be incompetent in controlling the group as well as lacking the proficiency to manage and solve disputes which arises every day.

I have held a meeting with all parties involved including the students about proper protocol and the dos and don'ts of the facility. Besides my efforts, the students are bringing alcohol, using obscene language, parading bareback and smoking all over the compound. This image is beginning to affect the smooth running of the facility and clients are becoming uncomfortable..."

Mr. Speaker, I just want to quote another part of this letter which states:

"...Today, another student mutilate the new fire alarm system, so presently the facility have no fire alarm system nor smoke detectors which leaves all users at risk and we are currently operating on an overload. Also on that same day a group of students defaced the portraits of the President, Prime Minister and the Minister of Sport with soft drink. They were made to clean it up. The coordinator used that opportunity to call the police to speak to them. Furthermore, this is a sporting programme and no measure was put in place to provide water. The students are endangering themselves by drinking from a condemned water cooler that was abandoned years ago..."

Mr. Speaker, we see here, after hearing this kind of report from Mayaro Indoor Facility, and this is what is taking place in the LIFEsport Programme where \$20 million was put for an eight-week programme.

Hon. Members: Ooh good!

Miss D. Cox: I can speak for Laventille, in Movant where there is the LIFESport Programme. I understand that many of the students there, the persons in the programme have been smoking marijuana and they have been gambling in the programme.

Dr. Rowley: Following the exemplar.

Miss D. Cox: Okay, that is another example. So, Mr. Speaker, after hearing that report, can you understand why the TTFF was not funded?

Dr. Rowley: Twenty million dollars in eight weeks.

Miss D. Cox: Twenty million dollars, while national footballers were being made to suffer, a ball was being held by others—\$20 million in eight weeks.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Sport was able to spend \$864,000 to house nine Cuban officials based on a proposal received from Sarge Enterprises limited, Earl Sargeant being the director. The rents were paid one year in advance, and permit me to read part of the correspondence from the Ministry of Sport addressed to Mr. Sargeant.

“Mr. Earl Sargeant,
Director,
Sarge Enterprises Ltd.
Santa Monica Gardens,
D’Abadie,
Trinidad.

This correspondence seeks to confirm that approval has been granted to incur expenditure in the sum of four hundred and thirty-two thousand dollars (\$432,000) per year for two years...”

So that is \$864,000:

“...within the fiscal packages (2011-12 & 2012-13)...for the provision of housing for nine (9) Cuban Coaches.”

Mr. Speaker, the rent was paid one year in advance. Permit me to read part of the correspondence from the—there is another piece of correspondence I want to read, but I may take up too much time. I want you to note the address of Mr. Sargeant, Santa Monica Gardens, D’Abadie.

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The Opposition Leader also spoke about the contract given to a company to maintain Eddie Hart grounds. The company is Amek Holdings Limited, and note the address, Santa Monica Gardens, D'Abadie. Mr. Speaker, this company is not even VAT registered.

Dr. Rowley: “In the Minister constituency?”

Miss D. Cox: Connect the dots, Mr. Speaker. What was the procedure used to enable these two companies which happen to be from the constituency of D'Abadie/O'Meara to be awarded contracts from the Ministry of Sport? I understand that this is just two samples, but this is widespread in the Ministry—
[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rowley: Widespread.

Miss Mc Donald: We practising charity in your home.

Miss D. Cox:—where there has been collusion among senior officials from the Ministry and persons being awarded contracts. I would like the Minister of Sport to tell us about his relationship with Malabar (FC) Football Club. What is the amount of funding they have received from the Ministry of Sport or the Sport Company to date, and for what purpose? I see the Government is planning to upgrade recreation grounds and I look forward to those in Laventille East/Morvant being upgraded and I will outline them in my contribution later.

Mr. Speaker, I applaud the efforts to build and upgrade sporting facilities. I note however, that the three major projects outlined in the budget under sports are situated in UNC constituencies. [*Desk thumping*] However, I would like to see a proper programme be put in place for the maintenance of these facilities when they are built.

It would be remiss of me not to congratulate all those individuals responsible for our athletes' achievements in the Olympics. I would like to congratulate the athletes for making us proud, and I need to congratulate the past Minister of Sport also for his foresight and assistance given to the sporting bodies in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, they will not admit it, but I want to place on record that the success of our Olympic athletes is mainly due to all the measures put in place, like the Elite Athletes Programme initiated and implemented under the PNM administration. [*Desk thumping*] These are the kind of results you achieve when sustainable measures are put in place. You get excellent results down the road. [*Desk thumping*]

I expected the Minister of Sport to come to this House to speak about his stewardship and to speak about what is happening in the Ministry of Sport. Instead of doing that, it was like comedy hour in this House on Friday. The Minister tried to attack as many persons as he could, including even trying to bring the wife of the Opposition Leader into the debate.

Hon. Members: Shameful.

Miss D. Cox: Mr. Speaker, this is something that we must not tolerate and we must not condone. [*Desk thumping*] I noted that there were a lot of smiles and encouragement on that side of the House—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rowley: From the Prime Minister.

Miss D. Cox:—for the behaviour of this Minister on Friday.

Dr. Rowley: Coached by the Prime Minister.

Miss D. Cox: Mr. Speaker, I move to my constituency. I wish to draw to your attention the constant disregard, disrespect and neglect of various Members opposite as it concerns the constituency of Laventille East/Morvant. While many Members opposite are assisting each other in their constituencies, sad to say, the constituency of Laventille East/Morvant is still suffering.

With regard to community development, I rally on behalf of the residents of Morvant as it relates to the Morvant Community Centre. I have written the Minister of Community Development, both present and past—and the present Community Development Minister is steupsing—[*Crosstalk*]—and I just want to say that this centre in Morvant, the Morvant Community Centre, is the first community centre to have been built in Trinidad and Tobago, and I was reliably informed that it was not only the first in Trinidad and Tobago, it was the first in the Caribbean. This Government has blatantly chosen to neglect the building of this centre and this should not be. Most of the community centres in Laventille East/Morvant need to be totally refurbished: Shende Street Community Centre, Malick Community Centre, Misir Village, North Malick, Mon Repos, Leasehold [*sic*].

I am also aware that a plan has already been drawn up and is sitting in the Ministry of Community Development for the Morvant Community Centre, and I would like the Minister of Community Development to take note, there is already a plan—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Peters: You want to give way?

Miss D. Cox:—for Morvant Community Centre drawn up there. I am asking the Minister to have that community centre built for the people of Morvant and the environs.

Mr. Speaker, with regard to sports and the development of recreation grounds in my constituency, I wish to state that all the grounds are in urgent need of repairs. I am yet to see a visible impact of the Ministry of Sport in the constituency of Laventille East/Morvant. The Morvant grounds are in dire need of upgrading. I received numerous complaints from constituents about the state of the grounds, the Coconut Drive Savannah and the Malick Recreation Grounds; they are both in need of upgrading. Many youths use those grounds and it is really not comfortable for them to be using those grounds.

I have written to the Minister seeking assistance for the development of jogging tracks, refurbishment of the grounds, pavilions, bathroom facilities and I am still awaiting this work to start in the constituency. There is also a need for multipurpose courts in the area and many basketball and netball courts are in urgent need of upgrading. I did speak with the Minister of Sport who advised me that the Ministry is looking into these requests.

So, Mr. Speaker, as in previous years, I do not want to come back here for next budget debate and to speak about the refurbishment of these same grounds again. I have been doing it and I will continue to do so until they are fixed.

Miss Mc Donald: Keep that page handy for next year.

Miss D. Cox: Mr. Speaker, we are all aware that involvement in sport acts is a deterrent to criminal activities, anti-social behaviour. [*Desk thumping*]

3.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I want the youth in my constituency to continue to be involved in sport, but they must have the necessary resources.

I wish to remind the Minister of Sport of an important component of the National Sports Policy which states: “Sport for all”; not for some, but all.

Mr. Speaker, I move to the schools in my area. I would like the Minister of Education—in all fairness to the Minister of Education, I have been speaking with him and he has been very pleasant and so on, but I want to get some action. He has been very pleasant and, you know, he returns my calls; he talks to me; but I am not seeing it being done, Mr. Minister of Education. I think it is a silver tongue you have.

Mr. Speaker, I would like the Minister to inform me on the status of the Early Childhood Centre located in Coconut Drive, Morvant. This centre was completed before May 2010 and, to date, it has not been opened, and I have written numerous letters to the Minister; I have spoken to him, and of course, as I said before, very pleasant, but nothing happening. Mr. Speaker, I wrote letters on May 02, 2011; August 22, 2011; March 15, 2012, September 04, 2012. To date, I have not been informed of why the Early Childhood Centre has not been opened after being completed for more than two-and-a-half years.

Mr. Speaker, the Lower Morvant Government Primary School is in a dilapidated state. The school needs to be rebuilt; the schoolyard requires repaving; doors need to be replaced; burglar-proofing needs to be installed; there is no telephone contact to the principal; no PA system in the school; the room assigned for information technology is too small, since only 11 students can be accommodated at a time. Mr. Speaker, something needs to be done at the Lower Morvant Primary School.

Mr. Speaker, the Morvant Epiphany Anglican School experiences severe flooding as a result of heavy rains. This has been a persistent problem over the years and I have been writing to the Minister about this particular school also. There is a river running alongside the school which needs to be dredged and the walls need to be repaired and elevated. Too often the students of this school have to stay at home because of flooding. Their work is being seriously affected.

Mr. Speaker, I move to the Malick Secondary School which has been experiencing grave problems. As we speak, Mr. Speaker, there is protest taking place again today, and I have written numerous letters again, and I just want to outline, to place on *Hansard*, some of the problems being experienced.

School has reopened and up to now the students of Malick Secondary are not in school. There is an urgent need for the school to be rewired. Block E is condemned because the roof is leaking and can collapse at any time. The roof of the library is rotten and leaking and is also prone to sudden collapse. Blocks A, N and F where most of the electrical equipment is housed is inaccessible to the students. The roof and lighting system in the school hall need to be redone. The footballers cannot use the football field because of the river running alongside the field. There is some work to be done on that river. The basketball courts need to be refurbished.

I can go on and on here this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, about the Malick Secondary School, but I would just like the Minister to understand that there is an

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urgent need for this school to be refurbished and there are a lot of problems in the school, and we have children right now who have not been in school since the school term opened. There are children who need to sit exams; they need to be in school.

I understand that they were asked to be housed at Aranguez North Secondary School. The PTA at the Aranguez School has refused. They are saying that they do not want the children of Malick Secondary in the school, so right now the children are still outside of the school. They were supposed to report for duty there this morning. There was a protest at the Aranguez School this morning so that the children could not go to school. Mr. Speaker, I hope that the Minister of Education can appreciate the need to act swiftly on these problems facing the schools in my constituency, because the people have been patient.

Mr. Speaker, this in brings me to a point that there is an urgent need for dredging and maintenance of the Mon Repos, Malick and Morvant rivers. Mr. Speaker, every time heavy rainfall occurs, the river overflows its banks and there is serious flooding in Coconut Drive, Mon Repos, Morvant and Malick. Also, the Morvant Anglican School—a part of this happens. They flood also when the river overflows. So, Mr. Speaker, I need the Minister of the Environment and Water Resources to look into this. And all that I am saying here, Mr. Speaker, I have written letters to the effect to all the relevant Ministers, and I have been writing letters and sending reminders to them.

So I must bring to your attention the serious water problem which now exists in my constituency. First Caledonia Road has been without water since Christmas, and I was informed that WASA is expected to replace the current pipeline which is very old and corroded, and I hope this would be done soon because the residents have been patient. They have not even protested. But, of course, they come to my office and I try to keep them cool, Mr. Speaker. How long could I keep someone cool if since Christmas you have no water? So I have to come here and speak about it, and I do not know what to do next.

Mr. Speaker, the residents of Coconut Drive have also been experiencing serious water problems and they stated that they have only started having water problems since this Government changed. So I hope, Mr. Speaker, that those residents who voted overwhelmingly for me in the last election are not being victimized.

Hon. Member: [*Steups*]

Miss D. Cox: You could “steups” as much as you like. Mr. Speaker, something is definitely wrong here. Why can the residents of Coconut Drive not be placed on a schedule? Many times WASA just takes the water and they do not know when it will be returned. There are some areas in Malick that experience serious water problems and we would like to see them addressed as soon as possible.

Mr. Speaker, this brings me to another area. I understand that the constituency of Laventille East/Morvant has 52 gangs in the URP. Well, I have not seen any of these gangs, or seen them working in the constituency, Mr. Speaker. There is a lot of work to be done in the constituency and if 52 gangs are allocated to Laventille East/Morvant, I have never seen one. So I would like to know what is happening with URP and CEPEP programmes in Laventille East/Morvant. *[Interruption]* Many areas that used to be serviced by CEPEP are no longer being maintained.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Mayaro is disturbing me, okay? Could I get some protection?

Mr. Speaker: Yes. I offer you full protection in this instance.

Miss D. Cox: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, because you may have to protect him from me next. *[Desk thumping and laughter]*

Mr. Speaker, there are many—

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

Motion made: That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. *[Hon. W. Peters]*

Question put and agreed to.

Miss D. Cox: Thank you very much, Member of Parliament for Mayaro. I see you have tried to redeem yourself, but I still need the community centre in Morvant.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to know what is happening with the URP and CEPEP programmes in Laventille. Many areas that used to be maintained by CEPEP are no longer being maintained. I see the Member for Oropouche East is leaving as I speak about CEPEP. Mr. Speaker, I understand that contracts are only being given out, where CEPEP is concerned, to friends, family members and party supporters, and I would like the Government to make sure that the people of Laventille East/Morvant will operate in clean, environmentally safe surroundings.

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Mr. Speaker, with regard to national security, law and order is, indeed, a key area that needs serious solutions. Mr. Speaker, this UNC-led coalition Government won an election on the basis that it had the solution to crime and violence in Trinidad and Tobago. Two-and-a-half years later their budget is proposing long-term solutions, and all of a sudden it is long-term.

Mr. Speaker, the PNM administration had put sustainable crime fighting measures in place which would have been yielding positive results now in the fight against crime. [*Desk thumping*] The Government has derailed most of our efforts which were put in place, and permit me to go back and to remind you of the cancellation of the OPVs.

I see the Minister spoke about the Government's commencement of a new naval operations plan to combat the drug trade. Mr. Speaker, the OPVs were cancelled because of a software problem that could have been rectified. My understanding is that the gun on one of the OPVs could not have been fired remotely. And, Mr. Speaker, what Trinidad and Tobago rejected was snapped up by Brazil, who recognized the great value of the OPVs. They bought all three and have since ordered six more. Mr. Speaker, this shows the efficacy of the solution we had in crime prevention.

Brazil found that our OPVs were ideally suited to protect their borders. Those three offshore patrol vessels would have greatly assisted in stemming the flow of guns and drugs into the country because border security is a key component of national security. Mr. Speaker, I would like to get an update on the litigation cost and a present status of that litigation surrounding the cancellation of the OPVs. The taxpayers of this country need to know.

Mr. Speaker, SAUTT was disbanded, and the collaboration of SAUTT and the coast guard stemmed the flow of movement of drugs on the north coast and the marijuana trade is now flourishing on the north coast. Mr. Speaker, I understand that prior to the election, UNC financiers were promised that SAUTT would be dismantled, and it happened. They were promised that the OPVs would be cancelled, and it happened. So I am not surprised that this took place, but, you know, what I am wondering, Mr. Speaker, are they really serious about crime? I wonder.

Mr. Speaker, SAUTT had a 40 per cent detection rate with respect to gang-related murders. What is the detection rate of the police service? Mr. Speaker, in order to make a dent in crime, there must be good intelligence, arrest and prosecution of individuals. Mr. Speaker, are you aware that about 70 persons who

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are currently incarcerated are because of SAUTT's investigative work, many of whom are gang leaders and members who will be out in the streets again soon because of the dismantling of SAUTT?

The Ministry of National Security intends to recruit 5,000 SRPs to assist in the fight against crime. Why such a stop gap measure? Mr. Speaker, the whole question of staffing of the police service is an area to which close attention must be paid. The police service must be modernized. I see many old approaches being put forward under the area of crime and national security. A total transformation of the police service must be done, and this is the approach that the PNM administration was taking.

Mr. Speaker, in the last budget debate, I made a plea for the members of the defence force and other protective services, including SRPs, to get the special \$1,000 allowance. I am indeed happy that they have all received it, the latest being the SRPs. But, Mr. Speaker, in last year's budget I asked for that allowance be extended to municipal police. Mr. Speaker, I would just like to repeat my request that municipal officers be given that \$1,000 allowance. Many of them work just as hard as regular police officers. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, under the Social Sector Programme, it states that the payment of the \$1,000 special allowance is intended to serve as an incentive to boost the morale of law enforcement officers. Mr. Speaker, what better way to boost the morale of police officers than to pay them in keeping with international standards?

Mr. Speaker, I query again the compensation package for police officers which I spoke about at length two years ago. I outlined the process involved and the compensation package which was agreed to by the then Commissioner of Police, the Police Social and Welfare Association and the Ministry of National Security. I ask the Minister of National Security to consult with the present Commissioner of Police who is aware of that package, and this package was agreed to by the key stakeholders. The Minister can also speak to Mr. Keith Renaud of OLEP.

3.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister in his presentation spoke about 21st Century policing. I would like to know if it is the same 21st Century policing that the Minister of National Security criticized many times. Mr. Speaker, permit me to

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quote from *Newsday* and this is just one dated July 04, 2012, an article written by Janelle De Souza, which states and I quote:

“A SHOWDOWN may very well be looming between new National Security Minister Jack Warner and Commissioner of Police Dwayne Gibbs, over the 21st Century Policing Initiative which is the brainchild of Gibbs, but which has been roundly criticised by Warner.”

End of quote, Mr. Speaker.

So, I really do not know if the Minister of Finance and the Economy knew what he was speaking about, when he mentioned this 21st Century policing which I understand the Minister of National Security is not in agreement with.

Mr. Speaker, with regard to the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Service, I must remind this honourable House that the fire service department is the first response organization that is summoned whenever and wherever a fire or any other emergency occurs in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I see a total of \$56.5 million will be provided to upgrade and expand the physical facilities of the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Service. I observe that construction will commence on fire stations, but it is sad to see that the Belmont Fire Station is not listed as one. This station not only needs rebuilding, but also relocating, because it is situated by the mortuary.

I did not see the expansion and refurbishing of the fire service headquarters which has long been outstanding, and the engineering department which needs more space to operate.

Mr. Speaker, what is happening with the promotion of fire station officers? There have been some complains that the last set of promotions for fire station officers was a while ago. If there is a problem, I would like the Minister of National Security to look into this.

Mr. Speaker, I was informed that the fire tender assigned to the Morvant Fire Station is regularly assigned to other areas, so that when there is a fire in Morvant and environs, my constituents have to depend on other fire stations to send their tenders to the scene. This is very unfair to my constituents who have to wait longer to get the necessary assistance from the fire department. I wrote to the Chief Fire Officer about this in April this year.

Mr. Speaker, members of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force who are involved in joint police and army patrol are at a great disadvantage. They have

been operating on 2007 salaries which the Minister of National Security mentioned earlier, yet they are required to stretch themselves very thin. The manpower required for the joint patrols will indeed stretch the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force to its limits. How long could this joint patrol be sustained? The officers do not even receive overtime as compared to police officers. I ask the Minister of National Security to look into this matter.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service, I am seeing the same infrastructural works reoccurring in the PSIP. What is happening in the prison service where infrastructural work is concerned? Is it snails that are doing the work at the prisons? I do not understand how come. It is about time that the nursery at the women's prison be completed. The officers' quarters and mess should be completed as soon as possible because the officers are suffering.

The prison service urgently needs a vessel to carry inmates and officers to Carrera. I have not seen any allocation for a prison vessel which is of utmost importance. The Government provided a water taxi for transportation of prisoners which was totally unsuitable. I was informed that the prison service could not use it. It should be noted that many of the prisoners who are at Carrera are high risk and are serving life sentences. It is important therefore, that the surroundings of the prison at Carrera be fitted with proper security. My information is that the security at the borders of this prison should be beefed up.

Mr. Speaker, the remand facility at Golden Grove needs to be refurbished. It now holds an excess of 1,200 prisoners and was built for 300. Clearly, that is a real hellhole. This cannot be safe for either the prisoners or the officers. Proper security systems need to be put in place. There continues to be a proliferation of cellphones in the Remand Yard at Golden Grove Prison. It is no secret that inmates "call shots" on individuals from inside the prison through the use of cellphones. What is the Government doing about this? The prison service is in need of modern security equipment which must include electronic monitoring.

Mr. Speaker, I understand that health and safety issues need to be urgently addressed in the prison service. There must be a swift approach to modernizing the prison. I would like to know the present status of the training academy which was earmarked to be built in Golden Grove. This is a prisons training academy. This was earmarked to be built in Golden Grove. I observe that emphasis is supposed to be placed on training in the prison service. Mr. Speaker, I would like to know also, what is the present status of the legislation under which inmates would be governed by the prison rules, which were finished and waiting to be

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placed on the legislative agenda prior to the May 2010 elections. I look forward to the legislation coming to this House which would indeed seek to have the prison measure up to international standards in terms of correctional institutions.

Mr. Speaker, it was brought to my attention that prison officers are not receiving homes from HDC. Many of them cannot afford to access the higher end homes, so they have to depend on HDC for assistance. There was a policy in place that 10 per cent of the houses were to be allocated to members of the protective services. I would like to know if that policy is still in place? I would like to know how many prison officers received homes from May 2010 to now? I would like the Minister of Housing and the Environment to look into this and assist the prison officers with homes.

Hon. Member: Where are the resources?

Miss D. Cox: Mr. Speaker, intelligence gathering of information is key to apprehension of criminals, and there must be a level of confidence and building of relationships in order to receive vital information from members of the public. The state of emergency last year destroyed many relationships that the members of the police service were building with residents of at-risk communities. The Minister stated that police vehicles are now being equipped with GPS technology. Well, I have news for you, Mr. Speaker, this is not new. I was advised that the Crime and Problem Analysis Unit is utilizing GPS units to map crime. Since the late 1990s GPS units were being placed in police vehicles. I was also advised that they were disconnected by the police themselves.

Now, Mr. Speaker, imagine the Government intends to construct and outfit a national training academy after they dismantled the SAUTT Training Academy. Mr. Speaker, SAUTT ran the Leadership Management Institute which was developed around Bramshill International Police College in England, the Specialist Crime Academy and the Security Service Institute which focused on training in the areas of intelligence and CSI training.

Now the Government is talking about forming a national security training academy. The Government is just dismantling, and then turning around to attempt to do something similar to what was dismantled. What a waste of taxpayers' money.

Mr. Speaker, I understand the Government is still owing money to the academy SAUTT was collaborating with. I mentioned the state of emergency earlier, and I heard that persons who were arrested during the SOE are quietly being offered money not to sue the Government. Where is this money coming from?

I see under the PSIP that \$100 million would be used for maintenance of aircraft and training of officers. Mr. Speaker, as we talk about aircraft, my favourite topic, when will the abuse of the helicopters which were bought for the national security stop? [*Crosstalk*] I need to remind this House that to operate the helicopters cost between \$1,000 to \$5,000 per hour. I was reading a newspaper recently. On the front page of the newspaper, I saw my friend, the Minister of the People and Social Development, a lady and a child alighting from the helicopter. [*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: Imagine that, “eh.”

Miss D. Cox: This is you?

Dr. Rowley: Going to picnic.

Miss D. Cox: Front page of the newspaper—front page—the Minister of the People and Social Development, a lady and a child alighting from a national security helicopter. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, like they either went on a picnic or they were going on a picnic.

Dr. Rowley: Either way he is not supposed to.

Miss D. Cox: Mr. Speaker, we are all aware that a helicopter was sent back to Trinidad, from Tobago, to Machel and guests, in order for Machel to perform at a private fete in Tobago. [*Crosstalk*] Well, as for the hon. Prime Minister, that is her first choice of travel—here there and everywhere. Clearly, there is an abuse of the national security helicopter and taxpayers’ money “jumpin up” as usual. [*Desk thumping and Interruption*]

Dr. Rowley: Keep your bums out of it.

Mr. Speaker: Please, please, the language.

Miss D. Cox: How much time do I have?

Miss Mc Donald: It would be deemed unparliamentary. [*Crosstalk*]

Miss D. Cox: I just want to know how much time I have.

Mr. Speaker: You have 13 more minutes. [*Crosstalk*]

Miss D. Cox: Okay, good. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is 29 months since this Government has been in office. They have put in place a state of emergency which is yet to be justified. Thousands of young men deprived of their freedom for reasons yet to be lodged. A select number of Muslims arrested for an alleged and unfounded ploy to assassinate the Prime Minister, and freed just as

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expeditiously as they were hounded—a figment of someone’s wildest imagination; one failed Minister of National Security and a current one groping in the dark and grasping at straws—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rowley: And threatening people.

Miss D. Cox:—two discredited and fired junior Ministers in the Ministry of National Security; an enhanced National Security Council; billions of taxpayers’ dollars wasted on overseas high-ranking visitors; a mentorship programme in tatters; a police service gasping for breath with the head of its two overseas bright stars cut off and, more recently, an attempt to proclaim legislation under a cloud of betrayal of the most despicable dimension, hustled through in a great and ingenious conspiracy for the sole purpose of harbouring friends and party financiers—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: All right, we do not want to go there. We have a Motion. [*Crosstalk*]

Miss D. Cox—from paying for crimes for which they have been charged at home and abroad.

Mr. Speaker, after 29 months and after all these atrocities which have come to pass, the alarming spate of crime and lawlessness in our beloved country still stubbornly and defiantly beckons unchecked, unabated and uncalled for.

Mr. Speaker, as the parliamentary representative for the people of Laventille East/Morvant, I welcome the fact that there have been no murders in Beverly Hills, Laventille for a few weeks now. The same situation prevailed in much the same way that there has been a drastic drop in the murders in Trinidad and Tobago during the state of emergency, but common sense alone tells even the most innocent infant that tying my hands behind my back and expecting me to shoot a pistol will last only for as long as my hands are tied. Placing a watchman on my doorstep night and day will hold me back for as long as the watchman is present and awake and, more importantly, for as long as you can afford the cost. [*Crosstalk*] I repeat, as long as you can afford the cost.

The Minister spoke of joint hot spot patrols which is not new. He also stated that it has produced results and there is a quote of not a single murder in 22 or 26 days, but one would think that Beverly Hills represents the whole of Laventille. If police and soldiers lock down an area, it is only obvious that there would be a decrease in crime in that area.

Dr. Rambachan: That is right.

Miss D. Cox: So to boast about not one murder in Laventille is another boast of the Government. I am indeed happy that there are no murders in Laventille, but one would think that Laventille usually has a murder 365 days a year. That is something that needs to be clear, because people do not know about Laventille but they talk about Laventille. Beverly Hills is just one area of Laventille. So when you talk about no murders in Laventille, you have to say no murders in Beverly Hills, Laventille. Laventille does not have a murder every day.

Dr. Rambachan: Chinapoo.

Miss D. Cox: Where are the statistics to prove that? Because the impression being given to the public is that there is a murder in Laventille every day and that is not so. That is not the norm. It was never the norm. [*Desk thumping*]

The lockdown in Beverly Hills was a reaction to gang violence and I ask the Minister of National Security, is this programme sustainable? The locking down of hot spots—is this the crime plan of the Government to move from community to community and lock them down?

Hon. Member: It working.

Miss D. Cox: Mr. Speaker, the PNM administration knew that to stem the flow of crime, there must be sustainable crime fighting strategies. That is why we put a lot of measures in place which would have been bearing fruit now. This is not to bemoan the excellent work being performed by the combined forces, for it has certainly given some temporary relief to the people of Beverly Hills, Laventille.

3.45 p.m.

Tackling crime and lawlessness requires more, much more than this temporary ad hoc measure. What the Government has offered the people of Laventille is nothing more than a painkiller. It stops the hurting, but the underlying problem still exists and will continue to flourish until the real depth and seriousness of the problem is tackled head-on. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hypolite: Well said!

Miss D. Cox: You see the glorifying of oneself and the photo opportunity solve nothing. It will only serve to give the impression that a “photo op” Minister is doing something substantial, when in truth and in fact he is accomplishing nothing that is lasting and durable.

Mr. Hypolite: Well said!

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Miss D. Cox: Mr. Speaker, I serve notice upon all those who believe that they can fool the people of Laventille. More wisdom, knowledge and understanding of the ills that plague our society reside in Laventille than, based upon recent events, Members of this PP Government can boast of. The people of Laventille know their problems and they know what needs to be done to solve them.

Mr. Speaker, this brings me to the point where Ministers are going into constituencies without even informing the Members of Parliament for the areas. [*Desk thumping*]

Miss Mc Donald: Yes.

Miss D. Cox: They are organizing programmes geared towards the people of Laventille with no consultation; total disrespect to the Members of Parliament for the area. [*Crosstalk*] Many of them are trying to score cheap political points. If the Minister of National Security is serious about crime, he will work closely with the Members of Parliament [*Desk thumping*] and the councillors for the area in organizing programmes for the area. [*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: Who is the MP for the area?

Miss D. Cox: I am asking that they do not make arrangements with community activists, gang leaders, gang members, supporters and so on and hold meetings. [*Interruption*] Hello. I realize the Minister of National Security is acting like the Messiah. I want to say in Laventille he acts like he is the Messiah, but, Mr. Speaker, there is only one Messiah and that Messiah is the Lord Jesus Christ. I want him to be careful because the Lord is a jealous God. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, there are Ministers in this Government providing contracts to gang members and leaders in community in exchange for support. They are talking about crime, all right, and I am aware of it. There are Ministers here providing contracts—and we are talking about crime in the society today—to gang leaders and members.

Mr. Speaker, I read a text sent from a Minister to a community activist, asking the person for the name of their company and promising them a contract to paint buildings. I read the text. “Nobody ain’t tell me.”

Dr. Rowley: From a Minister?

Mr. Speaker: I think we have to be very, very careful that we are imputing improper motives to Members of Parliament, and you are making a personal charge against Ministers. You are raising people’s conduct. I want to advise

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Members that whenever you want to make a personal charge or you want to raise Members' conduct—and this is a matter of conduct and a personal reflection and charge. I will advise you to bring a substantive motion, identify the particular Minister and let us debate it here, but let us not use a parliamentary debate on the budget to impute improper motives and make charges of a personal nature about a Member of Parliament who might be a Minister and raise his conduct and nobody knows who you are talking about. So every Minister is tainted as a result of what you have said. So, I am just advising you, do not go there, please.

Miss D. Cox: Okay, Mr. Speaker, thanks for your guidance. I will come back to it. I will move a substantive motion.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you.

Miss D. Cox: Mr. Speaker, the people of Laventille need sustainable employment and serious social intervention, and this intervention must start from the primary school level up. Giving out contracts and making monetary and other promises to at-risk youths is not the answer to crime.

I see some Ministers are targeting Laventille and east Port of Spain areas on a popularity campaign, looking for votes. All of a sudden, after two and half years in office, they have realized that they care about Laventille. Just last year, under the anti-gang law, the Government threw many of those youths in jail without having the evidence. So, if the anti-gang legislation did not fail, these same youths would have been nowhere around. I know the people of Laventille East, Port of Spain and Morvant are not foolish, and they will realize that—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Hypolite: They are not.

Miss D. Cox:—they are on a campaign to gain votes. All of a sudden you care about the people of Laventille, but let me tell you something: people of Laventille are not as gullible and foolish as they think. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I have much more to say, but time is against me.

Mr. Speaker: Three more minutes.

Miss D. Cox: Three? Okay. Mr. Speaker, I want to say something. There is a point I need to raise and I need the Government to hear that clearly. I always say it. When you become the Government of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, it is for all, not for some. Anything that is done for any constituent, whether it be in the area of crime, whether it be in social services, whether it be sports, it must be done for all. It must be done for all, not for some, and I think that is something that the Government needs to remember.

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I am the Member of Parliament for Laventille East/Morvant and I have to be Member of Parliament for all, not for some, and this is what the Government needs to take on stride. Because what is happening the attitude that is being shown here and it appears as though if you do something for the people of Laventille or some area, you are doing a favour. You all are doing my constituents no favour. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: “That’s right.”

Miss D. Cox: They are citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and they deserve to be given, equal, what is given to other constituencies [*Desk thumping*] and in any other constituency, you all, remember that, are not doing us any favour. You were elected to serve and you are supposed to serve to the best of your ability before God and before man.

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

The Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development (Hon. Errol Mc Leod): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And may I immediately subscribe to what was said finally there by the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, that the Government is supposed to be the Government for all of Trinidad and Tobago, and that perhaps when they were in Government they should have subscribed to those noble principles. [*Desk thumping*] They did not.

Hon. Member: Getting pay back.

Mr. De Coteau: Port of Spain North.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Not me.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: And I am not going to be disturbed by them either. Mr. Speaker, I want to say also, immediately, that an unsuspecting person landing in Trinidad and Tobago and hearing what has been said so far by the Opposition Bench in this debate, such an unsuspecting person would believe, would be led to believe, that it was over the last 29 months that everything, physical and social infrastructure in this country, just immediately started to, and escalated into the deteriorated state that the Member is complaining about.

Mr. De Coteau: Not the landslips in Moruga.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Landslips in Moruga?

Mr. De Coteau: Thirty years gone.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Thirty years. The state of disrepair into which our community centres, our roads, our physical infrastructure, the state of disrepair into which they have fallen is as a result, today, of the neglect of the Government that we have succeeded into office. [*Desk thumping*] That is the truth, that is the reality and we must be attempting now—we ought to join hands across the floor and attempt to deal with all the endemic and other problems afflicting the society of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] But that is not forthcoming from them.

When you hear, for instance, that it is the efforts of the past administration that is responsible for our 2012 Olympic successes—you know they almost claimed that it is the PNM that is responsible for the West Indies having won T20 yesterday. [*Laughter and crosstalk*] I find it ridiculous, Mr. Speaker.

I listened carefully—and I am very good at listening—and I have found that there has been absolutely nothing new, nothing inspiring. There has been no elucidation of perspectives which posit Trinidad and Tobago into the international community coming from that side. Absolutely nothing new!

Hon. Member: Were you surprised?

Hon. E. Mc Leod: As a boy at school I used to listen quite intently. Indeed, my father insisted that his family listened to the budget presentations and debates that would have eliminated from presentations such as Dr. Eric Williams would have done, and the responses that one would have had from the likes of Lionel F. Seukeran and other people. They used to teach the national community, and Dr. Williams used to be putting Trinidad and Tobago in a global perspective. Yes! What do we have here today? We have responses which we will not expect to come from a better than ordinary post primary school child, Mr. Speaker.

Nevertheless, it is my privilege to address this honourable House for the third consecutive year during the debate of the Appropriation Bill, and I do so as a proud member of the People's Partnership Government. [*Desk thumping*] One could not avoid hearing the couple decibels above whisper. I intended no insult, Mr. Speaker. I was merely stating fact as I see it. For yet another year, I recognize the knowledge and fortitude of our women and our men who are charged with the responsibility of shaping a framework for the management of our country's fiscal affairs for the good of all of our people in consultation with our people. Therefore, in this regard, I wish to place on record my profound appreciation to the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy and his team at the Ministry of Finance and the Economy for a job well done. [*Desk thumping*]

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Sen. Howai's expertise acquired over more than 30 years, I think, in the financial services industry has been manifested in the sound fiscal package presented to this House one Monday ago, and which was intended to move our economy along a path of sustainable development.

4.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, it was suggested that we have been realizing seriously depleted oil and gas production and I think that point was made by both the Member for Diego Martin West, Leader of the Opposition, and the Member for Diego Martin North/East. It is true that today we are affected adversely by a failure to have invested more in finding new reserves, indeed in maintaining our declared proven reserves. It was suggested by one of them, I think it was the Member for Diego Martin North/East, that we ought to have engaged in secondary oil recovery, workover programmes as we would know it in the industry.

But what that does, Mr. Speaker, is that assists you in maintaining your optimum production from already declared and known proven resources. What you need to do is to engage in exploration so as to bring to bear new reserves to improve your situation in the business. The Member went on to say, correctly so, that you would realize in seven years' time, the benefits of the investment that you would do today.

So I think, unconsciously, that Member was condemning the fact that seven years ago, they failed to invest in the extent that we should have invested in exploration to bring up a production that would take care of the—that would compensate against the natural decline that we are realizing. They did not invest in that. You know what they did? The likes of the last or the former Prime Minister, Prof. Julien—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Thank God for him.

Hon. E. Mc Leod:—Malcolm Jones.

Hon. Members: What!

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Thank God for them.

Hon. Members: Mc Intosh.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: No, I will mention Mc Intosh in something else, not that.

Hon. Members: Ooooh goood!

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Thank God for him!

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Did you put up a finger to stop me, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: No.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Thank God.

Mr. Sharma: You have to thank God for him. He only serves you!

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Or, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In small economies like ours, and especially if you did not invest in R&D, Research and Development, you do not go spending scarce resources to the extent that they spent, experimenting on something that others had deep pockets for, but in which they failed to invest their own money and they came to use Trinidad and Tobago as guinea pig and we fell for it. Nine billion dollars or thereabouts, we are committed—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Warner: “Tell dem! Tell dem!”

Hon. Member: Where that money gone, boy?

Mr. De Coteau: Thank God for him, boy.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: To GTL. Nine billion dollars—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Warner: These saints, boy! These saints!

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Had we expended half of that, Mr. Speaker, in exploration when they were spending it on GTL, today we would have been in a better situation than we are *[Desk thumping]* but they did not do that. They did not do that and today they want to blame somebody.

Hon. Member: Where the money gone?

Hon. E. Mc Leod: I am not saying that we are beyond mistakes and that we are infallible; I am not saying that at all, Mr. Speaker. But I know that if we are related to the devil, they must be Beelzebub himself. *[Desk thumping and laughter]* Clearly, the extensive consultations held by Minister Howai and his team as part of the pre-budget discussions—*[Interruption]*

Miss Mc Donald: Mr. Speaker, please, I rise on Standing Order 36(5), Beelzebub. *[Laughter]* He referred to us as Beelzebub I think. *[Crosstalk]* No, Mr. Speaker, that is very unparliamentary.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: That is the devil. We are not the devil.

Miss Mc Donald: Yes, that is the devil. That is the devil? Beelzebub. *[Continuous laughter and crosstalk]*

Miss Cox: “Out ah place!”

Miss Mc Donald: No, I do not consider myself to be any devil or anybody on this side, Mr. Speaker. Standing Order 36(5). Abusing us!

Miss Cox: It is not a joke!

Miss Mc Donald: Come on, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. I expect better of you.

Mr. Speaker: All right. Okay, Member for Port of Spain South. Hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprises Development, that expression apparently has aroused a lot of anger. I would ask you if you could probably leave out that expression and at least, you know, not describe Members of the Opposition in the language that you have. They take objection to it.

Miss Mc Donald: Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, he will withdraw it.

Miss Mc Donald: Withdraw it, please.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Thank you for your guidance, Mr. Speaker, and I withdraw the description.

Miss Mc Donald: Thank you.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: You cannot call us that.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: I withdraw the description, Mr. Speaker. But I was suggesting that if they think themselves anywhere near righteousness, then we are the blood brother, sister and cousins of Mother Theresa. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] “Ah not crazy, yuh know. Ah not crazy at all and ah doh even look it.”

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Say it one more time and you will convince yourself. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Clearly, clearly! [*Laughter*] The extensive consultations held by Minister Howai and his team as part of the pre-budget discussions demonstrates a keen understanding of the dynamics and benefits of collaboration and consultation to national development. This is a topic to which I will come back a little bit later.

After careful consideration, Mr. Speaker, consideration of the advances we have made as a Government over the short period of 29 months as identified by

the hon. Member for Laventille East/Morvant, in a period of grave economic uncertainty and threatening global instability, I am reaffirmed in my belief that we have delivered on many of our promises. [*Desk thumping*] We have and that is not to be denied. Of course, there is still a lot more to be done but we met “ah mess”, Mr. Speaker, and it will take some time to clean up that mess before we begin to gallop into positive development.

When we survey developments in education, trade, foreign relations, agriculture, social development and the entire sphere of activities, not forgetting the labour market, over the past two years, and compare these with the challenges faced by many countries, including those in Europe, we can only conclude that it is as a result of astute leadership, even as we made mistakes, that we made a most impactful difference in the state of affairs in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Long time, we used to call that cut-eye.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: “Dey still calling it dat. Up to today, dey still calling it dat.”

Hon. E. Mc Leod: If I did not know that it is cut-eye, “ah woulda tell yuh tuh go wey yuh looking.” [*Laughter*] Under the leadership of the Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, we are seeing for the first time a close nexus, a close alignment, among our national mission, vision, medium-term plans, programmes, projects and activities. We have witnessed a concerted effort at continuous improvement and the elimination of wastage of resources, time and efforts, and a demand that we, the Government, and by extension, the citizens, receive value for money. I wish to commend my leader, the Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, for a job well done. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I referred to how it had been done over the years, and over the period 1976 to 1981, I was one of those young persons coming to the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago and understanding some things and learning from those who were well experienced in the field. I alluded to Trinidad and Tobago being put in the regional and broader global context as we sought to address the important principles which we had established for ourselves. I thought that we might take another glimpse as the Minister of Finance and the Economy attempted, might take another glimpse of the global economy and labour markets. While the initial green shoots of economic recovery have been turning into branches in some parts of the world, many economies still remain very fragile and vulnerable. Trinidad and Tobago, as bad as the situation might be, has largely been saved by the fact that we have some oil and we have some gas.

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According to the International Monetary Fund, World Economic and Financial Surveys, Regional Economic Outlook Report, April 2012, I quote:

“The global economic environment is stabilizing, but remains weak.”

Just a few weeks ago, Mr. Speaker, it was indicated that the IMF was set to cut its forecast for global growth next month, given the uncertainty as to whether the eurozone crisis can be ameliorated. We heard from the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and Member for Tunapuna, as he taught us again today, indicating the situation that is deteriorating in the eurozone insofar as, I think it is Spain, and there are some precautionary moves being made by the French at this time.

As economic policies become more stringent, high sovereign debt persists in some countries and fiscal space appears to be shrinking. This leads us to become concerned about people and about jobs. People and jobs are really the impacts that we will make on the real economy. How then has the global labour market been faring in light of these global economic developments? As anticipated, labour market recovery has lagged behind economic recovery and economic growth has not contributed to creating sufficient jobs, notwithstanding the CSO’s number, 4.9 per cent and so on, and the quarrels that you hear across the floor about the—what is a good word for lateness?

Hon. Member: Tardiness!

Hon. E. McLeod: Well, it is not that I wanted really. [*Laughter*] About the obsolescence, perhaps, of the methods used by the CSO to give us unemployment numbers and cost of living and all of that, but that is what we have, and that is what we have to work with until we put in place a more accurate, more modern, mechanism.

4.15 p.m.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) *World of Work Report 2012* indicates that the global labour market is currently characterized by large employment gaps with a backlog of global unemployment of some 200 million, and Trinidad and Tobago cannot just ensconce itself within our own borders and look at what is happening inside of here and do not draw a relationship with what is happening outside of here. It is estimated that more than 400 million new jobs will be needed over the next decade, to avoid a further increase in unemployment. Labour imbalances are now more structural in nature, resulting in increased vulnerability of at-risk societal groupings who are experiencing long-term unemployment and exclusion from the labour market.

At the regional level, the labour markets in Latin America and the Caribbean are viewed to be steadily improving since 2010, according to a May 2012 report by ECLAC and the ILO entitled *The Employment Situation in Latin America and the Caribbean*. The report indicates that the average regional unemployment rate fell from 7.3 per cent in 2010 to 6.7 per cent in 2011 and for the Caribbean region, unemployment rates are recorded as increasing by 0.2 per cent from 2010 to 2011. These numbers tell a story—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Warner: To us.

Hon. E. Mc Leod:—to us, yes and they suggest that we are not doing too badly, “yuh know”. But it seems that we do best at beating up upon ourselves.

Mr. Speaker, there is a resounding call for action to prevent the deepening of the global jobs crisis. In summary, the experts are advising that the key to recovering from the fiscal and economic turbulence in which the world finds itself is to focus heavily on creating jobs and making the labour market more buoyant. In this regard, some of the policy prescriptions put forward by international organizations such as the ILO, include coordination of global policies to support global aggregate demand and stimulate job creation, regulation of the financial system to restore creditability and confidence that will benefit firms and in particular micro and small enterprises about which I have quite a bit to say later, targeting of stimulus measures to support job creation, job growth and encouraging private sector investment that will lend itself to expanded payrolls and reduction in unemployment.

That is the international situation. What about Trinidad and Tobago, the labour market, I mean? I am happy to report that the thinking and approach of this Government is consistent with the recommendations proposed by experts internationally and, therefore, it is no surprise that we have been reaping the rewards of sound, robust and informed decision-making which have been positively impacting our labour market in Trinidad and Tobago. Indeed, the 2012/2013 budget fulfils these criteria.

Unemployment rates—the unemployment figures are indicative of the fact that we are doing some right things and some things which are right. The Central Statistical Office recorded a decline in the unemployment rate from 5.9 per cent in 2010 to 4.9 per cent in 2011. This means that 7,000 less persons were unemployed in 2011 compared to 2010. Let me state that again. This means that 7,000 less persons were unemployed in 2011 compared to 2010. The unemployment rate for males fell from 5.2 per cent in 2010 to 3.9 per cent in

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2011, while that for females declined from 7 per cent to 6.3 per cent for the same period. Having spent most of my life fighting against the scourge of unemployment and disrespect for workers' rights, you will appreciate, hon. Members, the joy I experience each time I hear that one more person has obtained a job.

I recall my first contribution to the debate in 2010. I ended by calling upon the business community to give an opportunity to one more young person, if only for the Christmas period and that will help to transform the lives of so many of us.

Mr. Speaker, there have been significant declines in unemployment levels in various industries from 2010 to 2011, such as construction, community, personnel and social services and wholesale and retail trade restaurants and hotels. When the data is analyzed by occupational groups, we have seen noteworthy declines in unemployment rates in elementary occupations and among craft and related workers and clerks.

On the other hand, with regard to data on retrenchment drawn from notices filed by companies in accordance with the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act, for the year 2011, there were notices of 1,124 persons retrenched. For the period January to June 2012, we have received notices of approximately 308 persons being retrenched. But these ought not to be taken as absolute numbers because the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act, as you are aware, talks to retrenchment of no less than five persons, in which case you must report and there is the incidence also of employers who do not have collective agreement contracts with unions. They do not have relationships with unions and they abrogate the law insofar as that is concerned, but insofar as our receiving notices of retrenchment, we have had only 308 persons being retrenched for the period January to June 2012. The sectors accounting for the greatest number of retrenchments in 2011 and for the first half of 2012 are manufacturing, specifically the food processors and drink and tobacco subsector, distribution and petroleum.

It should be noted that in the construction sector, for which we received notices of 90 retrenched persons in 2011, there have been no notices filed for 2012. Most businesses reported that redundancy was as a result of loss of competitiveness, financial constraints, closure of business activity, increased cost of doing business, completion of particular projects and no immediate need for the relevant skills set.

Mr. Speaker, I am personally intent on doing all that is possible within my sphere of responsibility and influence to continue to improve labour market

efficiency in Trinidad and Tobago, and in this regard, as Minister with the responsibility for labour and small and micro enterprise development, I have ensured that the policies, programmes and projects of the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, those projects which are developed in the context of government's policy framework for sustainable development and the medium-term policy framework 2011/2014, are all aimed at promoting decent work and mainstreaming employment creation.

Mr. Speaker, let me now address some of the major developments under my portfolio over the past year and which have been transforming the labour and entrepreneurship landscape in our country and propelling us further along the path of sustainable development. These developments will no doubt highlight the fact that this Government is committed to evolutionary change. I copied this from somebody when I met with representatives from the business community, "evolutionary change at a revolutionary pace", and he looked at me—I had always considered him a serious capitalist and I do not need to suggest to you what he considered me—he said: "take dat in yuh pwefm". Time will not permit me to address all that I would have liked to do so, therefore, I wish to focus on developments in the following key areas: job creation, decent work, social dialogue, industrial relations, the labour legislative agenda and enforcement of rights in the workplace.

On job creation, early in his budget statement, the Minister of Finance and the Economy indicated that focus is being placed on our public policy agenda for transforming this country with solid platforms for good quality job creation and for ensuring that the wealth so created, is distributed to our national citizenry in a fair and equitable manner. I am proud to report that the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development has been contributing significantly to the creation of sustainable jobs in keeping with one of the four strategic priorities outlined in the *Medium-Term Policy Framework 2011-2014*, namely, economic growth, job creation, competitiveness and innovation. This is being achieved primarily through the creation of sustainable micro and small enterprises, promotion of co-operatives and expanding avenues for temporary overseas employment.

MSE development—micro and small enterprises remain the engine for economic growth in many countries and provide the opportunity for poverty reduction, boosting employment creation and stimulating economic activity. In our case, MSEs are centrally positioned in Government's diversification strategy. We heard from the Minister of Finance and the Economy that a comprehensive

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programme will be developed over the next year, in consultation with stakeholders, to address some of the challenges which persist in the micro, small and medium enterprise sector. We have already made significant strides in enhancing the environment for these enterprises to conduct business and are looking beyond to enhancing their export potential. We will work assiduously in this fiscal year in collaboration with our stakeholders to deliver on these new endeavours.

Since I took office in 2010 as Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, the Ministry's efforts in promoting and developing MSEs in Trinidad and Tobago have intensified and today we have adopted a more structured and evidenced-based approach to MSE development in collaboration with our stakeholders. At present, there are initiatives currently in progress and about to be implemented to facilitate MSE development in Trinidad and Tobago.

4.30 p.m.

A national baseline survey on MSEs is to be conducted shortly and work has commenced in the revision of the national MSE policy. The national baseline survey will provide us with the necessary demographic information on MSEs, from which we can create the appropriate policies, Mr. Speaker. Simultaneously, consultations are currently in progress for the revision of the national MSE policy that will support a more facilitative environment for micro and small enterprise development. We have already concluded four consultations in Trinidad and shortly we will be having another consultation in Tobago.

Thus far, we have received substantial yet sobering comments. Too many MSEs continue to cry out for a less onerous process for doing business in Trinidad and Tobago. Also, there is a need to recognize the unique challenges of micro and small businesses, and to implement programmes and support systems to encourage their development and their growth. I will like to assure these businesses that their voices have been heard and our Ministry, the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, will be making every effort to ensure that the elimination of barriers and the creation of the necessary support systems will be addressed within this fiscal year.

Mr. Speaker, there is need for consolidated effort and action from all Government agencies and stakeholders, in rectifying the current challenges facing MSEs in Trinidad and Tobago. The Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development will lead these initiatives, as we intend to transform the MSE environment in the coming months. Some of these efforts will be done in

collaboration with the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Investment as we implement the enabling competitive business strategy, a national programme that is supported by funding from the European Union, that seeks to improve the business environment for the micro, small and medium enterprise sector. Let me share with you now, Mr. Speaker, some of our major initiatives that are already bearing fruit in the MSE sector.

I would have addressed this honourable House on the national Integrated Business Incubator System sometime ago. Last year I reported on the establishment of this business system—the national Integrated Business Incubator System—which is designed to provide MSEs with the necessary training, physical infrastructure, financing, both seed capital and equipment financing, operational support and networking to develop them into sustainable and competitive businesses.

I am pleased to report that the opportunities created by IBIS, the acronym for the Integrated Business Incubator System, have been embraced by existing and potential entrepreneurs. Work has been progressing on the establishment of two types of business incubators: the commercial and the community based. The commercial business incubator will provide opportunities for existing MSEs to develop high value, high growth businesses as an impetus for national economic transformation using the public/private partnership model. This approach fosters partnering with private sector entities and non-governmental organizations for the creation of the business opportunities.

This opportunity was embraced by the Arthur Lok Jack Graduate School of Business in May of this year, and the first commercial business incubator, Mr. Speaker, in this category was launched. Two other proposals are currently being evaluated and we expect additional commercial incubator proposals to be submitted in the near future.

The community-based business incubators facilitate the building of a sound institutional framework for greater efficiency of entrepreneurial activities at the community level. Based on the findings of an in-house feasibility study for CBBIS, that is the community-based business incubators, conducted in 2011, it was determined that start-up and new businesses, particularly in vulnerable communities and communities highly susceptible to poverty, unemployment and underemployment should be the primary focus of this initiative. I am sure that the Members for Laventille East/Morvant and Laventille West will perhaps appreciate a whole lot that is coming here.

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I wish to add that the incubation process encompasses three main phases namely: the pre-incubation, incubation and post incubation phases. The first two communities to benefit from the IBIS programme were Sangre Grande and Siparia. Approximately 100 persons attended the first consultation for the first cohort in these communities. Of those who attended the consultations, 53 applications from interested persons were received, however, a total of 40 applicants met the criteria and were successfully enrolled in the pre-incubator phase of the programme; 24 from Sangre Grande and 16 from Siparia. [*Crosstalk*]

To date, participants from Sangre Grande and Siparia have graduated from the pre-incubation phase and have achieved [*Desk thumping*] success to the point of having their business proposals accepted by an expert panel, and will be entering the incubation phase of the programme shortly.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Before you continue, hon. Minister and Member, I think it is a good time for us to suspend for tea until 5.10 p.m.

4.38 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.10 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre and Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When we took the tea break, I was dealing with the promotion of the IBIS programme, and I wish to indicate that, to date, participants from Sangre Grande and Siparia have graduated from the pre-incubation phase and have achieved success to the point of having their business proposals accepted by an expert panel and will be entering the incubation phase of the programme shortly.

There is a process through which we take these people and particularly young people, the emphasis is on young people, there is a process through which we take them. So they go through the pre-incubation stage, after we would have had consultations and received their applications and so on. Having gone through the

pre-incubation stage they are then put into the incubation stage and we spend time developing the particular business in which they would want to be involved.

The second IBIS cohort has been selected from the communities of Point Fortin and San Juan/Laventille, Barataria. I wanted those Members for Laventille East/Morvant and Laventille West to hear this, but I am sure that the information is going to reach them because we have identified that those are at-risk areas, and we really want to help all of the people of Trinidad and Tobago to the extent that we can identify their needs, their concerns and the purposes for which they would want to apply themselves. Training associated with the pre-incubation phase in these areas commenced in June 2012.

For Point Fortin, 57 individuals expressed an interest in IBIS. Of those potential entrepreneurs, 34 applications were received and 19 potential entrepreneurs are currently actively participating in pre-incubation training. For the San Juan/Laventille/Barataria region, a total of 173 individuals expressed interest and 80 applications were received. Fifty applications were successfully screened and currently 49 candidates are attending pre-incubation training.

We are pleased with the response being received as the participation rates continue to exceed 95 per cent of all accepted candidates. I have to cut to the chase, Mr. Speaker, given the limited time that I have.

5.15 p.m.

We expect that by the end of the first quarter of this new fiscal year, two incubators will become operational in Sangre Grande and Siparia to facilitate the candidates who graduated from the pre-incubation phase in these areas. Additionally, the next communities being considered by IBIS are located in Tobago, in Couva, Caroni, Chaguanas and Diego Martin, Carenage. We are not leaving it there, Mr. Speaker because we have to create—we have to assist in creating a market for these businesses as they develop, and we do not want any to fail.

So there is the fair-share programme, another major initiative in the area of MSE development. This programme facilitates increased entrepreneurial activity and a vital link between Government agencies, Ministries and departments and qualified MSEs and cooperatives by providing public procurement opportunities up to \$1 million. Qualified businesses also benefit from access to training opportunities and increased visibility.

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In the fiscal year 2010/2011, the Ministry reviewed this programme, and by December 2011, approval was granted for a two-year plan that would enable its operationalization. We have continued to market the programme to encourage entrepreneurs to register and to bring Government agencies on board, as well. We continue to engage Government Ministries, and I can say at this point, Mr. Speaker, that there are at least 14 Ministries that have committed to the process. We will be visiting State agencies as well.

Additionally, we will continue to engage the regional business associations, as well as the chambers of industry and commerce through presentations, newspaper advertisements, distribution of flyers via direct mail and other means. We have been able to sensitize persons to the benefits of this programme. The processing of approximately 90 clients—nine zero clients—is under way for provisional certification in the fair-share programme.

It does not end there either, Mr. Speaker. In August, 2012, IBIS partnered with the Caribbean Information and Credit Rating Services Limited, CariCRIS, the region's credit rating agency, to implement a flexible MSE credit-risk rating methodology, in order to conduct and provide detailed reports on the risk ratings for IBIS incubator clients. This will enable clients to furnish prospective financiers with relevant credit analysis on the viability of their business enterprises.

Very briefly, let me say a word or two, Mr. Speaker, on the National Entrepreneurship Development Company Limited, NEDCO. Sometimes we hear NIDCO and we confuse it with NEDCO. NEDCO is the implementation arm of my Ministry with regard to MSE development. This company continues to play a critical role in implementing Government's policy on MSEs through provision of loans and business support services to such entrepreneurs. For the period October 2011 to August 2012, 330 loans were disbursed: 255 of these were categorized as new loans.

In keeping with the Government's thrust to expand the tourism sector, NEDCO is now granting loan financing for the purchase of new or used maxi taxis, maxi-taxi repairs, and maxi-taxi insurance. Lending will be subject to a ceiling of \$500,000. This is a Government that is working; this is a Government that is trying to develop other sectors and individuals in the economic advance of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Speaker.

I want to get quickly to—there is so much to talk about. There is so much to talk about, and one would have thought that the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, Mr. Speaker, and the small and micro enterprise

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development is hardly mentioned, but we keep emphasizing it all of the time. They say Ministry of Labour and they thought that we superintend over strikes and lockouts and guide matters to the Industrial Court, and so on, only. We do that, and that has been taking a lot of our time, but we are also trying to develop employers themselves, entrepreneurs who will assist in employing additional people, and so on. We subscribe to the thing about teaching the man to fish, so that he feeds himself for a lifetime, rather than our handing a fish every day and just feeding him for that day.

Industrial relations, Mr. Speaker, has been perhaps our biggest challenge since coming to office, and we are getting over the nervous parts of this thing, you know. We are getting over it. We have done a lot of work, but there is still so much to be done, and we are trying to engage as much as they are prepared to allow themselves to be engaged in this process. We are trying to engage all of the trade unions and all of the employers through their organizations, their federations, and so on.

We inherited, Mr. Speaker, an entire plateau of industrial relations problems and unsettling and troubling collective agreements, all of them for the period 2007 to 2010, 2008 to 2011. And these agreements outstanding—a number of them still—these agreements were being offered zero by zero by one; and others, one by one by one; 1 per cent in some cases, 3 per cent in some cases. Now we have an understanding as to the reason that might have been the case.

There was no social dialogue process taking place and people felt, some of them trade unions, they felt threatened and they were referring all of the time to the stand-off that took place in 2009—was it during CHOGM or the Summit of the Americas—when they thought that they might have marched to bring to the attention of the 34—or 33, is it—leaders of the Summit of the Americas. They thought they would have brought their plight to the attention of the likes of these leaders, yes. State forces were organized against any such demonstrations, and we did not have any call for marches as big as we saw recently. It is like the People's Partnership Government is responsible for the state of things and all of the measures that we would have met when we came to office. [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Blame, blame, blame, blame, blame.

Hon. E. McLeod: Well, it is not blaming you, as much as it is putting it squarely in front of you, so that you would appreciate your own failures. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*]. I will tell you when we go to the Executive Lounge.

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Mr. Speaker, we had committed in the Government's policy statement, we had committed in our manifesto 2010, insofar as labour is concerned, we had committed to amending the Industrial Relations Act, to remove a number of limits that were unfairly placed on the backs of one set of the Partnership, if you like, in the tripartite process. We committed to ensuring the right of workers to join trade unions of their choice; we committed to doing something about regularizing the status of certain classes of workers who had been left out for as many years as we have had the Industrial Relations Act, and before it, the Industrial Stabilization Act. Such workers as domestic workers, gardeners, amongst others, we had committed to regularizing their situation and to providing decent work for all.

We thought that we might also deal with an extreme provision in the IRA that allows for the pursuit, Mr. Speaker, of the certification of trade unions. Once a trade union was deemed to have taken illegal industrial action, especially if such action was identified as having a political content beyond the normal trade union political content, yes, we thought that we would deal with that.

But as you are aware, the Industrial Relations Act affects the society, it affects workers and their unions, it affects employers and their organizations, and in a society such as ours, if you want to change the provisions in that Act, you would prefer to engage in consultation with the social partners, so that they can all assist in informing the positions that we must take. Insofar as that is concerned, we established for the first time in 32 years, the Industrial Relations Advisory Committee identified at section 80 of the IRA, and we have given them the task of reviewing all of these conditions that exist in the Industrial Relations Act, and I look forward in the next couple of days to receiving their first report.

They were appointed in January of this year, after consultation and consideration, and so on. We want them to look at—and they have been mandated to look at—these that I have already mentioned, in the context of our commitment to decent work for all in the society. If we are going to deal with decent work for all, in which people have jobs that they can go to, jobs that are fulfilling, jobs that allow for the respect of the rights of workers, and so on, sometimes you might have to go seek adjudication on issues relating to all of that, and those whom you go before for adjudication themselves do not have security of tenure. So we committed to changing that situation, too, [*Desk thumping*] where judges in the Industrial Court do not now enjoy security of tenure. This People's Partnership Government is going to award them security of tenure.

Mr. Speaker, as you are aware, we would have done something a couple months ago with the Maternity Protection Act. We amended it to reach

international standards, and in 2010, for Christmas I think it was, we amended the Minimum Wage Act. The minimum wage, which was promised \$1.00 increase in 2005, did not receive it and, in 2010, we put it to \$12.50 from \$9.00. It is a lot.

5.30 p.m.

Dr. Gopeesingh: From \$9 to \$12.50.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: From \$9 to \$12.50. Mr. Speaker, social dialogue at the enterprise level is as critical as social dialogue at the national level. Both levels of dialogue contribute to a stable and harmonious industrial relations climate. We are committed to attaining such peace and stability. It could be said, Mr. Speaker, that we are living in interesting and exciting times where democracy truly prevails. Some may wonder whether I am disturbed by the frequency of industrial action that we have been experiencing over the past year and a half.

Mr. Warner: Not in the least.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: As a veteran trade unionist, myself—

Hon. Member: You live with it.

Hon. E. Mc Leod:—I live with it. I am in no way disturbed but rather encouraged that trade unionism is very much alive in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] But let me advise that trade unions and their leadership must begin to better articulate the interest of their members, their workers and that of the society in which we live. I have often said that if we exert all of our efforts to put shelter and provide protection over any one small group of workers, but we leave the rest of Trinidad and Tobago uncovered and bare, then we would not have properly protected that little group of workers. [*Desk thumping*] We have to see the national interest.

Mr. Warner: Talk, boy, talk, talk.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: We must know that the strike weapon is a most important weapon and we can have it subscribed to the development of our democracy. Of course, we can. So we must know when to strike.

Mr. Warner: TCL.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: When we take strike action, Mr. Speaker, such action should not end up being punitive to the very people whom we claim to be serving. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Peters: TCL, TCL.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: There are some 50 workers, Mr. Speaker, who continue to be outside of their jobs as we speak, and it is because one decided that one must shut down the place and not listen to advice that is given—very reasonable advice. As chief conciliator, there are some things which I will not even say to this Parliament because I want at all times to not just be impartial, I wish to also appear to be impartial. The TCL strike was an error of great magnitude in Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Warner: Somebody must be held accountable.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: The Industrial Relations Act recognizes the rights of unions and employers to take industrial action with a few exceptions in furtherance of their individual aspirations in negotiations for collective agreement. In my last budget contribution I indicated the stance of this Government, that we do not frown on industrial actions undertaken within the ambit of the law.

I also placed on record that the People's Partnership Government pays the highest respect to the fundamental right of workers to join organizations of their choice to represent them and the right of parties to an employment relationship, to engage in free and fair collective bargaining in keeping with the provisions of ILO Conventions No. 87, Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize, and Convention No. 98, Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining.

The Government does not wish to interfere in this process but to encourage and facilitate productive bipartite dialogue. And, Mr. Speaker, I make bold to say that as a member of this Government, I am not aware of any attempt by this Government to stultify the growth of the trade union movement, to stifle popular protests and so on. As a matter of fact, we have been inviting them to come and let us sit down as reasonable people around the table and find solutions to the many problems that we have. [*Desk thumping*] But there will continue to be those who will not readily accept our word and who might well go on a course that might end up being destructive.

I wish to place on record that the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development takes his role as conciliator in disputes arising out of the employment relationship very seriously. We have seen a decline in the number of reported trade disputes by 8 per cent from 1,226 in 2010 to 1,127 in 2011. Between January 2010 to September 2012, approximately 1,842 issues requiring conciliation proceedings were reported, 779 of these were finalized by memoranda of agreement. For the two years that we have been in office, we have

concluded 49 full collective agreements for which negotiations were not completed for the 2007—2010 period. [*Desk thumping*] But for the limited time that I have—

Mr. Speaker: Four more minutes.

Hon. E. Mc Leod:—I was going to read the full list, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Indarsingh: Read all, read all.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: The full list, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: You can table them and they will be circulated.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Very well, Mr. Speaker. Yes.

Now, we want to get to the next phase of this process, and it is only the key players in this thing who would prevent that from happening. The Minister of Finance and the Economy spoke at somewhat great length on the question of advancing the social dialogue process. At last year's budget debate, I indicated that our Government remains committed to using meaningful social dialogue as a developmental process to propel us onto the road of sustainable development.

I reiterated my firm conviction that there was not anything that could not be solved by social dialogue: whether it is bipartite dialogue between employer and employee; or tripartite dialogue among government, employer and worker. Social dialogue promotes consensus, not necessarily total agreement but consensus for building capacities, maximizing available resources and increasing the delivery of value on matters of national importance. Dialogue particularly in the periods of economic downturn is an important component of good governance, social harmony and economic prosperity.

We could look at other societies, Mr. Speaker, where since the 1980s they had engaged in a level of social dialogue that had advanced them to the point, yes, and without which dialogue they would have suffered drastically in the scenario started in 2008/2009—the world economic declines, and so on. I am talking about Singapore; I am talking about Ireland; I am talking about Mauritius; I am talking about Barbados, right here on our doorsteps in the Caribbean; I am talking about Jamaica. As a matter of fact today the Jamaican trade unions have agreed with the Government that there will be no—there will be a freeze on wage increases for a period of, I think, two or three years.

Mr. Warner: Three years, yes.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Yes. Now, I am not proposing that we do that here, but I am saying that we must sit down and talk about the problems afflicting and affecting Trinidad and Tobago if we want to save this place. [*Desk thumping*] I am happy to report that June, last June, on the 26th and 27th, we had a most important social dialogue workshop, and we had representatives from Mauritius, from Barbados, from Jamaica and from the ILO's office in Geneva here. And the Prime Minister has agreed to take ownership of this process as it is going to be chaired by the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, and with the trade union federations attending, both of them committed to involvement and support for the process. We want to take them at their word and we look forward to Trinidad and Tobago going forward ever and backward never in that regard.

I think I must end now.

Mr. Speaker: You have one more minute.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: One more minute. Earlier, I mentioned something about the obsolescence of the CSO. I did not quite mean what I said. It is the methodology that they employ that is old, that is obsolete and that we must change. I did not mean that the CSO itself was obsolete, and I thought that I should correct that.

I am certain, Mr. Speaker, that given the path we are currently charting, the people of Trinidad and Tobago can expect to see improvements in our labour market in a relatively short space of time, including improved conditions of work. We will continue to put our hands to the plough to ensure that we serve our people and realize the goal of decent work for all.

I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am grateful for the opportunity to join this debate on the Bill entitled "An Act to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30th day of September, 2013". Before I turn my attention to the Bill under review, I should like to express my gratitude to the Leader of Government Business for the much more reasonable hours that we shall now be spending at any one sitting debating these very important and weighty Bills. Having to stay in Parliament from 10.00 a.m. one morning to 5.00 or 6.00

the following morning and having to rise and speak in the wee hours of the morning has been rather painful and stressful, especially for a senior citizen like me. So I am thankful, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this budget is a budget of deception. It is a budget of smoke and mirrors in which the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy is seeking to convince the population that our economy is in good shape. He projects that there would be 1.2 per cent growth in real GDP in fiscal 2012, but as a layman I am struggling to imagine this real GDP growth. Even a cursory glance at the key productive sectors of our economy shows declines. Let us examine some facts. Mr. Speaker, I gained a lot of my information from looking at the budget statement for the fiscal year 2012.

Let us look at energy. This sector alone contributes almost 40 per cent of our GDP. There have been no tangible developments of even one of the major projects identified in the fiscal 2012 budget as being the significant earners of foreign direct investment for Trinidad and Tobago. AUM 2, CariSal, the Reliance bitumen upgrader for La Brea, Methanol 2, polypropylene, maleic anhydride—none of these projects have come on stream. Neither has the hon. Minister mentioned any word on the grand plan for the solar manufacturing complex nor the national wind resource programme to promote renewable energy.

Mr. Speaker, what we do know is that there has been a decline in oil production in 2011. This decline was nearly 4 per cent and we know that there is a continuation of natural gas shortage in 2012 which, by the way, the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs last year, told us would be a thing of the past since his Ministry was coordinating the planning of plant and upstream shutdowns, but this has not happened and natural gas production has declined by over 5 per cent.

Even as I speak, Mr. Speaker, there are several plants to shut down on the Point Lisas Estate to shelter maintenance and reservoir work in the upstream sector, a situation that is likely to persist at least until late 2013 or even early 2014. In fact, as the upstream maintenance programme peaks in 2013, there is likely to be even greater decline in natural gas production before the situation improves.

The knock-on effect of the lower gas production is a continuing decline in ammonia and methanol production over 4 per cent and this at a time when ammonia prices are US \$650 per tonne and methanol prices pushing close to US \$400 a tonne. Similarly, LNG production declined by some 5 per cent at a time when our LNG exports are under serious pressure from new LNG to market. In

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addition, the phenomenal rise of natural gas reserves over the past 24 months in east and west Africa is ominous indeed and does not augur well for our local natural gas sector.

Mr. Speaker, by the way, the national population should be made aware that this PP Government frittered away a golden opportunity for Trinidad and Tobago's energy sector in Ghana while they deliberated and procrastinated with the installation of their boards.

Mr. Speaker, let us look at agriculture. Of the 15 megafarms identified in the 2012 budget, only five have started production, and only one in the current fiscal year. The agriculture sector is expected to contract by 5 per cent in 2012.

Manufacturing: Given the long TCL strike, this sector is expected to decline further following the 2011 decline.

Hon. Member: "Doh read the whole thing, nah"

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Construction: the rate of decline this year has more than doubled from last year, to some 20 per cent. Of course, Mr. Speaker, some favoured contractors are doing very well, but for the majority of contractors in this sector, it is only crumbs, if that at all. It would be interesting, Mr. Speaker, for example, to pursue a listing of all the major contracts including subcontracts awarded in the construction sector, especially with respect to the highway to Point Fortin.

Tourism: both the number of cruise ships and the actual number of cruise ship passengers have shown significant declines. I rather suspect, Mr. Speaker, that our much publicized crime rate has had a negative impact on the tourism industry. Events such as the phenomenally disastrous, ill-advised state of emergency, the unsubstantiated prime-ministerial assassination plot and the current lockdown of Laventille have not gone unnoticed in the international arena.

While the Minister of National Security seems proud and is boasting and high-fiving his colleagues on the other side that there have been no murders in Laventille for a long time—for which, of course, Mr. Speaker, we are very happy—we cannot deny the fact that this is a false sense of security as a result of the State having employed its full military capability to lock down a specific area. Mr. Speaker, this is *déjà vu*. It readily brings to mind the abysmal failure of the SOE. In the interim, crime continues unabated in the rest of the country.

Mr. Speaker, I have here—I heard the hon. Minister speaking this morning and saying there is no crime, but I have collected here, since his lockdown—

September 27: A Toco man killed, a peacemaker; Friday, September 28 in the *Express*: A woman's decapitated body found in Longdenville. I have Friday, September 28 also: No clue in Barataria murder; Saturday, September 29: Three cases of sexual assault on minors. That is very, very, very, you know, terrible crime. Sunday, September 30, in the *Express*: Morvant man shot dead close to home. Wednesday, October 03: Two shot dead after disputes.

I see the public information officer of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, Sergeant Wayne Myster, warning women, especially elderly women, to be careful because they are easy targets for criminals, and I know why he did that—because there were several deaths in the country areas, deaths concerning elderly women. One Mrs. Ferreira who died, who was murdered almost two weeks ago, her death was only published in the newspapers day before yesterday. We have a Mr. Brown who lived at Gasparillo, he was murdered. I have not seen his death published in the papers as yet. Probably I have missed it. I am only saying I have not seen it. There is a gentleman from Penal who also was murdered. I have not seen his death in the papers yet. Probably the media could investigate and let us know why these deaths have not been published.

Hon. Member: Three hundred and twenty-nine.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: And then today I heard the hon. Minister saying that we were looking for something to happen over the weekend. But, certainly, today it was published in the *Express* that on Friday, a Chinese national was slain in a hold-up, and the crime rate now stands at 300—number of people murdered, sorry, stands at 313 for the year.

So, Mr. Speaker, what I am saying is that the crime continues and locking down is not the solution. [*Desk thumping*] Yet, in the face of all that I have just recounted, the finance Minister would have us believe that the real GDP is projected to grow by 1.2 per cent. Now, how can I believe that? Who can believe that?

The simple, irrefutable fact is that Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Speaker—our economy has been in a suspended state of stagnation for the last three years. Yet there is an incredible boast that we are at full employment which usually applies when a country has unemployment down to 4.9 per cent and under. But the economists are challenging the Minister's statement claiming that unemployment figures for Trinidad and Tobago are more like 16 to 20 per cent. I have an article here in the *Daily Express* on Thursday, October 04, where Indera Sagewan-Ali is challenging this and saying the real jobless rate is 16 to 20 per cent.

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Mr. Speaker, I should like the hon. Minister to go into any of the PNM constituencies and poll the unemployment numbers. He has the luxury of not having to represent any constituency, but those of us who were elected know first-hand the enormous pressure that is building in our constituencies where our young people have no work. This is a fact. This budget is nothing but a budget of deception, a budget of smoke and mirrors. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, when will this Government stop trying to fool the people, fool the people, fool the people? When will they stop?

Hon. Member: Never, never.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Mr. Speaker, this is the largest budget in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, \$58.6 billion with a deficit of \$7.6 billion. The two years prior, we also operated on deficit budgets, and it appears from the Minister's statements that we can expect to be operating on a deficit budget for the next five years or more.

Mr. Speaker, for fiscal years 2011 to 2013, Trinidad and Tobago would have spent \$164.2 billion. It would have earned \$145.9 billion and would have accumulated a deficit of \$18.3 billion. When and where will it all end? The reality is that we are spending more than we are earning, and we are seeing all the signs of being burdened by a debt load that is clearly unsustainable.

This is the very overspending and debt load that led the countries of the Eurozone, like Greece and Spain, to the deep financial crisis in which they currently find themselves. This Government is revelling in its claim that our debt to GDP ratio is not abnormally high but, Mr. Speaker, it is rising. And should we continue in this vein, spending more than we are earning and accumulating debt year after year, Trinidad and Tobago shall finally find itself in dire financial straits.

While I do appreciate that many governments engage in deficit financing as part of a recovery plan to rejuvenate or jump-start the economy, responsible governments plan to do so only for a limited time. They always have an exit strategy to take the economy out of such a potentially perilous financial situation. Therefore, the Minister of Finance and the Economy must tell us how he proposes to do this. The Minister, the hon. Minister, owes it to the citizens of this country and to the taxpayers to do so, to tell us how he plans to narrow this deficit.

Now, this morning I did hear the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs, who in a previous incarnation was Minister of Finance, roll out a plan for recovery.

5.55 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, what confidence can we have in what he has outlined for us when what he promised in 2010 and 2012 were not done? They never materialized [*Desk thumping*] and my extremely brilliant colleague, the Member for Diego Martin North/ East, detailed all of this at great length—extremely brilliant. He was outstanding in his contribution. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Finance must give us the reassurance, and reassurance is what we need, what the country needs, that he and by extension his Government are not spending the patrimony of our children, our grandchildren, their children and their children. We want that reassurance; the public needs that reassurance, Mr. Speaker.

In the meantime, this UNC-dominated Government is still insisting on misleading the public that they met an empty Treasury when the Government was elected into office in 2010. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is an irrefutable fact, Mr. Speaker, that the PNM left US \$8.7 billion in foreign reserves and US \$300 billion in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund—this is a fact—and the debt to GDP ratio was 38 per cent, one of the lowest internationally.

But before I continue, Mr. Speaker, I have to deal with the allegations of corruption constantly being thrown at the PNM by this PP Government in respect of the rapid rail project. On Friday last, the Member for Oropouche and Leader of Government Business kept harping at the \$485 million spent by the PNM Government on the design and initial paperwork for the rapid rail project. Mr. Speaker, expenditure on this project was projected to be \$20 billion, and as such the \$485 million expended to complete the design and preparation of bid packages and which represents only 2 per cent of the cost of the completed project is certainly not unreasonable. So I do not know what they are talking about. I do not even know, you know, they know about financing projects, et cetera. That is why they cannot get their projects off the ground. [*Crosstalk*] But this PP Government just wants to implant in the minds of the public, deeds of corruption on the part of the PNM administration just to counteract its own very questionable practices. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, I noticed on this Government's infamous TV discussion the other night, when they were on three channels, the Members opposite had to go back 35 years into the days of O'Halloran and Boysie Prevatt to dig up any alleged wrongdoing on the part of the PNM, simply to justify their 28 months in office of alleged, Mr. Speaker, alleged I am just saying, Mr. Speaker, alleged corruption,

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deception, malfeasance and incompetence. They had to get 35 years and dig out whatever they could get out of those 35 years, to justify and counteract their 28 months of malfeasance.

Mr. Speaker, this year in his defence of his Government's unfulfilled promises, the Member for Chaguanas West, he went back to 1956, same thing, they going back, back, back. We are not going forward; we are going back. Every time, their only rebuttal, Mr. Speaker, their only defence, the only rebut is to go back into what the PMN did, what the PNM did, what the PNM did; something that the public adjudicated on since May24, 2010; and we will never go forward, we must go back. That is all—when we come here to debate, Mr. Speaker, rather than dealing with the issue, that is all we hear. We do not get anything much from them. That is all we hear, what the PNM did, what the PNM did. “We gone back to 1956 now.”

Mr. Speaker, they also love to speak about moral authority. I want to ask them, where is yours? They love to speak about moral authority.

Mr. Speaker, there was so much in the budget that was rehashed from the promises of the past two years. It was in so many ways a cut and paste budget of the two previous budgets presented by this UNC-dominated Government. Mr. Speaker, how many times shall we hear about growth poles? We have been hearing about growth polls in Laventille, since 2010, since I became a member of this august Chamber and since I have been sitting here I have heard about growth poles.

Nothing has changed, everything has been the same. We hear the promise again. I would love if they would do something for Laventille. I see a couple more places have been added to their growth polls, Mr. Speaker, two of them in my constituency, Belmont and Gonzales. Oh, they are coming by me, I am waiting for them. I would welcome any opportunity for advancement of my constituency and my constituents, but I shall not be holding my breath.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you, despite my best efforts, the roads and bridges in Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West remain in an unsatisfactory condition. The Cascade and St. Ann's rivers are a disaster waiting to happen, and if not properly cleaned, dredged and paved, these rivers are likely to overflow, creating the same flooding disaster that occurred in Diego Martin and Maraval, when those rivers overflowed recently. But I am getting the runaround from the Drainage Division of the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources. I am speaking to one

Mr. Baboolal, but each time I call him I hear a new story. I have been on a site visit with him to see the rivers, he has promised that he will do something about it but I cannot hear from him again.

Mr. Speaker, I am warning this Government about this potential for a flooding disaster in Cascade and St. Ann's. Mr. Speaker, I am waiting patiently and hopefully to see what programmes and projects will develop from the planting of these growth poles in my constituency, in Belmont and Gonzales. And I rather look forward to see what will happen in my colleagues' constituency also. But what I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, is that the constituents of Belmont and Gonzales, will not be kissing the feet of any Minister for any work done in our constituency. [*Desk thumping*] No, no, no. It is the duty and responsibility of this Government to serve all the people, conscientiously and without fear or favour. After all, they all took a sacred oath of office in this very Parliament to do so. It is our legitimate expectation that this Government will honour its oath.

Mr. Speaker, the cut and thrust of politics apart, the Members on this side have become very aware that if as a responsible Opposition we proffer constructive criticism and sound advice to improve the governance of our country, diligently doing the job expected of us by our constituents, who have elected us to act in their best interest. Mr. Speaker, we have become aware that we expose ourselves to a tirade of insults and derogatory comments and a level of vitriol that is totally unacceptable for parliamentarians. In addition, there are a few, not all, Mr. Speaker, I am not saying all, a few Ministers who are quick to threaten that we shall get nothing done, no cooperation whatsoever in our constituency, if we criticize them.

Mr. Speaker, given this negative response of the Members opposite, as a brand new parliamentarian, I chose to be reserved in my comments, but the more I saw the negative approach of this Government, the more I began to tell it like it is. Mr. Speaker, I am putting the Members opposite on notice, so far, little or nothing has been done in the constituency of Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, and should you continue to do nothing in my constituency, you have only Almighty God and the people to answer to. But as a responsible Member of the Opposition, I shall continue to bring all your wrongdoings and malfeasance to the attention of the people.

Mr. Speaker, the atrocity, the treachery, the deception and betrayal of section 34 has emboldened me. I am warning this PP government the masks are off for all to see and the gloves are on. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, I should like to underscore the point made by the Leader of the Opposition that this UNC-

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dominated Government is trying to muzzle the Opposition. They have cut the allocation for the Office of the Leader of the Opposition by \$500,000 and they have cut the allocation to Parliament for the maintenance of the Parliament Channel by \$700,000.

Mr. Speaker, the Parliament Channel, this is the medium whereby the public, parents, students, teachers, the man in the street, could view and hear how our country is being governed. In addition, they are trying to purchase the *Mirror* and the *Newsday* newspapers, and, at the same time, buying out more and more prime time on the TV channels. So this UNC-dominated PP Government is hell-bent on reducing the opportunities for the Opposition or any dissenting parties to broadcast their views to the public. Whither goest [*Desk thumping*] our beloved country? It seems to me that we are fast becoming a dictatorship. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I heard the hon. Minister of Housing, Land and Marine Resources boasting of all the work that was done for the constituencies in central and south Trinidad, the roads, the three new beautifully constructed housing developments. I am happy for those people, “eh”. I am very happy for them. But he did not mention the employment opportunities that these projects would have generated for the people in these areas. I am really happy for my brothers and sisters in south and central, sincerely happy for them. But I have to ask: what about the roads in Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, in Port of Spain South, in Diego Martin West, in Laventille East/Morvant, in Laventille West, in Diego Martin North/East, in La Brea, in Diego Martin Central, in St. Ann’s East, in Arouca Maloney, in Point Fortin and San Fernando East? What about the roads there, Mr. Speaker? What about housing accommodation for our constituents?

In my constituency, I have a fire victim, Rose Mottley, mother of 10 children. Since April when her house was burnt to the ground, I have been appealing to the HDC for housing accommodation for her and her family. Her family is scattered, her children are in various homes. To date she has no fixed place of abode. What about Ancil Luke who applied for housing accommodation 32 years ago? Yes, he never got a house under the PNM, but this is a new Government who promised to change things. Mr. Speaker, I personally brought all his documents to the hon. Minister of Housing, Land and Marine Resources several months ago and begged him to assist and to date he has had no luck, absolutely not even a response, and he comes here to boast about the beautiful housing in south and central. Mr. Speaker, there is no level playing ground here, none. I have to ask: does this Government care at all about these poor, suffering people?

6.10 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, getting back to employment for our constituents, in last year's budget, \$320 million was allocated to CEPEP, in the first instance, and a further \$240 million thereafter; yet in Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, as in all the PNM constituencies, we have had a rather depleted CEPEP labour force.

I wrote to the Chairman of CEPEP, Mr. Adesh Deonarine, spoke with him on several occasions on the telephone and met with him on two occasions in an effort to address the situation, since there is a real need to address environmental issues in my constituency.

Mr. Speaker, remember, this is the constituency that accommodates the Prime Minister's and President's residences; the head offices of the major banks and large multinational corporations; and also all the foreign embassies; in addition to which, my constituents need work. At the end of it all, Mr. Adesh Deonarine, the chairman, advised that he cannot give me any teams since he does not have the money to do so; but CEPEP got \$320 million and a further \$240 million, making a total of \$560 million. To which constituencies did all this money go? Which constituencies benefited from all this enhanced allocation? Not the Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West or any of the other PNM constituencies. It is the same story with the URP which receives \$389 million annually.

I say again, it is not a level playing field. It is not a level playing field at all. There is no equal opportunity here. This Government—at least I can only conclude and I am only saying, given all the facts available to me, it seems that this Government has an agenda that does not favour the people of the PNM constituencies. [*Desk thumping*]

In this budget, the Minister of Finance and the Economy is proposing to dismantle the URP and CEPEP. I am not saying that this is a bad proposition, if another viable, sustainable option is presented. In his budget, the hon. Minister is espousing the good corporate talk of public/private partnership. This concept, known as the PPP modality is a very good concept that appeals to the social responsibility of corporate citizens to partner with Government in respect of programmes and projects.

Mr. Speaker, I would have imagined that the hon. Minister would, first of all, have engaged the private sector in conversation around this initiative and would have gained its buy-in or commitment to this strategy; but apparently the hon. Minister is yet to do that.

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I would like to read page 41 of the budget statement, restructuring of CEPEP and URP, which says:

“I propose to provide companies with a training allowance to assist in skill development. I shall now encourage companies to engage employees of the CEPEP and URP programmes. The National Productivity Council, which was established in January 2012 would be assigned the responsibility for managing the transition of the CEPEP and URP employees to the private sector.”

Mr. Speaker, I get a sense that he will be doing these things in the future; that he has not engaged the private sector as yet in his plan. He has not got their buy-in and commitment as yet. I will tell you, he comes to this Parliament and unveils this intent to the public without first having received the commitment of the private sector and this is why I found that there was a deafening silence from those quarters.

This budget has generated a lot of debate in respect of the various initiatives it proposes. We have been hearing and reading diverse views on the removal of VAT, the removal of the gas subsidy on premium gasoline, et cetera; but I have yet to hear any debate on the PPP modality. The silence of the private sector has been deafening.

In my previous incarnation, I had devised an initiative to implement an OJT programme for our students during the July/August vacation, but before announcing this programme to the key stakeholders—the parents, the students, the Ministry of Education—I first had to engage the private sector in dialogue about this initiative, submit my proposals to them and gain their buy-in into it. Having done this, I was then in a position to hold out this carrot to key stakeholders.

Should the hon. Minister fail to get the desired response from the private sector given this fragile, uncertain economy and this despite his proposed incentives, then what is his position? All he would have succeeded in doing is arousing mixed sentiments among CEPEP and URP workers: in the first instance, feelings of job insecurity and uncertainty in the future for some; and for others, high expectations of employment in the private sector.

Mr. Speaker, this UNC-dominated Government does not know its way because it has absolutely no firm plan. How many times shall we hear about diversification of the economy by shifting focus from and reducing the penalty on a declining and uncertain energy sector to the development of the agricultural and agri-business sector? Today, we are still buckling under the strain of a high cost of living driven by high food prices and a rather worrisome food import bill, which now stands at approximately \$4 billion annually.

What targets do we have so far to measure the extent to which this Government has achieved any iota of success in respect of the development of the agricultural and agri-business sector? I dare say that a Minister had been appointed, who appeared to have some vision in developing this sector, but what happened? He was transferred to another Ministry.

The hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy declares that this Government is now prepared to embark on a joint initiative with Guyana. Mr. Speaker, this was a failed initiative in the past, somewhere around the 1960s, so the public will be anxious to hear his plans. He did not give us the logistics of how this would unfold. What roles would the two countries play in the development of the potential bread baskets of Tucker Valley and the Guyanese hinterlands? Will there be a migration of labour from one country to another and vice versa? These are questions that need to be answered for the sake of the public; after all, it is their money, taxpayers' money, that will fund this initiative.

I read in an article in the *Guardian* newspaper on Thursday, September 27, 2012, where the Trinidad and Tobago Agri-Business Association has proposed a plan to save the agricultural sector more than \$160 million in food imports by 2015 and, in doing so, create 2,700 new jobs. This Government should be engaging the TTABA in discussion before it even thinks of joint ventures and/or removal of the value added tax from food items.

In her party's pre-budget fete, Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister had made this big announcement about removing VAT from food items when VAT had already been removed from a number of basic food items—I think about 60. That was just another attempt at fooling the people. Do you know what this reminds me of? It reminded me of her earlier announcements of the provision of free bus passes for school children—an initiative that had been implemented under the PNM administration as far back as the 1980s.

I was appalled. I was appalled because in my previous incarnation as a teacher and administrator, I used to be entrusted with the responsibility of issuing these passes to school children, a practice that continued until I demitted office in March 2010. It also reminded me of her announcement that free public transportation would be made available to senior citizens. What a laugh! This initiative was put in place under the PNM administration years before, in its 2007 budget. It is extremely difficult to deal with a Government that confuses good governance with fooling the people—very, very difficult!

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Getting back to the question of the removal of value added tax, the announcement that VAT would be removed from 7,000 items came only after the population began to express its bewilderment over the fact that VAT had already been removed from at least 60 basic items. My question is: which are these 7,000 items? A list should have been published by now. Is the list published? I would like to know what are the 7,000 items and why do we have to import all these items? Are we serious about lowering our food prices and feeding our people?

I lived in Guyana for several years and I can remember, in the 1970s when I was in Guyana, there was a ban on almost all imported food items. I lived to see the mushrooming of a number of cottage industries and housewives making their own jams, jellies, mayonnaise, peanut butter, chow-chow, granola and I can go on and on. The people were eating fresh, good, healthy foods.

Mr. Speaker, I want to go back to that point about healthy foods. I would like to ask: where is the money coming from to replace the \$400 million that this Government stands to lose from the removal of VAT? To what extent will this removal of VAT on these food items impact positively the poor man's pocket? These are questions we need to ask and one must take into consideration that even though all basic food items have been zero-rated for many, many years, the poor taxpayer has still been burdened with rising food prices.

How will the removal of VAT affect the high prices of fresh produce which have no VAT—vegetables, ground provision and fruit, even beef, chicken and pork in the market where the average citizen frequents? I believe, if this Government were really serious about reducing the high cost of food items, it should have been seeking to reduce the high food import bill as well as stimulating local food production. I feel the Government should have launched a buy-local campaign and banned the importation of many food items that fall under the category of wants and not needs, especially all that processed and tinned stuff which it is pushing down the throats of the people.

Mr. Speaker, this is not a healthy choice. It is not as healthy a choice as fresh produce and I do believe what we would like to see is a healthy society. I am sure that the hon. Minister of Health would agree with me. The Government should give incentives, subsidies and assistance to our local farmers to enable them to employ more labour to assist in increasing food production so that market produce could be made available in larger quantities and at cheaper prices.

In this way, we can achieve many objectives in one fell swoop. We can stimulate the local food production, reduce the food prices, generate employment

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and create a healthy society. It is no rocket science; it is simple logic and that is why I would much prefer to hear the plan of the Trinidad and Tobago Agri-Business Association.

How many more times are we going to hear about the construction of an integrated campus in Tobago—UTT, UWI and COSTAATT? Since 2010, I am hearing about it. Well, the THA election is imminent, so I believe that soon we may see a sod-turning ceremony because they have to score some political gain.

Before I move on, as I mention Tobago, I want to say that this Government is promoting the use of CNG by our citizens, but did the Government even consider Tobago in this plan? I dare say no because Tobago will be at a disadvantage in this thrust to use CNG. Tobago does not have one single CNG station; neither are there any plans to install one in Tobago. Tobago does not feature among the first seven CNG stations identified by the National CNG Task Force. [*Interruption*] My friend is saying one is being planned; probably now in a hurry when they realize that they have forgotten them because this would have been a big blow for Tobago. Sometimes I feel this Government is only paying lip service to Tobago, for votes, of course.

So we are hearing about this integrated campus for Tobago since 2010. The only campuses that this UNC-dominated Government seems interested in constructing are the COSTAATT campus in Chaguanas and the law campus in Penal. That is all they are interested in. That is all. [*Desk thumping*] This deceptive budget is cheap talk and nothing else. [*Desk thumping*] This Government is continuing in the same vein that it began its term in office—fooling the people; fooling the people; fooling the people. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, did this PP Government believe that the Members on this side would sit blindly by and accept all that was presented to us last Monday afternoon in this budget simply because we had a new Minister of Finance? Does he not belong to the same Government who so deceived this Parliament and this nation with deception after deception, culminating in the ultimate act of treachery and betrayal that was section 34? Mr. Speaker, we just cannot trust this Government anymore to do what is right for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

6.25 p.m.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Permit me now, if you may, to turn my attention to the Ministry of Education. I see my dear friend, a very pleasant gentleman, the Minister is sitting there. [*Crosstalk*] I will try to be gentle. He is a nice man.

This Ministry of Education received one of the largest allocations in this year's budget. They always do receive a large allocation, and I agree with that. Education is the bedrock of national development. I agree that they should receive a large budget; \$4.3 billion approximately. A slight decrease from the previous year's allocation of \$4.6 billion.

When we look at page 128—I have it here—of the *draft estimates of expenditure for the financial year 2013*, we see that apart from that \$4,283,824,536—we see that under Development Programme Expenditure funded from the Infrastructure Development Fund, the Ministry also has at its disposal a further \$635,500,000 making a total of \$4.9 billion; a little more than \$4.9 billion, sorry, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, let us examine what the Ministry of Education has to show for the \$4.6 billion that was allocated to it in 2012. Let us look at the Ministry today. What is the public image of the Ministry today? A Ministry in turmoil! With Parliament in recess during the July/August months, many of us enjoyed an easier schedule. Not so much the Minister of Education, not so much. Every day in the newspapers there was some horror story happening in the Ministry. Parents and teachers protesting over the new SEA curriculum; schools not ready for the reopening of term; teachers protesting about delay of salary negotiations. The protests continue about the dilapidated conditions of schools and the late reopening and repair of some schools.

I had my colleague from Laventille East Morvant talk about the Malick school which cannot be opened up to now. In the *Daily Express* on Wednesday, September 05—school opened on the 4th, or was it the 5th? I think. I cannot remember the exact date but the long list of schools that were not opened, every day in the newspapers, “School repair system needs urgent fixing.” This is the *Guardian* editorial. This is September 02.

Then, the *Express* Opinion, “Here we go...again,” the schools not prepared for reopening, they are not ready. The *Daily Express* Monday, September 03, you

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had the Palo Seco Government Secondary; the Princes Town Government Secondary; La Lune Roman Catholic School in Moruga. Then you had the first Shouter Baptist school opening. Lovely! Plenty PR, but without a principal and teachers, they came eventually. But unheard of, a school opening without principal and teachers; I never heard of it.

The *Express* on September 08, “Parents upset over ‘horrible’ Diego Martin School.” You have the Diego Martin North Secondary—dilapidated. Teachers and parents protest. There is another article on Tuesday 11, well into the reopening of school. At five schools classes suspended. St. Benedicts College La Romaine, South Oropouche RC, San Fernando Boys RC, Palo Seco Government, Santa Flora Government, and the list goes on.

You have TTUTA with their thing which I will get to. Oh-ho, no! We had also St Ursula’s PTA, we had Febeau Government Primary, that did not open till September 19, three weeks after the reopening of school, Mr. Speaker. Then Woodbrook Presbyterian School; Malick parents—I just said that. The Cunupia High, I hear is on a go slow, air condition systems and so not working and they have blocked up the open bricks for the air conditioning, and the children are suffering. The La Horquetta South Primary, Belmont Boys’, they are all in the news everyday, on the TV and the papers, everything. It is a horror. I am sure that the Minister, poor fellow, is having a time of it.

Mr. Speaker, the school vacation repair programme is scheduled every year for the months of July and August. The original list of schools this year to be repaired was 210. This was an official list I understand. It is my understanding that this was an official list compiled by the Ministry of Education after consultation with principals and TTUTA. For reasons best known to the Ministry, this number was scaled down to 77 schools. However, up to August 23, principals were bombarding the Ministry of Education complaining that the reopening of school was imminent and nothing had been done in their schools.

When school reopened on September 03, 2012, 37 schools were in no condition to be reopened. When I perused the *Public Sector Investment Programme*—I have it here—2012; Mr. Speaker, I would like to read:

“The construction of new primary schools and the upgrade of existing ones remain key aspects of improving the overall quality of education. A total of \$201.6 million has been allocated for several construction and upgrade programmes to be continued...”

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Those are primary schools. Secondary schools: “An allocation of over \$287.9 million will be made through IDF funding for the provision of increased educational opportunities at the secondary level. Funding of \$178.3 million for the Secondary School Construction Programme will facilitate the proposed completion of approximately five out of ten secondary schools currently under construction and continuation of the remaining five (5) schools. Additional resources totalling \$109.6 million will be used to finance school upgrades, including:

refurbishment and rehabilitation works to address problems at aging school buildings.

A total of \$4 million will be made available for the continuation of construction of additional blocks...”

Mr. Speaker, the point I am making by reading this out is that the budgetary considerations had been determined at least one year prior to the reopening of school in September 2012. It shows it clearly there. The money was there. The hon. Minister had the entire year to plan and put things in place for all these projects, be it the construction of new schools—[*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: I know you cannot construct all overnight, it takes long. It is the repair and upgrade of existing schools that I am concerned particularly about right now.

Mr. Speaker, TTUTA charged that this delay in getting schools open in time was due to poor planning and due to the reluctance of contractors to expedite the projects. TTUTA claimed that many contractors were reluctant to work with the Ministry because they could not get moneys owed to them. The hon. Minister refuted TTUTA’s claim, saying this was not true. I personally know this to be true because many contractors have approached me in the past for assistance in getting, for them, outstanding moneys owed to them by the Ministry of Education.

Mr. Speaker, I personally re submitted a copy of all the relevant documents of one contractor who did work at St. Francois Girls’ College and built an assembly area for our students to meet so that they could be protected from the elements. It is not a hall—we could not afford a hall—a meeting place. I submitted all these documents to the Member for Moruga/Tableland who in his previous incarnation was Minister in the Ministry of Education. He told me that he gave it to the

Permanent Secretary. I begged him every day. This man is waiting since 2010. His money is due. He did good work at a cheap price. The Ministry of Education, their personnel passed every—followed proper procedure and everything was passed.

Hon. Minister, what I am saying, this was not to come out from the Ministry's, per se allocation, this was committed in the school's allocation by me before I left. It was recommitted—I kept in touch with the school—in successive years. You refused to approve that man's money. He is still being owed that money after he built that lovely area for those girls to be able to meet and assemble away from the elements. That is not a drain on you, that is committed in the school's allocation. I committed that. I would like to know why is it he cannot get his money and everything was above board. It was signed off by the Ministry of Education and I am very upset about that. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, there are hundreds of contractors in the same position as him. If the Minister cannot successfully manage the vacation repair programme, and ensure that schools are in a condition to be reopened in time for the new school year, how could he effectively and efficiently manage the construction of new schools? The hon. Minister is always speaking of the magnitude of the problem, but seems unable to mobilize the necessary resources to deal with the problem.

Mr. Speaker, he claimed that people were expecting too much of him. But I should like to remind the hon. Minister that he accepted the position, and if he is unable to deliver, he should at least give to the people a reasonable explanation why he is falling short. The hon. Minister loves to stand here in these august Chambers and lambaste the PNM for not being able to implement. I wonder what he is saying now that he is in charge and coming to terms with the challenges of implementation that are clearly in evidence before him. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

Miss Cox: “Wam to de EFCL?”

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Additionally, Mr. Speaker, some schools failed to open because of a lack of teaching staff especially in primary schools. Even the much publicized St. Barbara's Shouter Baptist School opened as I said before without a principal and teachers. [*Crosstalk*] It is unheard of.

Hon. Member: Even Success Secondary!

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Success Secondary too? No teachers!

Hon. Member: Shortage.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: I fail to comprehend why there should be a dearth of teachers in either primary or secondary schools when there are so many UTT graduates with a bachelor of education waiting to be placed.

Mr. Speaker, I noted with great interest on page 50 of the document outlining the three-year public sector investment programme that—and I must read from this document that:

“Over the next three (3) years the main areas of focus will include increasing access at the level of early childhood education to achieve universal enrolment by 2015.”

Good objective, good goal, hon. Minister, to achieve full universal enrolment by 2015.

6.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, to achieve full enrolment means that 600 centres must be constructed. This is because we have approximately 17,000 new births per year, and we have three cohorts to accommodate: three-year-olds, four-year-olds and five-year olds. So we are speaking about 17,000 by three, which is 54,000 infants to accommodate in ECCE centres annually. If we are speaking about 90 infants per centre, we are speaking about 600 centres.

The IDB-funded Seamless Education Programme, which was signed off in 2008 under the PNM administration, targeted 50 centres which the Ministry of Education inherited in various stages of completion. I know some of them, the sod was just turned, et cetera and some of them were built and some of them were half built, in various stages of completion.

These 50 centres apart, the Ministry of Education would still be required to finish 550 additional centres to achieve full enrolment by 2015. The hon. Minister says that he is building all of these centres by 2015, a rather ambitious plan, since he could not even get 37 schools repaired in time for the reopening of school. The hon. Minister seems to be facing a serious challenge with implementation. So, he must tell the public how he is going to achieve his ECCE goal. The Minister needs to roll-out for us, for the benefit of the public, his construction plan to support his intention of full ECCE enrolment by 2015, if not, this is just another case of “ol’ talk” and fooling the people .

Mr. Speaker, I should like to ask the hon. Minister about the in-service and pre-service primary school teachers who pursued the Bachelor of Education Early Childhood Education at UTT. In an effort to improve the effectiveness of

curriculum delivery in primary schools, the PNM administration decided to upgrade the level of teacher professionalism in primary schools.

In 2005, teachers who were pursuing the teachers' diploma at the Corinth and Valsayn Teachers' Colleges were encouraged to transfer to UTT to pursue a Bachelor of Education Degree. Funding for this programme was received from the IDB. The goal was to produce high-quality professionals for the primary as well as the secondary schools.

There were two cohorts entering UTT to pursue the Bachelor of Education: the in-service teachers who were sent to UTT on scholarship and the pre-service teachers, persons who wanted to become teachers who had literally walked off the streets and left their jobs to pursue the Bachelor of Education Degree with the conviction that they would have received employment with the teaching service.

Mr. Speaker, the problem is, after completing the four-year Bachelor of Education Degree, the in-service teachers specializing in early childhood education, returned to their schools in their substantive positions as assistant teacher primary, and to date have not been upgraded to the position of Teacher I as promised to them. To make matters worse, they are now being requested by the Ministry of Education to resign their permanent positions in order to accept contract positions at Early Childhood Care Centres. Now, who would do that, Mr. Speaker? How unreasonable is this to teachers! The same request is being made to those teachers who had specialized in special education.

In an article in the *Guardian* newspapers on December 08, 2011 entitled: "Project to help children with special needs soon", I read where the hon. Minister of Education stated that his Ministry would launch a pilot project to diagnose children with disabilities and special needs. But what is the hon. Minister doing about all those UTT graduates who qualified in special education and in early childhood education who have not been upgraded to Teacher I and who are now being asked to resign their permanent jobs to take up a contract position with the Ministry of Education? Probably the Minister could give us the rationale behind it. Probably there is a rationale, but those teachers are crying out. They are crying out.

Currently, there are many UTT graduates whose skills are not being utilized for the benefit of the nation's children, and the Minister is talking about full ECCE enrolment and projects to assist children with special needs, and we have the qualified personnel there and they are not being utilized, and we want full enrolment, and we want to do all these very ambitious projects.

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Mr. Speaker, it is the pre-service UTT Bachelor of Education graduates who suffered the worst fate, because most of them were unsuccessful in gaining employment with the Ministry of Education and they remain unemployed while some schools are protesting a shortage of teachers. Come on, hon. Minister, please investigate and do your job and right all these wrongs! I have confidence that you would do it hon. Minister.

I have spoken ad nauseam in my previous budget contributions on this Government's laptop programme, advising the hon. Minister of Education on the appropriate implementation of the laptop programme, so much so that I feel weary at the thought of broaching the topic again. I shall not speak at length on the laptop programme, save to say, it seems that finally the hon. Minister is taking into consideration all of my recommendations—I feel very vindicated. I told you so. I hate to say it, I told you so—and making an attempt to improve the programme implementation, albeit a little late, but better late than never.

I had read in an article in the *Guardian* newspapers dated May 26, 2012 entitled “Education Minister: Steps in place for better laptop use in schools” and I saw in another article entitled “Dr. Tim. More laptops for schoolchildren next year”. In these articles, I was pleased to see—I have them here, I do not really have time to read them; I would have liked to—where the goodly Minister was confronting some of the challenges which I had been indicating to him such as teacher training and improved Internet and networking capacity. Hon. Minister, I am very pleased to see that.

In addition, last Thursday night I saw the hon. Minister on TV saying that schools would soon have Wi-Fi fibre-optic network and increased internet capacity from five to 25 megabytes, and I am indeed relieved that the technical infrastructure which is so critical for the successful implementation of the laptop programme is finally being put in place.

While the hon. Minister is preoccupied getting all this done, I should like to respectfully advise him to examine the number of laptops that are in a dilapidated condition; to examine the number of schools where ICT is still not being successfully integrated into the curriculum as an integral part of pedagogical practice; and to examine the mixed administrative and reporting arrangement. Hon. Minister, the mixed administrative and reporting arrangements between the IT department and the principal under which the technicians operate needs to be addressed since it is undermining the purpose for which the IT technicians were appointed, which is to lend a supporting role to teachers in respect of the integration of ICT in the curriculum. In many schools, this is not happening. All in

all, in some respects—I would not say all—this PP Government’s laptop programme remains little more than the fulfilment of a campaign promise.

I noticed in the draft estimates on page 176 that the amount of money allocated to salaries and cost of living allowance has been increased from \$1.9 billion to \$2.3 billion, an increase of \$396 million which represents an increase of approximately 21 per cent. I can only hope that the Ministry of Education has factored this increase to accommodate the hiring of new teachers, especially UTT Bachelor of Education Degree graduates and the settlement of arrears and new wage increases for which TTUTA has been fighting. TUTTA, be guided and be advised accordingly! I am only saying, “Look this 21 per cent increase in moneys allocated to salaries and cost of living allowance suggests to me, that teachers are positioned to receive a decent and well-deserved wage cut.”

I also noticed, however, very sadly—while I was glad for the increase that teachers will get—to see in the draft estimates that the Textbook Rental Programme for secondary schools has been reduced from \$17.9 million to \$16.8 million, a decrease of \$1.1 million. Mr. Speaker, this textbook programme was put in place by the PNM Government to assist students in their education advancement, but this UNC-dominated coalition is systematically and conscientiously dismantling all the programmes and systems that the PNM administration had put in place to ensure the education development of the young people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, while I cannot condone wastage of Government funding, in like manner, I cannot sit idly by and see this heartless Government cast hundreds of young people out in the cold and out of the GATE without giving them adequate warning and a fair chance to redeem themselves; a fair chance to make right their wrong.

I cannot sit idly by while this cold-hearted Government condemns young people to an abyss of despair and callously cut their lifeline to a better life without holding out to them some sort of safety net; without giving one thought to what shall become of them.

Suddenly, we are hearing about a host of stringent criteria associated with a means test for approval for funding under the GATE Programme. The People’s National Movement left a legacy of free tertiary education to all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, regardless of colour, creed, race or class, so long as they are able to satisfy matriculation requirements. As such, all undergraduate students deserve the chance gifted to them by the PNM, to fulfil their life-long ambitions.

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This was their legitimate expectation under the PNM and this PP Government ought not to take it away from them.

In addition, under the People's National Movement, a policy was established that any graduate attaining a First Class Honours Degree in any field of endeavor would be granted a scholarship to pursue a PhD. This was part of the PNM's vision "from ABC to PhD". Many students who have fallen into this category applied to the Ministry of Public Administration for a scholarship. To date, they have not received any scholarship and efforts to communicate with the relevant authorities at the Ministry of Public Administration have proven futile. These students are frustrated and feel that they have been denied their legitimate expectations granted to them under the People's National Movement.

What has become of the PNM's vision for the educational advancement of the young people of Trinidad and Tobago, I ask? Mr. Speaker, we live in very sad times, very, very sad times indeed. The curtailing of post-graduate scholarships is going too far and the new GATE criteria will exclude too many students. Too many young people will end up suffering for a few defaulters. Some students who face personal, social and financial challenges and who are deserving of special consideration will be deprived of the opportunity to fulfil their dreams and make a meaningful contribution to their country.

As the entire country is aware, certain UNC financiers have audaciously expressed their legitimate expectation to be freed, but what about those students who would be excluded under the new GATE criteria? Do they not have a compelling and legitimate expectation of achieving their academic goals? It would appear that this PP Government wishes to dismantle every single initiative implemented by the People's National Movement to create opportunities for the development of the human resource capital of our country. I am beseeching this Government to hold its hand on this GATE issue. Give delinquent students a stern warning and a last chance, some sort of amnesty. Everybody is getting an amnesty. Give them an amnesty, and rethink your strategy and give due consideration to deserving cases.

The Minister said that his Government intends to align GATE to national imperatives, a very loaded statement, but he did not elaborate. One has to wonder: what are these national imperatives? Who designed them? Who was consulted? One is also left to wonder: what is this Government's plan for education given that education is the bedrock of national development? This UNC-dominated coalition must report to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and explain to them clearly its plan for education in respect of nation-building.

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In the absence of such disclosure, this UNC-dominated Government seems to be subtly and surreptitiously removing the institutional goalposts further and further from their traditional centres and relocating them out of the reach of those who had access to them.

6.55 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: You have one more minute, Member.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Succinctly, they are raising the bar for attainment of higher education by establishing the most stringent criteria that would debar many struggling hopefuls the opportunity for higher education, and making more and more elusive, the dream for self-advancement that the People's National Movement had held out to them.

This PP Government seems to be systematically dismantling all of our traditional institutions, one by one, while the nation has been standing idly by looking on in bewilderment as if we were looking at a horror movie in slow motion as this PP Government "mashes up the place". Only the pace is not so slow anymore. This Government is accelerating its pace and moving swiftly to dismantling, recreate and relocate our major institutions, alienating and condemning a whole section of our population.

This PP Government is taking our beloved country down a very slippery slope to the detriment of our beloved country. Mr. Speaker, this is very, very scary.

Mr. Speaker: All right, your time is up.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Mc Leod: May I propose a further extension?

Mr. Speaker: No, not today. [*Laughter*] The hon. Member for Caroni East, Minister of Education.

The Minister Education (Hon. Dr. Tim Gopeesingh): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I remembered sometime during the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West's contribution, she mentioned the gloves are on. So, for a moment I wondered whether I was going to be floored across from somewhere on this side, so I have decided to put my glove on at this time. A lot of her contribution was on education and I will begin my response on the education aspect as the Minister of Education.

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Mr. Speaker, the words of a great American philosopher and scientist, Benjamin Franklin, made this statement:

“If a man empties his purse into his head, no man can take it away from him. An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest.”

And he goes on:

A budget should therefore be a choice, not necessarily an easy choice, but the right choice. And that is the choice to take the responsible prudent path to fiscal stability, economic growth and opportunity.

These were the words of Benjamin Franklin, the great American philosopher and scientist.

Mr. Speaker, this is what the hon. Prime Minister, the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy and the People’s Partnership Government have done. We have made the right choice. We have taken the responsible, prudent paths to fiscal stability, economic growth and opportunity. So, when the Minister of Finance and the Economy presented the People’s Partnership budget statement in 2013, “Stimulating Growth, Generating Prosperity”, we offered the sincerest congratulations for a tremendous budget statement he made last Monday.

Mr. Speaker, our budget, 2013, must be viewed and analyzed in the context of where we were when we came into Government in May, 2010. There was an international global crisis and a financial meltdown; the worst since the 1930s. The global financial crisis sent the world economy tottering, sparing no nation state. The USA was in severe economic recoil. President Obama found himself in the middle of the worst economic, monetary and fiscal difficulties and he immediately infused US \$1 trillion to stimulate the economy. Today, they have a debt of close to US \$17 trillion and a debt to GDP ratio of close to 100 per cent. Mr. Speaker, I gave that in the context of where we found ourselves as a country. The rest of the world could not have escaped the contagion effects, and so did Trinidad and Tobago and the wider Caribbean. Today, as the former Minister of Finance said, countries like Greece, Ireland, Italy, Spain and France are now finding themselves in tremendous difficulties. Today, China and India, their economy is shrinking and is not going as fast as they expected it to go.

We have to position ourselves in relation to the rest of the world and it is a fact that we have to go back and speak about what we met when we came into power, and the former Minister of Finance indicated today that we met an almost empty Treasury—\$300 billion had been spent by the previous administration in an eight-year period.

Mr. Indarsingh: More than that.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: More than \$300 billion, and we ended up owing \$19.5 billion on the Clico issue, another \$5.4 billion—\$550 million to the HCU investors, and uncontrolled expenses by the state enterprises like UDeCott, and we know what happened with UDeCott and Calder Hart—billions and billions of dollars spent. Then there were—[*Crosstalk*—Mr. Speaker! Mr. Speaker!

Hon. Member: “Forget them nah, let them talk.”

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:—we had \$18-plus billion in guarantees signed by the previous administration, almost \$14 billion in letters of comfort and another \$5 billion in off the balance book recording—so we, in effect, had something like \$37 billion in contingent liabilities which we inherited from the previous administration.

Dr. Khan: Shameful!

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: So, the previous Minister of Finance had to deal with almost \$37 billion in contingent liabilities, a local and foreign debt of almost close to \$25 billion, and \$19 billion in Clico, half a billion with HCU and the World GTL, as Minister Mc Leod, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre indicated earlier, almost \$10 billion in questionable deals with World GTL with Petrotrin—and this is the economy that we inherited. We have to congratulate the former Minister of Finance for stabilizing the economy and leading us onto our platform for economic growth which our present Minister of Finance and the Economy will take us through.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at our macroeconomic fundamentals, we can boast that we have maintained strong macroeconomic fundamentals in terms of our financial governance. Our exchange rate is stable; our foreign exchange reserve is US \$2.4 billion, which is TT \$15.4 billion—14 months of import; our interest rate is about 7 per cent; our inflation rate has gone down to 5.6 per cent; our Heritage and Stabilization Fund has gone to US \$4.5 billion, which is close to TT \$28.8 billion and it yielded last year 9.5 per cent on an investment. We have full employment at 4.9 per cent; we have debt to GDP ratio of 38 per cent, way below what other countries are experiencing—United States has over close to 100 per cent debt to GDP, and our external debt servicing is only 1.2 per cent.

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

This is a situation that our Ministers of Finance, the previous Minister of Finance, and this Minister of Finance and the Economy has stabilized our

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economy and created a platform to launch us into economic growth for sustainable development. Sincere congratulations to both our Ministers of Finance, the previous Minister of Finance and present Minister of Finance and the Economy. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Deputy Speaker, their competence, their brilliance, their capability, their capacity have gained them national and international respect for their marked professionalism. This is the calibre of the people we have on our side as opposed to the other side.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we hear them all the time—they want to get into government. Well, we understand, we were in Opposition and we were in Opposition for nine long lonely years, 2001 to 2010, and I remember when Minister Moonilal and myself, and a few of us sat on the other side we used to ask, “Why it is that we are here?” Just about four or five of us across there could run the government exactly what PNM was doing at the time. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*]

Miss Hospedales: You are not doing any good thing.

Mr. Warner: Thanks to Juliana Pena.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thanks to—what is her name?

Mr. Warner: Juliana Pena

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:—Juliana Pena that we had been able to see the light of the day, so now we can govern. Madam Deputy Speaker—

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Talk about schools, man, and about protests.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yes, I will speak about that now.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this budget caters to the needs of each and every citizen, one which seeks to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor, the differently abled, the young, the old, the private and public sector. This budget reflects rigid fiscal discipline, strong stimulus boost with the PSIP, refocus on social welfare programmes, reduction in transfer to state enterprises because the state enterprises had been a bleed on the national economy for a long time. The Minister of Finance and the Economy is going to re-examine the whole expenditure rationale for a number of state enterprises, and so he is intent on reduction of transfer to state enterprises—that means you are making them lean and trim and they must function with full governance and proper governance with accountability and transparency; higher employment in the construction sector and review of all expenditures. Madam Deputy Speaker, this is the proposed wish of the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy for this fiscal year 2013/2014.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I now want to come to the issue of what the last speaker spoke about in terms of the economy. She said about our economy in stagnation. What I just gave you there as a macroeconomic fundamental, you see that as an economy in stagnation? Not at all, Madam Deputy Speaker. This is not a budget of deception; this is a budget of what I just spoke to you about—a clear budget of where we are going, what we have met and what we are going to do. We are not fooling anybody, and it is not mirrors and smokescreens that we are seeing. We are on our path to full economic development, economic growth and strong economic performance for all the people of our country.

This manifesto of 2010, elicits and speaks very properly about “Prosperity for All”, and this is what our Government has been doing for the last two years and four months. The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: She did not spoke, she read.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: I have a name.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I do not want to call you by your name, we have to refer to you by Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West.

Mr. Sharma: She did not spoke, she read.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: She read—right.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: I consulted my notes. “You know what happen, that is all you go use today.” The verbal abuse—[*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I want to refer to the question of deficit financing. Madam Deputy Speaker, they are accusing us of deficit financing—the other side—and I want to turn your attention to the Office of the Auditor General’s report of April 25, 2012, for the financial year 2011, and on page 97 of it, is a comparison between total revenue and total expenditure for the financial years 2007—2011. The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West spoke about us spending more than we are earning. In 2007, who was in power—PNM. Your total revenue was \$40.466 billion, your expenditure was \$41.538 billion, so you spent more, \$1.072 billion more than you earned—that is 2007. In 2008, when the price of oil was about \$140 per barrel and the price of gas was almost \$5.50 per million btu, million cubic feet, you received \$55 billion in 2008, revenue \$55.55 billion and you spent \$55.45 billion, so you had a surplus.

But look what happened in 2009—you received \$40.163 billion and you spent \$45.328 billion. You spent \$5.165 billion more than you received, so you have no

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moral authority to speak about the deficit financing whatsoever. [*Desk thumping*] And if I go back to 2004, 2005 and 2006—I do not have the book here with me—you will see for all those years of 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, with the exception of 2008 and 2009, you had deficit financing—so no moral authority from that side to talk to us about deficit financing.

We are using the deficit financing for the Public Sector Investment Programme to stimulate economic growth, to stimulate growth in the construction sector and to stimulate jobs. This is where we are as far as the People's Partnership is concerned. Let me go to the manifesto of 2010. We said “Prosperity for All”, and I read from it. For a united people to achieve a sustainable development:

“We are guided by the principle that the highest mission of society is the development of its citizens. Accordingly the commitment of our government is to promote a process of people-centred development. To achieve our mission, we have built our policy on seven (7) Development Pillars, which are interconnected and which constitute the cornerstones of our strategy for sustainable development...”

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is where we are going. This is what the former Minister of Finance took us through, and this is where the present Minister of Finance and the Economy is taking us for the next two years and eight months, and into our second term of office. Our strategy for sustainable development of Trinidad and Tobago, people-centred development, poverty eradication, infrastructure, information and communication technology, national and personal security, more diversified knowledge intensive economy, good governance and foreign policy.

This is what—so, our people-centred development, this is where education comes in:

“...the optimum contribution of each and every citizen is crucial. In a knowledge-driven economy”—this is in our People's manifesto—“a strong basic education system and significant participation in tertiary education make a decisive difference. Accordingly, we commit to making human development a central thrust through the education system...and to support lifelong learning”—and—“skill building...”

7.10 p.m.

This is where pillar 5 comes in:

A More Diversified, Knowledge Intensive Economy—Building on the Native Genius of Our People

In a world in which innovation is the decisive competitive advantage, human initiative and creative capacity represent an enormous asset.”

Madam Deputy Speaker, education and human development remain critical to building the foundation. It was the legendary South American freedom fighter, Simon Bolivar, who underscored the importance of education to any government when he said, and I quote:

“The first duty of a government is to give education to the people. No other investment yields as great a return as the investment in education. An educated citizenry is the foundation of every community and the future of every economy.”

These words ring true centuries later.

The hon. Prime Minister has always embraced that philosophy of people-centred development and human capital development for sustainable development. This is what she started in 1997 when she was Minister of Education, continued to 2001, and this is what our hon. Prime Minister is continuing to send her major thrust on education for her people of Trinidad and Tobago, and that philosophy continues. This is why the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy and the hon. Prime Minister have made sure that education gets the largest slice of the budget of \$53 million, \$9.1 billion for the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Tertiary Education.

Do you know what that is? It is close to 18 per cent of the annual expenditure and close to 6 per cent of the GDP. This is far better than most developed countries like Great Britain, the United States and Canada, where their expenditure on education is about 12 to 14 per cent and is only about 4 per cent of their GDP. Ours is about 18 per cent of our annual expenditure and 6 per cent of our GDP.

In fact, many of our colleagues and the nation as a whole will see that the issue of education is a major one coming up in the United States’ presidential election. I read on the official website of the US President, whitehouse.gov, that President Obama has launched an educate to innovate programme, a campaign to improve the participation and performance of America’s students in science,

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technology, engineering and mathematics, known as STEM. Madam Deputy Speaker, when I saw that, I could not help but think that the advisors who came up with that campaign for President Obama must have been following the dynamic changes that we were making here in Trinidad and Tobago's education system. [*Desk thumping*] We are leaders in education in the Caribbean. We are leaders in education in Latin America and the Caribbean. Our academic performance and the performance of our education system, despite what the last speaker spoke about—I will make some retorts on her statement in a short while—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: You are a leading Minister, President of UNESCO.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: By virtue of being Minister of Education.

I want to go into the first question of information and communication technology on the laptop issue. We said in the manifesto that infrastructure for human connectivity and backbone of the knowledge of the economy, in order to be competitive—[*Interruption*] [*Mrs. Mc Intosh rises*]

Hon. Member: Sit down! Sit down!

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Madam Deputy Speaker, a point of order, 36(5).

Hon. Member: A point of what?

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Standing Order 36(5), imputing improper motives. He is not to say that I thought I would be Minister of Education. You cannot say that.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Who said so? I did not say that.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: You just said that. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Khan: He never said that. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Overruled; Member you may continue, please.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: I do not want to be.

Mr. Sharma: “What you want to be?”

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Minister of Energy and Energy Industries.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: That is not your business. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: In our People's Partnership manifesto what was said about Information and Communication Technology" is that:

"in order to be competitive nation in the global knowledge economy we will link our diversification strategy to the creation of knowledge industries...achieved by installing basic, technology-driven infrastructure...

Integrate broadband internet coverage, integrate internet-enabled education throughout the school system."

We said that the connected classroom would be central to educational transformation as well as teacher education. Connectivity technologies will be tapped to link teachers with teachers, teachers with students and students with students.

With our laptop initiative, which was the brainchild of hon. Prime Minister, we have now given out close to 55,000 laptops to our students. [*Desk thumping*] We have given close to 4,000 of our teachers, and by the end of our first five-year term in office, we would have given out close to 88,000 laptops—

Mr. Sharma: That is a world record.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:—to our students from Forms 1 to 5. By extension, if there are about four siblings in a family, a child, a brother or sister and a mother and father, we would have given close to 85 multiplied by four, 340,000 citizens of Trinidad and Tobago would be tech savvy and have the ability to use communication technology. Do you know what that is doing for our country? It is lifting the tech savviness of our population. [*Crosstalk*] Just in one year when we gave the laptops, we rose 16 per cent in the global index. You could imagine three years later?

Do you know how many teachers have been trained? Let me just give you this. Distribution of school staff members with ICT training: 3,732 teachers were trained; heads of departments and deans, 891; principals and vice-principals, 243. So we trained about 4,800 teachers, heads of departments, deans, principals and vice-principals.

Let us talk about the laptop usage. The last speaker, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, has always criticized the laptop issue. [*Crosstalk*] In fact, her leader—I do not know who is their leader—but the Member for Diego Martin West—remember when we spoke about calling the children in Form 1 "duncee"—he called the children "duncee", and there was a big hue and cry all

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through Trinidad and Tobago when we began giving out the laptops: whether the laptops would work, why we were buying laptops for rich students, why we were bringing out this laptop issue.

Madam Deputy Speaker, hear what the teachers are doing in Form 1, what is happening in Form 1:

Remedial learning, 45 per cent have been using it; regular classroom instruction, 91 per cent of the teachers; finding and accessing information, researching through the Internet, 86 per cent; preparation of lessons, 93 per cent; presentation of lessons by PowerPoint, 94 per cent of the teachers in Form one are using it; students work on projects in class using laptops, 89 per cent; students using e-books in class, 32 per cent; and students using blogs in class is only 25 per cent.

Concerning the digital content resources on the laptops, hear what they have on them: Technology education, two files: Technology—integrated science, Spanish, social studies, technology education—social studies, mathematics, language arts. Folders with student laptop and teacher laptop with all the links to resources; the laws of Trinidad and Tobago. As the Member for St. Augustine, the hon. Minister of Legal Affairs had recommended, we put the laws of Trinidad and Tobago on the laptops; Pennacool mathematics.

And we had from Microsoft 16 software applications on the laptops by Microsoft: Windows 7 Professional; Office 2010 Professional, and this includes 2010 versions of Word, Excel, PowerPoint, OneNote, Outlook, Publisher and Access. Microsoft Windows Live Essentials, Windows Live Messenger; Windows Live Writer; Windows Live Family Safety, which gives parental control to help parents keep their children safe online; Microsoft Mathematics; Microsoft Mathematics Add-in; Microsoft Chemistry; Microsoft Photosynth, et cetera. Is that not amazing? [*Crosstalk*] It is amazing. Microsoft Worldwide Telescope; Microsoft Small Basic—puts the fun back into computer programming; Microsoft Live@edu, online services for students—co-branded communication and collaboration services for students, faculty and alumni.

Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, that is the laptops, the teachers and the use. Let us talk about where we are going. All this we did for three years at a cost of approximately \$186 million, and not one person in Trinidad and Tobago could find anything about lack of transparency and accountability. This is over board and the highest degree of professionalism in securing our laptops for our students, [*Desk thumping*] totally above board by iGovTT and the Ministry of Education. Big hue and cry, and this is where we are.

You know, I remember the hon. Prime Minister giving a little story, that she went somewhere and a little boy came to her and hugged her. You know what he told her? He said, "Prime Minister, thank you very much for the laptop." Do you know how the hon. Prime Minister has touched the lives of thousands of young children in our schools who would not have been able to have a laptop. She has ensured the future for our young, poor children. No poor child must be disadvantaged as far as education is concerned. There is equity in place in education. There is quality and accessibility, and the poor must never be disadvantaged.

We are also purchasing a digital portal so that we could store all the information related to the curriculum, so the students can use their laptops and get the information. We are getting e-books. We are working with the Commonwealth of Learning and IDA Singapore. We are working with the Marshall Cavendish maths series, so that we have the interactive white boards where the students would be able to sit in their seats and work with their teacher, who would work with an interactive white board, and they could use the computer on the math series.

We have 152 secondary schools with computer labs, ranging from one to six. In some of our schools we have six computer labs, some of these have up to 60. *[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for Port of Spain South and Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, I want to ask you to abide by the Standing Orders and allow the Member to speak in silence.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

At present we have Internet connectivity of 10 megabytes in our schools, but it is not a dedicated fibre optic cable, it is shared by the community as well. We know we are not getting a good enough response. We have 152 IT technicians in our 152 secondary schools.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: What are they doing?

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: They are ensuring that the software and the hardware in the schools are working well, and they are accountable.

7.25 p.m.

All the principals of primary schools, we have given them laptops; all the principals of secondary schools have laptops as well. We are in an age of

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communication with email addresses of all of them, so in one minute we can send information to all our principals of primary and secondary schools throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

You know what this has resulted in? More students are now doing IT at the CSEC level and CAPE level with better academic performance. This is what this has done to our—[*Crosstalk*] Now, our Central Tenders Board is working on something that is going to continue to revolutionize the issue of the laptop. We are seeking now to implement an integrated technology solution to complement an on-site security guard service that will achieve the following objectives: improve the level of physical security at all schools; improve the effectiveness of the on-site security guard service; increase secure wireless broadband access to all schools for students and teachers; reduce communication cost, and effectively deliver education content to students.

What is the scope of this project that the Central Tenders Board is going out for tender pretty shortly? This scope would be to provide the following solutions listed below: 447 primary schools and 133 secondary schools—we will get the service for them.

Components of the project:

Critical assets security intruder detection system;

Perimeter security intruder detection solution;

Proactive remote guarding solution;

Armed tactical response solution;

Secure wireless broadband access solution;

The wireless is Wi-Fi, voice solution and would affect the internal communication replacing the PBX, and with a 25 to 40 per cent reduction in cost in communication at schools.

The wireless within the schools will be dedicated fibre optic, laid into the schools, so not any of it would be shared, and it has the ability to add other features of voice and video. And in that aspect we would have a dedicated television channel, to carry all our educational materials from—let us say the RLRC, audio visual recording studio, transmitted to all the schools at the same time. This is revolutionizing education, Madam Deputy Speaker, that we could stay at RLRC, the best teachers in the room, film that while it is going on, and

transmit that to all our primary schools, 476, at a particular time. We can store it on DVD, and then give it to them again so that they can use. We are providing, at any time, television system for all the primary schools.

Mr. Sharma: We are going to “film” it. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: To tell you the significance of the IT; last year Trinidad and Tobago entered the Microsoft Innovative Education Forum, Latin America, which is a global programme in which teachers are encouraged to present their best practices integrated technology into the education process. Annoushka Ishmael, a teacher of ASJA Girls’ Secondary School, placed second in the extended learning beyond the classroom category for her project entitled “Educated Girls...Empowered Women”.

This year we have recorded another great success in this programme in the person of Mrs. Janadi Gonzáles Lord, a teacher from Bishop School East, and her project won the category, “Innovation in Difficult Circumstances”, which means that she is going to Prague in the Czech Republic in November this year. She is featured on the website dailyledventures.com, where she is championed as being an innovator who has worked to make education accessible to all students, regardless of any physical or learning challenge they may face.

Like all the teachers of this nation, Madam Deputy Speaker, they continue to do our country proud, and I want the *Hansard* to record and reflect the great achievements of these teachers for posterity, and our warmest congratulation to them, and to all our 16,000 teachers in Trinidad and Tobago; all of 16,000 teachers who are working extremely well. There are always some who will have some difficulties. And last Friday we celebrated World Teachers Day, and this Government is the first Government that paid the respect and the honour to teachers by having, last year, a ceremony for honouring the teachers of Trinidad and Tobago, and this year again, about a week ago, we had that ceremony for our teachers. That is the respect and honour we pay to our teachers.

You know, our laptop policy now has caught on with Latin America. Argentina has just given 3,000,000 laptops to the students. Russia has given laptops to 2,000 schools.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: But their implementation—

Hon. T. Gopeesingh: And Uruguay has now given—I had a meeting with the Minister of Education in Uruguay, and he was telling me of a tremendous revolution in IT that is taking place in Uruguay since their administration of the

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laptops for the students. They have given them to both primary school students and secondary, and they have given out 1,000,000 laptops already in the 3.5million population to their students. And you know, all our secondary schools have computer labs, and out of the 476 primary schools, we have to now provide computer labs for 134; almost 340 of our primary schools have computer labs as well, Madam Deputy Speaker.

So, you know what Gonzáles said, she made a keen observation.

“We want to create 21st century learning, of course, but mind change is more important.”

Let me speak now—so I have dealt with the question from the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West on the laptop issue.

Let me speak about universal early childhood education. Our manifesto—so we have been able to deliver. What we promised in our manifesto we delivered. On our IT, we promised one laptop per child and we delivered. [*Desk thumping*] This is not a smokescreen Government. We say we are going to do it and delivered, and that was done, and we delivered it with efficiency and effectiveness, Madam Deputy Speaker.

This is what we said about preschool. Self-confident creative enterprising children must be the goal.

“As they learn-to-play, work independently and with others to make progress, we must build the foundation for personal achievement, as well as co-operation and collaboration with others to achieve mutually satisfying goals.”

This is what we said in our People’s Partnership manifesto.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there are 34,000 children between the ages three to five—ages three and four; age five go into primary schools. So the Member is wrong when she said we have three cohorts, we have two cohorts; age three and age four; so we have 34,000 children to take care of, not 51,000 children, in the formal system.

At present, we have 170 ECCE centres, 69 run by Servol with approximately 8,000 students. So we need to take care of 26,000 more students. How do we do this? You build ECCE centres, you have to have the teaching staff. But we know when we asked them when Mrs. Manning was the Minister of Education, they came about with a plan, they said they were going to build 600 early childhood

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education centres by 2012. They left office in 2012 [*sic*] and they completed about 17 early childhood education centres. Seventeen they completed in nine years that they were there between 2001 and 2010. You know how much we have done in our 28 months? We completed 27. [*Desk thumping*] We are building 24 now that would be completed by December, and we are starting another 26 that would be completed by next June/July, so by next July, for the beginning of the new academic year in 2013, we would have constructed nearly 80 childhood education schools. Eighty, that would take care of 80 by 70 students or 80 by 60, that is about 4,800 or 5,600 students.

Now, how are we taking care of the others? We have to build another hundred, and it is not unrealistic for us to build another 100 early childhood education centres between now and 2015. We are going to do it, and we will do it. [*Desk thumping*] If we can build 80, by next year we would have completed 80. We have got the experience and the knowledge how to do it, and we are going to be accelerating it to build another 100. So, we have built 180. One hundred and eighty by 70 students is 12,600; 12,600 plus 8,000, that is 20,600. How are we going to take care of the other 14,000 children now that we want between the ages three to five?

Madam Deputy Speaker, we have had two national consultations with the private sector, owners of early childhood education centres, and nurseries and kindergartens, and they were warm in praise for the Ministry for coming to them. Now, we have invited them to partner with us, and they own the nurseries, and they are running the nurseries—the early childhood education centres—and we have now developed four models where we can partner with them, and they will join with us, and we will take care of their students and their teachers, and we expect to have another 200 of these centres. There are seven hundred plus registered in Trinidad and Tobago now—early childhood education centres, kindergartens and nurseries—746 is in fact the number. We only want 200 of those, and 200 of those will give us the 12,000 to 14,000 students that we need to move on and to be able to reach the goal of universal early childhood education.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is realistic, and we have the plan to do it, and we are working towards it. Now, you have one teacher to 10 students in early childhood education centres. So if we have 34,000 children to take care of, we need 3,400 teachers. We have put on advertisements nationally. Seven of the tertiary institutions that are managed by Minister Karim have come with us, and they have already started to train 800 early childhood education teachers out of

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the 3,400, and there are more that are coming aboard now, so it is UTT, COSTAATT, Roytec, UWI, Credo—from the Catholic Institute, and two others, USC, that is the—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Indarshingh: University of Southern Caribbean.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: University of the Southern Caribbean. We have seven tertiary institutions that are training teachers. So, if the general public is hearing, all the mothers and all the families who have young ones, five O'levels with mathematics and english, we need them to come on board. We need another twenty-six hundred to twenty-seven hundred early childhood education teachers to come on board in Trinidad and Tobago. They can do their certificate, and then move on to their bachelor's degree, some have gone on to their masters.

So we have them at the hierarchy in the school, administrator/tutor, teacher, assistant teacher, auxiliary. This universal early childhood education will be a realism, Madam Deputy Speaker, there is no question about it. We are creating jobs, and we are affording career path development for our young ones.

So, our models, the four models that we are sharing with the partnership, there are four: what you call minimalist, they do not need much support, we are going to purchase space, that is the second; the third is one-off grant, and the fourth is a community-based initiative. And if we achieve universal early childhood education, we would be the first country in the world to do so. No other country in the world has done that, and we would probably be the first country in the world to have universal early childhood education, universal primary education, universal secondary education and universal tertiary education. [*Desk thumping*] I think this is education for you, and this is where the Prime Minister has been putting the money, and has indicated that this is the way that we must go as a nation, human capital development, and people-centered development for sustainable development.

And all free, Madam Deputy Speaker; and they are continuously accusing us now about the other thing, GATE. That is a matter for the hon. Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, but I cannot sit here as a colleague in education and allow those to go without challenging them.

They were the same wicked ones, [*Crosstalk*] the PNM, not you, I take that back, sorry, not them, the PNM was spreading malicious and false rumours nationally at the last election.

Mr. Indarshingh: Propaganda.

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Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Propaganda. [*Crosstalk*] You know what they were saying, we were going to close down GATE. There was rumour all over that we were going to close down GATE. In fact, we expanded GATE to include technical and vocational education. [*Desk thumping*] We expanded GATE. And if you look at the budget submission, we are moving to spend, not \$600 million which was last year for GATE, [*Crosstalk*] we are spending now \$800 million for GATE. That is a further expansion of the Gate programme, but what we want to do is to prevent the abuse of the system. Some students are failing in one area, moving into another area and failing again, we have to put checks and balances, we cannot leave the taxpayers' money to go like that without putting checks and balances to prevent an—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Browne: But why are they failing?

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:—abuse of the system. Why are we?

Dr. Browne: Why have they failed, we need to answer that question?

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Well, that is a question that we have to—

Hon. Members: That is a personal issue. [*Crosstalk*]

7.40 p.m.

Now, the teacher aspect: the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West spoke about the teachers. [*Crosstalk*] The first thing I want, in case the Member did not know, who controls the teachers? It is the Teaching Service Commission, according to the Constitution, appoints, promotes, transfers and disciplines. Who does it? Not the Minister of Education; not the Ministry of Education, so matters related to teachers' appointment, transfer, promotion and discipline reside in the independent constitutionally arranged Teaching Service Commission to do those things.

The Ministry of Education and the Minister of Education have nothing whatsoever to do with appointment, promotion, transfer and discipline. So, neither the Ministry of Education nor the Minister could be blamed for anything as far as the teachers' aspect is concerned. But we have a responsibility too, and we bring this to the attention of the Teaching Service Commission. And you would remember me saying that we wanted to have the vacancies filled, and I am proud to say that the Teaching Service Commission under Miss Hyacinth Guy as the chairperson acceded to our request to meet with her. We had very lovely

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discussions, and here today, the positions of principals, vice-principals, teachers, heads of departments and deans are being filled. There are very few vacancies left, so those issues are being done. [*Desk thumping*]

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you very much, colleagues, for your recognition in terms of allowing me to continue for another half an hour if we need to. I just want to go back to this manifesto again, and I am going back to this because these are the things—[*Interruption*—that we said, these are Government policies. I gave you the Government policy on ICT, I gave you the Government policy on ECC, I am giving you the Government policy on teacher training. [*Crosstalk*]

We said we would strengthen the quality on learning by ensuring that teachers are trained, educated and certified at all levels of the system from pre-school up. Our aim is to further professionalize the teaching service; work with the union on professional upgrade and professional standards.

Let us talk about teacher training and development.

In keeping with the philosophical underpinnings of diversity in teaching...learning, teacher education to support a curriculum for transformation that is being strengthened, Madam Deputy Speaker,".

We are working with the:

"Higher educational institutions to strengthen teacher quality and relevance in the secondary and primary system."

We have at the moment 200 teachers studying for the Bachelor of Education for the primary school, and within two years all our primary school teachers would either have a teachers' diploma or a Bachelor of Education, almost close to 8,000 primary school teachers. No one will be there as assistant teachers and no one will be having just five O levels teaching in primary schools.

Now, there are teachers who are specializing in physical education, VAPA, ECC, Math and English. In-house workshops for secondary school teachers are being conducted in item writing, paper setting, marking examinations, monitoring

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SBAs and internal assessments; training for oral examinations and examination reviews in seven CSEC and five CAPE subjects; 3,000 primary school teachers have been trained in physical education and VAPA; professional development workshops have been held for 1,000 teachers in 15 areas. Focus groups in meetings for principals and teachers have taken place.

Teaching and teaching development, the performance: we have a project unit now called TEPU, and this conducted its fourth annual professional development workshop and the professional development workshops were mounted in—listen to them: strategies for working with special needs students in inclusive areas, data driven instruction, strategies for transforming schools, anger management, critical incidence, stress management, mentoring, time-management, conflict resolution, development of map skills, disaster preparedness, primary school dance, painting, primary school integrated arts.

These workshops were designed to meet the needs of teachers at all levels throughout the school system, and additionally we gave certificates of participation to teachers who met the requirements. And we are also doing management training for 60-plus supervisors, the 400-plus principals in primary schools and 152 in secondary schools and the number of senior teachers.

We are also focusing on literacy development. This is what the manifesto said again. So, Madam Deputy Speaker, we are keeping to our word. We are delivering what we said we would deliver, and we promised that and we are delivering. [*Desk thumping*] This is our watchword and we are working with it and we are delivering, and I am only speaking about education, but my other colleagues, when they speak about their own Ministries, this is just one workbook. “An era of caring”, and this is the other one here, somewhere I have it—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Indarsingh: Lift it up proud.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: We promised 365 days we will be doing that, and we have another one here [*Shows document*] “Fulfilling the Promise”. This here has about 44 pages of “Fulfilling the Promise”, achievements, and this here has thirty-something. This is for one year and this is another year. This is the performance of this Government. I am only speaking about education; you could imagine when my colleagues speak about the individual Ministries what would happen. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Sharma: You could print that one out yourself.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: So, let us speak about literacy development. [Crosstalk] You know, we said that we would expand the meaning of literacy to include a second language in the curriculum at primary, secondary and tertiary level, under the centre for teacher training and development the project design to improve the reading skill of students in primary schools. [Interruption]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, Member for Laventille East/Morvant, I know we like to talk as women; since I have sat on this Chair; since I assumed this Chair 46 minutes ago, both you Members kept on talking. I want to ask you to please observe the Standing Orders and allow the Member to speak in silence, please.

Miss Cox: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, but the men speak more than us. [Laughter]

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you. Madam Deputy Speaker, we implemented the literacy and numeracy strategy to raise the levels of achievements of students in Infant Year 1 and 2 and Standard 1. Eighty teachers were given scholarships to do a Masters in reading. They have come out now and we have utilized their skills and proficiencies across the primary education system.

We have ensured that the best suited teachers go into Infant Year 1 and 2 and Standard 1 for, particularly, the literacy and numeracy aspect. We are now bringing out the manipulatives that were on the cupboards by principals in some of the schools. They are now using the manipulatives for the teaching of mathematics for our students. In fact, the Pearl Study which is a programme for international reading and literacy studies done internationally, and 64 countries that were done studied in about 2006, we were ranked below the 400 level, the pass was about 500 points, and we just did another—we have just engaged a few months ago in the study, and we have been promoted. We have gained 35 points in our literacy and numeracy aspect in the Pearl Study worldwide and internationally. [Interruption]

We are still not at the desired level, but what it is equivalent to, that the students in Standard 3 are six months better in their reading than they were about three years ago, so that is part of the achievement. [Desk thumping] When we do the analysis of the National Test pretty shortly, we will know where we are as far as the programmes that we are putting for literary and numeracy.

I want to go on to the construction aspect, the infrastructure. We have been accused of not knowing where we are and what we are doing, Madam Deputy

Speaker. Far from the truth. What we inherited from the previous administration from 2001—2010; please forgive me for going back but it has to be a relationship of what we inherited to what we have to do; the foundation. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, we have 900 schools; 476 primary; 152 secondary; 180 early childhood education centres; 76 private primary; 18 private secondary; 900 schools plus. It is a monumental task, particularly where 100 of the schools—the Member has gone, I would wish that she would stay here and listen, she cannot take the jamming. [*Laughter*] She cannot handle—I have my gloves on, she has taken off the gloves now it would seem. I have put her into a corner and the referee has blown the whistle already. She has been defeated. [*Laughter and desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: The referee has—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: No, no; she is very nice; I enjoy it, but today I have to battle with her in the ring. [*Laughter*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, we met 900 schools, right? One hundred of our primary schools are more than 100 years of age; 300 of our primary schools are more than 50 years of age, and what did they do from 2001—2010? We are inheriting that. So we have 100 to 200, to possibly 300 schools to rebuild during our time, but look at our performance so far. When we used to ask the previous Minister of Education; the Member for Oropouche East, and Member for Fyzabad, and a few of us used to ask the previous Minister of Education, how many schools have you built? She would say 18 secondary and so much early childhood education. So, we used to ask her where these schools are; they are probably in Mars, because we could not see them?

Mr. Sharma: She used to ask you, “How you could say that?”

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yes, “How you could say that?” But, I went in there. There were eight secondary schools being built by them since 2007; not one was completed.

Hon. Member: At phenomenal cost.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: At phenomenal cost of \$200million for one, and this is what we had to inherit to pay back the people, the contractors who had stopped the job because they were not paid between 2007—2010. Eight schools at \$200 million each, that is \$1.6 billion. [*Crosstalk*] We had inherited to pay them and we are now fighting to pay these contractors and get the schools back ongoing, and we were able to open Marabella Secondary, we opened up Biche, and there is a third one?

Hon. Member: Freeport?

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: A third secondary school we opened.

Mr. De Coteau: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: “Nah”, I cannot remember it now but it would come to me. Aranguez. Early childhood education, we completed 27; 24 in progress; 26 to start pretty shortly.

Mr. De Coteau: What about the Baptist school?

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yes, we built the Shouter Spiritual Baptist Primary School in four months, Madam Deputy Speaker. And this thing about no principal and teacher being there on the first day of school; the Teaching Service Commission said that there would be no—they were the ones who were appointing the principal and the teachers. They took a long time to appoint them but the second day of the school, the principal and the vice-principal were in the school. So, it is not a matter of no principal and no vice-principal in the school. [*Interruption*] And the cost of the Shouter Spiritual Baptist School was \$32million.

Hon. Member: Thirty two million?

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yes, and two phases “eh”; Phase 1 and Phase 2, and you know what they were building primary schools at, between 40—50 million.

We built 13 primary schools during our time here, and let me just—I have them here somewhere: the secondary schools were Marabella, Aranguez and Biche. Thirteen primary schools: [*Interruption*] Lengua Presbyterian, Arima New Government, Palo Seco Government, Penal Rock Road Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha, Balmain Presbyterian, Tunapuna Government Primary, Riversdale Presbyterian Phase I and II, Charlieville Presbyterian, Mt. Pleasant Government Primary, St. Barbara’s Shouters’ Spiritual, Tulsa Trace Sanatan Dharma, Biche Presbyterian Primary. We completed 13 primary schools, and 37 are on this PSIP for this year and we will complete them, all 37. [*Desk thumping*] Yes.

Mr. Jeffrey: I heard you mentioned Palo Seco Government Primary, to the best of my knowledge that was built under the People’s National Movement.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: We completed it.

Mr. Jeffrey: Who built the school?

Mr. De Coteau: Just like HAJI Construction. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Okay. So, 13 primary; four secondary schools completed and I spoke about the early childhood education centres; and we have about 37 schools under the PSIP project for this year—the primary schools—and we are going to complete them. [*Crosstalk*]

So, they had \$200 million for a secondary school, \$40 million for a primary school; we built some primary schools on that list, in less than eight weeks at a cost of, about what, \$7 million for one; [*Desk thumping*] that will survive for 50 years, because it is pre-engineered, pre-fabricated type of school, well designed, well constructed to last 50 years—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Peters: And that is value for money.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:—and that is value for money. We are building early childhood education centres at the value now of \$3.5 million for one, Madam Deputy Speaker. So when you talk about construction—

7.55 p.m.

Do you know what we did for repairs? We have done repairs to almost 500-plus primary and secondary schools during our 28 months. Last year alone during the summer vacation repair programme, we did repairs to 340 schools. This year, when I said that we were doing 77, EFCL had, in fact, corrected me and said that they had done 120 schools for during the repair.

This thing about 39 schools not opening is a pure fabrication by TTUTA. I have to say that this is wrong by TTUTA to have put out that list that 37 schools were not opened. We checked it, the first day of school, there were 11 schools that were not opened. By the end of the first week, we were down to five schools that were not opened, but every day now everybody is protesting because they want their school. I agree that the parents must get the schools for their children, but it is very difficult to do everything one time when you have 100 schools that are over 100 years of age.

So it is a matter of prioritizing now; and last week we had a meeting with the denominational boards, all 18 of them. I met with them at the Ministry and I asked them to give me their priority list so that we can determine from the prioritization that they have given us which one of their schools we will work with to ensure that we either repair the schools or we construct the schools. So we understand that the students are having difficulty and we empathize with them and we are working as fast as possible to relieve their anxiety.

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As far as the Malick school is concerned, Malick is 45 years of age—my understanding, I have been advised. The electrical system went into degradation. The front was totally gone. There was a fire that burnt out two of the areas in a block. We repaired the block; we painted over and did the work. We did the electrical work, we took away the standby generator, the Electrical Inspectorate passed the electrical system, but we know that there is a lot of work to be done. We got three contractors to go into the school for electrical, each contractor came up with 1.7, 1.7, 1.4. It is going to cost \$4.5 million to complete the electrical work for Malick and the decision is now being made by the Permanent Secretary and us and we may have to tell the contractors, “Go ahead, see if you can get it done in a week, and we have to open the school for the students.”

The Palo Seco school, I had discussions with the Member of Parliament for La Brea on many occasions, and I thank him for showing the interest. [*Desk thumping*] We wanted to move the students to the Beach Camp—we got Beach Camp to accept them, and I thank Petrotrin for allowing us to do it, so the students will be transferred to Beach Camp while we do work on the fungus issue in the Palo Seco school. So that takes care of the ICT, it takes care of the ECC, it takes care of the construction.

Curriculum: part of the issue related to curriculum, we said that we would revise/review the curriculum and this is what we have, in fact, done. We have reviewed the primary school curriculum and the early childhood education curriculum, and that is down pat now, there is no question about it. We had two days in Cascadia for the primary school curriculum stakeholders’ meeting, and one in each district of Trinidad for the primary school consultation. More than 3,000 people participated and 75 per cent of the participants advised that we should move the SEA from March to May. This is what we did. We moved the exam from March to May and the results.

Just in one year, in 2012, as opposed to 2011, a higher percentage of students scored above 50 per cent, 60 per cent and 90 per cent than in 2011, by just moving the exam from March to May, six weeks down the line. That was an idea from Minister De Coteau, yes. “Let’s move the exam down,” and the national community was fighting with us. We said, “Give us a chance and we will prove that this is correct.” But 75 per cent of the participants said, “We must do it,” and we did it. And so, therefore, a higher percentage of students scored above 50 per cent, 60 per cent and 90 per cent, and in 2011, also, a lower percentage of students scored below 30 per cent in 2012.

So 4.8 per cent scored above 90 per cent in 2012 compared with 4.5; 57.1 per cent scored above 60 in 2012, as opposed to 56 per cent in 2011; 71 per cent scored above 50 in 2012, compared with 68 per cent in 2011, and 9.1 per cent scored less than 30 per cent in 2012, compared with 9.9. So in all aspects of the SEA results we did better in 2012 than in 2011, and I do not know whether it is just the movement of the exam, but we also gave them assistance. This is where the academic performance is improving as well again.

Look at the CAPE results. We are not satisfied with the CSEC results. CSEC, we have to do a lot more work for the students, but look at the result of CAPE. Our students are extremely brilliant. Compare 2010 to 2012, in Unit 1 in 2010—60.8 per cent; 2011—61.8 per cent, and 2012—66.5 per cent, an improvement in CAPE for those who are achieving Grades 1 to 3 by 66 per cent. Achieving Grades I to V in 2010—88 per cent; in 2011—93 per cent and in 2012—93 per cent. Madam Deputy Speaker, 93 per cent of our students writing CAPE in 24 subjects passed Grades I to V. Grades I to V. That is the performance of our students now, their best input.

Now, let us talk about the visual and performing arts and the continuous assessment component. We said the curriculum has to be reviewed. More than 65 per cent of the participants said that we should include physical education and visual and performing arts—[*Interruption*] visual and performing arts. So we said in the manifesto, you know—hear what we said in the manifesto:

- “We will reform the curriculum”—to—“include music, art, drama, creative arts, information technology, science and technology, sports, the history and culture of all our peoples.
- We will promote character-based education, ethics, strengthen the work ethic and introduce value-balanced programmes as critical components of the curriculum.
- We will strengthen the range of technical vocational offerings to increase options and choice across the system.”

Madam Deputy Speaker, when we said we will bring in the continuous assessment component and give students 20 per cent for the Standard 5 for the SEA and 20 per cent for Standard 4, there was a lot of dissatisfaction outside, but we had consultations, but, obviously, some people who were not there when the consultations began to air their voice, they began to speak; but we are a Government that listens. We are a People’s Partnership Government which

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listens. [*Desk thumping*] I went twice to Cabinet and Cabinet directed the Minister of Education to “hold your horse; wait. Let us do it as a pilot project in Standard 4, and once you get it working properly, we will introduce it formally in Standard 5.” This is what we are doing, Madam Deputy Speaker. We are introducing it in Standard 4 now as a pilot project and we are moving to Standard 5 and Standard 3, as well, and we are moving to Standard 5 later on next year.

I have spoken about the enhancement of literacy and numeracy. Let me speak a bit about special needs. Madam Deputy Speaker, it is sad for us to say that approximately 30 per cent of our students, our children born, do have some special needs, whether it is dyslexia, autism or emotional or behavioural or psychological abnormality or deficiency in reading and hearing, or neurologic problems, over 30 per cent, and so 30 per cent of 17,000 is about 5,100 on a yearly basis. We are now doing a pilot study in eight ECCE centres and eight primary schools to determine the true incidence and prevalence of each one of these problems, and we are moving to bring on about five centres, four in Trinidad, one in Tobago, so that we would have educational psychologists, behavioural psychologists and clinical psychologists looking after these children and looking after their hearing and their vision, and all these areas that—

Dr. Browne: When were they first started?

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: We have signed off the contract, it is an IDB contract, and within about another week or two the research will start to be done.

Dr. Browne: Where?

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Eight primary schools and eight early childhood education centres.

I want to thank the hon. Minister of Health for his work that they have been doing with us in the schools, and the School Health Programme has been a tremendous assistance to us. And I want to just read from the outcomes for 2010/2011 on hearing.

“The total screens for hearing from October 2010 - September 2011 was 15,259 (86.3%)”—of the students were tested.—“The number of students who passed on the first screen was...(82.8%)...and (17.2%) out of that screened amount failed. According to the screening protocol, any child who failed the first screen must be re-screened within three (3) months. Out of the re-screened amount, 784 (5.1%) passed, bringing the total number of students

who passed the hearing screening nationally for that year group to...(87.9%)...Those referred for further evaluation and care were 496 (3.3%).”

That is by DRETCHI. So we are taking care of our students in hearing. The vision aspect, we have not gone as far as we would like to go and I would continue to speak to my colleague to make sure that we start the vision screening, as well, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Supply of textbooks: for the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, we have 40 publishers who are supplying textbooks. It used to be held by a group, one guy in 2008 got \$30 million for primary schools and \$30 million for secondary schools as a publisher.

Hon. Member: PNM financier.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yes, PNM financier. We now have 40 publishers, 28 local and 12 foreign, and a significant percentage of these books have been given out already. Most of 18 of the local publishers have given out 100 per cent of the books, and 50 per cent of the foreign publishers have given their books. In fact, listen to the number of books we have delivered to date. In the primary schools, 349,000 plus; in the secondary schools, 93,443 total, an amount—that is in primary—that is from the local publishers. The foreign publishers, 21,000 in primary, and 47 in secondary; 68,000 books have been given from the foreign publishers. Also, the printers, four printers were extremely busy during this period of time within the last three months because it is the first time the local printers are getting work to print the textbooks, whereas previously they used to go to China to have the books printed, and so on, and this is the first time this is happening.

CVQs: we are now, that is part—we produced a strategic business report in 2010 December, and we produced our five-year strategic plan 2011—2015. Out of that 2011—2015 strategic plan, we have 16 priority areas, and I have spoken about a lot—laptop initiative, universal ECCE, literacy and numeracy, expansion of CVQ, testing and neurodiagnostic of children, change of the date of the SEA, continuous assessment component, improving academic performance, improving infrastructure in school, teacher training, curriculum reform, human resource management strengthening and full computerization, organizational restructuring and institutional strengthening and communication strategy, career guidance and parenting. These are the 16 priorities that we are working with, Madam Deputy

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Speaker, and we intend to continue. We are almost halfway through on most of these and by the end of our first term in office, we would have achieved quite a lot.

In the last two minutes that I have, let me just give you some figures on CVQ, because for too long tech/voc education has been left behind and Cabinet in 2005 gave the mandate for the implementation of CVQ—good. An MOU was signed between Ministry of Education and NTA on March 12, 2008, for the purpose of revitalizing CVQ. In 2010/2011, 43 secondary schools participated in CVQ programmes involving 1,351 students in 26 occupational areas.

In 2011/2012, the number of schools increased to 446, the number of students increased to 1,538 in 28 occupational areas, and, in 2012/2013, the number of schools now increased to 85, with 3,000 students participating. The schools were given \$100,000 each to be spent specifically on the programme. We have 1,319 assessors who have been trained, 935 being certified, 259 internal verifiers and 50 external verifiers.

We are working with NTA as a training institution, and by October 15 representatives of tertiary training institutions will be meeting with officers of the Ministry of Education, the NTA and the Accreditation Council to further plan expansion of teacher training. So there had been an increase in the number of entries for tech/voc subjects in 2012 at CSEC. There were a total of 12,041 entries compared to the previous year, 2011, when the number of entries recorded was 10,500.

Madam Deputy Speaker and colleagues, this has been part of the work of the Ministry of Education and I can speak for the next hour or two on the work that we have done.

8.10 p.m.

It has been a tremendous amount of work. It is a large portfolio, 900 schools, and 16,000 teachers and so on, but we are up to the task. I want to thank Minister De Coteau for being there with me for the first two years and I thank him very sincerely for working alongside with me, and what we have been able to do. I want to thank the Prime Minister for her confidence and allowing me to continue the work.

So in closing, Madam Deputy Speaker, the late great American President, John F. Kennedy once said that:

“Our progress as a nation can be no swifter than our progress in education...The human mind is our fundamental resource...”

Our budget package reflects this fundamental truth to its core, and I want this honourable House to record for prosperity that in just two and a half years in Government, the People's Partnership Government has gone where no other administration has dared to go in the education sector. [*Desk thumping*] Where we met stagnation, we replaced it with innovation, so great and ahead of its time that the creators of Star Trek would be amazed. Where we found bureaucracy in lack of accountability, and failing systems, we replaced it with a policy of efficiency, effectiveness and transparency so our children will benefit from the best education system that anyone in the world can benefit of.

As I close, I want to re-echo the words of John F. Kennedy who said:

“Let us think of education as the means of developing our greatest abilities, because in each of us there is a private hope and dream which, fulfilled, can be translated into benefit for everyone and greater strength for our nation.”

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

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Environment and Water Resources (Hon. Ramona Ramdial): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to stand here tonight and give my 2012/2013 budget contribution. Let me first congratulate the hon. Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar and our new Minister of Finance and the Economy, Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai, for a people's budget. [*Desk thumping*] Let me also take this opportunity to congratulate the West Indies Cricket Team for winning the World Championship 20/20 Tournament. It was the most exciting, nail biting match in recent times. So, for that, we congratulate the West Indies Team. With that said, I would like to ask a question: Is the opposition PNM delusional?

Hon. Members: Yes.

Hon. R. Ramdial: As I sat here and listened to the Opposition MPs go at the budget—[*Interruption*]

Miss Cox: You started off good.

Hon. R. Ramdial:—I was amazed at the audacity of them to accuse the Minister of Finance and the Economy of manipulating the figures, for not coming clean, for fooling the public, et cetera. As I remembered, and allow me to quote from the *Hansard*, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin West saying in his 2009 budget contribution as a backbencher. He said:

“We cannot go back now and undo what we have done, but we certainly can do things differently so as to make sure that the small priorities are at the spear of the arrow as we go forward.”

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He continued, Madam Deputy Speaker:

“The things that influence people’s quality in life, the small aggravations which...cause small money, a high lift pump, a retaining wall, a drain, the paving of a road...”

And he went on.

Now, clearly, Madam Deputy Speaker, this is the same Member for Diego Martin West, who in 2009 accused his PNM-led Government consisting of the same players in front of me, as having misplaced priorities. Now, clearly, this is the same Member, and it is not a PNM Government that is building the box drains, the retaining walls and paving roads all over T and T. It is the People’s Partnership Government led by Kamla Persad-Bissessar who is delivering to the people and will continue to do so for a very long time. [*Desk thumping*] The Opposition PNM led by the Member for Diego Martin West, Dr. Keith Rowley, is clearly delusional. I will go on to show in my contribution the delusion of some of the other MPs on the Opposition side.

I want to start with my good friend the Member for Laventille East/Movant. Now, she made reference to WASA and the water projects not coming to her area. I am fortunate enough under this new Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources to have information at my fingertips, readily available information.

Hon. Member: Ganga Singh.

Hon. R. Ramdial: As she made mention of First Caledonia Water Project and that project commenced today at a cost of \$786,000 and that project commenced today. She even made mention of Lower Coconut Drive and she was talking about the water supply. Lower Coconut Drive has a 24/7 water supply. [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: How we know that?

Hon. R. Ramdial: Upper Coconut Drive has a supply on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays. She even mentioned Upper Sixth Avenue and they also have a supply of water on Monday, Tuesday, Friday and Saturday. This information is coming directly out of the water. So clearly this is another Member who is delusional about the work of the People’s Partnership Government—[*Interruption*]

Miss Cox: Madam Deputy Speaker, I take offence to the term “delusional” and I did not say anything about Lower Coconut Drive. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Sharma: Nonsense. [*Crosstalk*]

Miss Cox: I said Coconut Drive; 36(4).

Madam Deputy Speaker: You may proceed, Member.

Hon. R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. [*Interruption*]

Miss Cox: Madam Deputy Speaker, I take offence to the word “delusional”. I am not delusional and I am not accepting that word from her. I take offence, 36(4). [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. R. Ramdial: So Colm could call us delusional.

Mr. Sharma: That is your business. You cannot be rude.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Members! Member for Couva North, continue please.

Hon. R. Ramdial: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will continue with my contribution. As Minister of State in the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources and serving with line Minister, Sen. the hon. Ganga Singh, this new Ministry is now responsible for WASA, Water Resources, EMA, National Reforestation and Watershed Rehabilitation Programme, Environmental Policy and Planning Unit, Forestry Division and the Drainage Division.

The Prime Minister in her wisdom saw it fit in the last reshuffle to create this Ministry in light of the growing concerns to protect, conserve and sustain the environment. Also over the years, we have seen the Caribbean become prone to frequent natural disasters in the form of flooding, landslides, earthquakes and hurricanes due to global warming and climate change. We have also witnessed an increase in negative human activity, such as pollution, intense industrialization, quarrying, hillside developments, deforestation which has led to environmental degradation and the loss of life and property. Not very long ago we saw this disaster in Diego Martin which I will talk about a little later on in details.

Now, I want to move on to an issue the Member for Diego Martin Central raised with respect to flooding. He claimed that the People’s Partnership Government promised a solution to flooding—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Browne: Jack Warner promised that.

Hon. R. Ramdial:—and I want to clearly beg to differ with that. There is no perfect solution to flooding. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: Nowhere in the world.

Hon. R. Ramdial: However, the risk to flooding can be reduced and the effects can be mitigated. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Browne: Tell Jack that.

Hon. R. Ramdial: I just want to say that in Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean, the main causes of flooding are intense rainfall and, of course, river flooding. However, in the urbanized areas, the main causes of flooding are the presence of reclaimed lands, an increased infrastructure on hill slopes, along with some poor drainage maintenance. Of course, there are other human factors which cause flooding, littering or the clogging of drains with foreign debris, deforestation, poor construction of drains or canals and improper location and construction of homes and businesses. It is also the cutting down of the hillsides which also contribute to the increased risk of flooding.

Now, under this new Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, moneys were allocated for possible solutions, and here are some of the plans that we have in place for the new fiscal year to deal with this flooding problem.

Mr. Imbert: Detention ponds.

Hon. R. Ramdial: We are, of course, going to increase roadside bins to prevent littering, frequent cleaning of drains and canals, reconstruction and new construction of drains especially in fast growing commercial areas and installation of trash nets for easier cleaning, the dredging of drains and rivers, decreased deforestation mechanisms and the encouragement of afforestation of our hillsides, building terraces or baskets on hillside to reduce rates of run off, presence of water pumps in places more susceptible of flooding, avoiding construction along active flood plains, river banks and avoiding coastal areas which receive strong winds and rains, and of course building at least three feet higher than the level of the road. These are just some of the measures this new Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources will be embarking upon in order to mitigate the effects of flooding.

I also want to say and I want to make this clear to the House that flooding, whether we institute measures or not, it will take place in some areas regardless of what is done, because flooding cannot be completely avoided.

Dr. Browne: Which areas?

Hon. R. Ramdial: However, as citizens we must take responsibility for our homes and, of course, we work with the authorities and the Government who are there to also implement a macro plan in assisting the individuals and the citizens

of Trinidad and Tobago. Therefore, this is something that we intend to embark upon in terms of flood mitigation. That is not it, when I speak about drainage later on, you would see some of the projects and plans that drainage has embarked upon in order to really come up with a holistic plan to dealing with flooding in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Sharma: Excellent planning.

Hon. R. Ramdial: So I want to also revert to the Diego Martin crisis, and I know the Member for Diego Martin Central made reference to many issues that arose from that fiasco or from that natural disaster, and I know he referred to the authorities really not being there to assist—*[Interruption]*

Dr. Browne: I never said that.

Hon. R. Ramdial: No. Listen, listen—to assist in the manner that he expected. But I just want to say that on behalf of WASA's input, during the first three days there was an average of 50 officers on the ground working with 30 pieces of heavy equipment and their operators conducting repairs and cleaning up operations. A total of 26 streets and main roads were cleaned along the Diego Martin Main Road, Petit Valley and Maraval. I have these streets that I am going to call out to you.

In Diego Martin the 15 streets, and I am going to mention some: Apple Blossom Street; Casuarina Drive; Diego Martin Highway; Morne Coco Road to Sierra Leone Road; Theodore Herschel Avenue; La Estancia Avenue, Diego Martin; President Weizman, Diego Martin, Princess Elizabeth Avenue, Diego Martin; Queen Elizabeth Avenue, Diego Martin; Rockdale Road and Blue Range Road, Diego Martin; Sierra Leone Well No. 10 Diego Martin; Sinai Street Diego Martin—*[Interruption]*

Dr. Browne: What?

Hon. R. Ramdial:—St. Lucien Road, Diego Martin; Van Buren Avenue, Diego Martin; West Vale Villas, Diego Martin. In Chaguaramas, WASA was on the ground along Tucker Valley Road. In Maraval, they were at Moka, Cascade and environs. At Petit Valley, they were there at Chuma Munka Avenue, Duke of Edinburgh Avenue and Lazare Street, Petit Valley. WASA worked in assisting residents in the clearing of the debris, the rubble on the property and the washing down of properties. They assisted in the removal of debris, they cleared the roadways, they washed down the roadways of sludge and they assisted other agencies in clearing of the roadways.

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Madam Deputy Speaker, of course, the cost of this work, the relief and rehabilitation of this area cost WASA at least \$2.5 million in this relief effort with respect to the Diego Martin disaster that took place. And therefore, the Opposition PNM cannot come here in this House and accuse the Government, of not responding, especially to our natural disasters where we have seen an intensity of it and especially certain agencies under this new Ministry where it is that we know for a fact that we are out there, we are working and we are delivering because we care for the people. [*Desk thumping*] Therefore, I will make reference again; the Opposition PNM is clearly delusional.

Mr. Sharma: Very much, very much so.

Hon. R. Ramdial: We have been in office for two and a half years and we have been working nonstop. As an MP, I am on call on 24/7, and therefore I speak on behalf of all of my other colleagues and all the other MPs, I am sure they work very hard, but they cannot come in here and accuse us of not working. It is all politics at the end of the day. I want to also again make reference to Dr. Rowley's remarks in 2009.

Dr. Browne: No, no. Member for Diego Martin West.

Hon. R. Ramdial: Sorry, Member for Diego Martin West. And I just want to quote something from the *Hansard* he said again, and we are here to correct or to remedy that. He said and I quote:

“When I first became MP in the area, the water supply was bad in those areas. Today, it is awful. In many instances, for a \$10,000 or \$100,000 or a \$2 million project, the project is not being done.”

8.25p.m.

“There is one particular project in my constituency in Cemetery Street, where we have laid pipelines and brought great jubilation to persons in the area, because they saw...(WASA) laying the pipelines. It is now three years...”

And he is speaking in 2009—right?

“It is now three years and not one drop of water has been put in that pipeline. The people are now provoked and are laying threats to the Government”—the then PNM Government—“because of an absence of, one, an available water supply in the district and two, even if the water is brought into the district, there is not a pumping facility to pump the water to where they are.”

That was in 2009. On taking office in 2010, the People's Partnership Government provided water, and now in that said Cemetery Street, for two and a

half years they have a scheduled supply of water on Monday, Wednesday and Friday night. Is that not deliverance?

Hon Member: Yes.

Hon. R. Ramdial: Is that not deliverance? And that is just one agency under the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources. And, again, I make reference to the delusional state of the Opposition PNM.

Miss Mc Donald: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise on 36(5). That word “delusional”, I want to believe that word is unparliamentary.

Dr. Browne: Get another word.

Mr. Sharma: No, no, no.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Of course, it is.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for Couva North, you may continue.

Hon. R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. [*Crosstalk*] Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, moving on. I have listened since Friday to certain MPs who have made their contributions on the Opposition side, and made mention of their constituencies, because rightly so, we represent people and at the end of the day, when we are in Parliament, we need to account to the people of Trinidad and Tobago with respect to our performance as an MP. I sat and I listened, and they complained about their constituencies not getting resources, and I want to say again, the People’s Partnership Government does not believe in inequitable distribution of resources.

Hon. Members: What? What?

Hon. R. Ramdial: I want to draw reference again—and these are hard facts that I have gotten from the WASA department: Diego Martin West got at least 10 WASA projects since 2010, costing \$21,125,000; Diego Martin East got three WASA water projects, costing \$1.3 million; Diego Martin Central got five WASA projects, costing \$1.5 million. Therefore, this delusional stance that they take and they come here—[*Interruption*] Listen! Listen! They come here and they stand and they are “holier than thou”, because they think that they are getting nothing and they can come here in Parliament, abuse parliamentary privilege and say that they are getting nothing from the People’s Parliament Government.

But we have the evidence to prove otherwise and, therefore, we are not going to sit here and allow a delusional Opposition side to tell the People’s Partnership Government that we are not delivering, because as a young Member of Parliament

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and being Minister of State in that Ministry, I know for a fact that there are agencies that are delivering, and we have delivered over the past two-and-a-half years. We have delivered and, therefore, we cannot fool the public of Trinidad and Tobago. And, of course, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will get the relevant facts for the other Opposition-held MPs and circulate them in Parliament. I will print them out. [*Crosstalk*]

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, with Diego Martin West, Diego Martin East and Diego Martin Central, in two and a half years, WASA has spent \$24 million in water projects for these constituencies—for these PNM-held constituencies. So I take umbrage when these MPs stand here, especially the Leader of the Opposition, and complain of not getting resources, because I am sure my colleague from Oropouche West has given resources to these constituencies; I am sure that the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo; the Minister of Education, have given to all of these constituencies. Therefore, Madam Deputy Speaker, we will not sit here and take those sorts of comments coming from the Opposition MPs.

I also want to make reference to the waste water projects that WASA is going to be embarking upon for the PSIP Programme, 2012—2013. [*Crosstalk*] We are going to be embarking upon the Beetham Water Re-use Programme at a cost of \$2 million; we are going to be embarking upon a design/construct Beetham sludge management system at a cost of \$27 million; we are also going to be providing construction supervision services for the Beetham Sludge Management System at a cost of \$1.8 million. There is also going to be the Palmiste Waste Water System that is also going to be prepared at a cost of \$5 million; construction of San Fernando access bridge and roadway at \$23.5 million—

Mr. Sharma: Water more than flour!

Hon. R. Ramdial: Yes. Water for all, as they say: Design and construct southwest Tobago Waste Water System at \$20 million and, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is not in Trinidad alone we are focusing our resources on; we are going to Tobago and, therefore, Tobago will get a waste water system at a cost of \$20 million. [*Desk thumping*] This is a short-term project to address waste water services in southwest Tobago, from Buccoo to Crown Point. It will provide reduction in contamination of marine and surface waters in Tobago and, therefore, this is part of our PSIP Programme for the new fiscal year.

There is also going to be construction of supervision services for the southwest Tobago project at a cost of \$3 million; the rehabilitation, Madam Deputy Speaker, of the Scarborough waste water treatment at \$8 million, and that

is going to take place also in this new fiscal year. There is also going to be work by WASA done with respect to the Scarborough property connections at a cost of \$7 million.

So we are really and truly working, Madam Deputy Speaker, as a Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources and as a People's Partnership Government. I can continue with our waste water PSIP projects. We have at least 17 that are already on stream. Part is going to be IDB funded; part is going to be, of course, locally funded and we are on stream and on route for getting these waste water treatment plants. So, Madam Deputy Speaker, we are well on the road to really improving our water supply to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

I want to move on, Madam Deputy Speaker, to the environment division of the new Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, and I want to make mention of some of the plans that we have ahead of us for the new fiscal year. Of course, we have been addressing environmental issues in a comprehensive, coordinated and holistic manner to mitigate the negative impact of natural and man-made environmental disasters, and I spoke of that a little earlier on when we spoke of flooding. A total of \$27 million will be provided to the agencies which bear responsibility for environmental protection in order to advance the initiatives in this most critical area of the nation's development.

So the EMA is going to be partnering with SWMCOL and they are going to be playing a very operational role in terms of ensuring that environmental standards are met; fostering the country's developmental agenda. The sum of \$4.6 million is provided to these agencies to be used to meet operational expenses.

The environmental policy and planning division is also a unit of this new Ministry and they will be rolling out environmental policies with an allocation of \$.7 million in 2013. It is expected that the following consultancies will be completed, and I make reference to the Forest and Protected Areas Management Authority. We are looking to develop an authority. We are also looking at the reduction of the methylbromide in quarantine and pre-shipment usage in Trinidad and Tobago; a strategy for the reduction in emissions of carbon dioxide; the mainstreaming of climate change into the national development strategy. This is also very important with respect to creating a sustainable environment, Madam Deputy Speaker, and this new Ministry is going to spearhead these works.

Hon Member: Delusional.

Hon. R. Ramdial: With respect to the reforestation sector in Trinidad and Tobago, approximately \$20 million will be allocated in 2013 to the Forestry Division and to the THA. The Forestry Division will receive an allocation of \$19.7 million to continue developing and restoring the stock of forest resources in Trinidad and will address the following activities in 2013:

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Minister, would you give way? One question, Madam Deputy Speaker. You moved very quickly on from the environmental issues and you spoke about your environmental initiatives for 2013. I just want you to tell me a bit about your achievements over the last fiscal period—your achievements with regard to the environment in terms of policy. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. R. Ramdial: Madam Deputy Speaker, I will address that later on in my contribution—with respect to the achievements. Let me talk about the plans that we have, because we came here and we sat and the Opposition MPs kept asking us for our plans for the new year, what we are doing, so I am going to make mention to that.

I will continue, Madam Deputy Speaker. There is going to be regeneration of forest in all five conservancies of north/east, north/central south/east south/central and south/west Trinidad, utilizing allocations of \$4.2 million; development of forestry access roads, utilizing an allocation of \$4 million; improvement of management practices in the area of watersheds, wetlands, national parks, wildlife, utilizing an allocation of \$2.8 million.

Since we are on that topic of wildlife, I want to make mention, Madam Deputy Speaker, that we increased the cadre of forest rangers this year by 120 additional, and, therefore, these forest rangers are going to act in the capacity to really tighten the surveillance during the hunting season with respect to protecting our wildlife, and we are going to clearly improve and really beef up the resources with respect to the hunting season and how we treat with the hunters. I also know that the permits that we issued were reduced from five to three, so during the hunting season the hunters are now only allowed three permits in order, again, to preserve our national wildlife. [*Interruption*] That is coming.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I also make mention of the initiatives in Tobago with respect to the environment in 2013. We are going to be embarking upon a forest plantation inventory study; urban forestry programme; veteran trees husbandry programme. So these are some of the initiatives that we have for Tobago. Additionally, a number of environmental and ecological initiatives are to be undertaken in Tobago for which an allocation of \$1.1 million is provided. These

include the following: improvement to Buccoo Reef Marine Park Ecological Monitoring; improvements to the reefs at Buccoo and Speyside; ecological monitoring of the reef check; an oil spill contingency management plan and a watershed management pilot project. All of these are initiatives with respect to the environment that we are going to be embarking upon.

With respect to the Institute of Marine Affairs, Madam Deputy Speaker, IMA will receive \$12.6 million to continue its effort in the areas of research, and I know the hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre made mention of research and development, and I honestly believe that in every Ministry we need to have an R & D unit. Of course, that will improve the quality that we serve to our citizenry.

So the sum of \$10 million will be allocated for the construction of the Institute of Marine Affairs because they do a need home. Other projects will include the establishment of a marine research field station; investigation of coastal processes affecting Columbus Bay; establishment of control for IMA's benchmarks in Trinidad; development of a recirculating salt wall system for aquaculture research and the submarine turbine research project.

So these are some of the plans that we have in place for this new Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, Madam Deputy Speaker. I also want to say that a little earlier on this year we were faced with a dilemma at Grande Riviere with respect to the turtle issue that we dealt with. We all know what went wrong there, and we all know who were the stakeholders involved, who were liable, who were culpable, et cetera, but at the end of the day, as a Government and as a Ministry, we did what we thought was the correct procedure at that point in time. It was an emergency intervention and I do not want to talk too much about that, but I want to say, arising out of that action, or inaction, as one may say, we formed a Grande Riviere turtle committee under the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources to spearhead and to manage all activities that take place on the beach of Grande Riviere.

8.40 p.m.

Therefore, Madam Deputy Speaker, this committee—we are partnering with the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure and of course, this new Ministry of Environment and Water Resources, we are the stakeholders who are going to be managing that beach and making proper decisions—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Browne: Is about time.

Hon. R. Ramdial:—with respect to conserving our turtles and preserving the hunting season. [*Interruption and laughter*]

Mrs. Mc Intosh: “Half ah dem done ded.”

Dr. Browne: Ten remaining.

Hon. R. Ramdial: Right. So we are going to be embarking upon that plan, Madam Deputy Speaker, and therefore, for future actions we are going to be assured under this committee that the correct actions are taken. I know the Minister of Tourism and myself have toured not very long ago, again, and we have decided to bring everyone together. I know that the Ministry of Tourism is also going to be embarking upon a plan to further PR that area to attract much more visitors than we already have.

Hon. Member: Very good.

Hon. R. Ramdial: So we are all very cognizant and aware of what we need to do as a new Ministry and what we need to do as a People’s Partnership Government. One of the good qualities of this Government; we have many good qualities, but one of the better qualities of this Government—and you would have heard a lot of our Government Ministers speak about it—is that we listen to the populace when they speak. You have heard our Prime Minister speak many times before, we lead by consensus. [*Crosstalk*] When the Opposition PNM come and they sit here and they make their wild-goose statements and their allegations, they are clearly delusional. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: She is directing it at persons.

Miss Cox: Madam Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 35. I would just like to know—[*Interruptions*]

Mr. Sharma: No, no, no, just raise the Standing Order.

Miss Cox:—if delusional is a word that can be used in this Parliament. [*Crosstalk*] How it was determined? I am speaking to Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not in this context, Member. I want to ask the Member for Couva North to refrain from using the term delusional.

Hon. R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, let me apologize and I will try to get a more apt word as I move along.

With respect to the Drainage Division, an investment of \$204.5 million will be made in 2013 to assist in controlling flooding in low-lying areas in Trinidad and Tobago. The major infrastructure works in fiscal year 2013 will include the construction of reinforced walling and paving of watercourses and continuation of

coastal studies. The sum of \$50 million will be provided through the IDF to embark upon these works of the upgrade of drainage channels in Trinidad and Tobago. The work scheduled to be undertaken include: works at San Juan, Arima, La Quesa river, Cascade, St. Ann's and Mausica rivers.

There is also going to be the recommencement of improvement works at the Blackman ravine, Tacarigua river and the Tunapuna river. The sum of \$16 million will allow for the commencement of the north-west peninsula and the south Oropouche river basin study and the Mayaro coastal studies. So, all of these are projects and plans and studies that we are going to be embarking upon as the Drainage Division to deal with this serious aspect of flooding in our country.

In addition to which, under the major river clearing programme, work would commence on the Marabella river, the Solidaridad river and the upgrade of drainage structures in the Caroni irrigation area, with an allocation of \$13.8 million.

Several drainage rehabilitation projects will be undertaken under the infrastructure rehabilitation and flood mitigation programme with an allocation of \$18.6 million. The related projects include: the Dunderhill ravine improvement project to be executed in Arouca, the Diana river improvement project in central Trinidad and the Santa Cruz river flood reduction project.

An allocation of \$20 million from IDF, of course, Madam Deputy Speaker, will facilitate the continuation of the flood mitigation and erosion control programme. This programme comprises the El Dorado main drain flood reduction; the Blackman ravine flood reduction projects; the north Manzanilla seawall project; the Beetham area dewatering project, and the Cap-de-Ville coastal protection project. [*Interruption*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: When?

Hon. R. Ramdial: This fiscal year.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: It was supposed to start in August last year.

Hon. R. Ramdial: It is going to be started.

Dr. Rambachan: What happen to 2008?

Hon. R. Ramdial: In addition, Madam Deputy Speaker, the sum of \$55 million will be provided for the drainage and irrigation programmes implemented by the regional corporations under the Ministry of Local Government. These activities will include the construction of box drains and other structures in local communities throughout Trinidad and Tobago. [*Crosstalk*] As the Member for

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Diego Martin Central is asking, the new Minister of Local Government, the Member of Parliament of Tabaquite, has been very proactive as a new Local Government Minister and I want to commend him. [*Desk thumping*] He has been very proactive. He has been going and touring the different regional corporations. He has been listening to the councillors. [*Crosstalk*] He has been listening to the MPs and he has been asking for a programme of works from all MPs. I know that the Member for Tabaquite would also make such recommendations to the Opposition MPs, and ask them to send in their programme of works. He is saying that he has asked them already.

Again, I draw reference to this state of mind that the Opposition MPs are in. This state of mind—[*Interruption*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Members, Members, please. Let us hear the Member, please.

Hon. R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. This state of mind that the Opposition PNM is in when they come here and they sit and they complain of not getting resources, they are disconnected from the reality of what is really taking place and what our Government is doing.

You have the Minister of Local Government working extremely hard because we realize, and we identify, the importance of basic infrastructure that is needed. For years, the regime under which the PNM held Government, basic infrastructure was totally ignored under that Government, totally ignored. In my constituency of Couva North, which is a densely populated area, at least 27,000 constituents in that area and more and growing. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Browne: In every constituency.

Hon. R. Ramdial:—what is happening there is that for nearly 10 years basic infrastructure was neglected. There were areas in Couva north like Carli Bay where there was no water for 25 years

Hon. Member: Twenty five years—

Hon. R. Ramdial:—25 years no water. It took a People's Partnership Government to come into power to give these people a supply of water, after 25 years of not having water. You would have heard all the Government MPs speak about the resources and about the lack of resources during the PNM regime that they never enjoyed. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Members, please, please, I am on my legs. Members, please, let us have some order in this honourable House. [*Crosstalk*] I want to ask you to observe the Standing Orders of this Parliament, please. Member for Couva North, you may continue.

Hon. R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was speaking about the lack of resources in most constituencies under the PNM regime which we lacked. At the end of the day they were famous for only focusing on certain areas, and developing certain areas, and disregarding, especially rural areas. Rural neglect flourished under the PNM and under their regime, flourished.

Therefore, I want to commend the Minister of the People and Social Development who under this new People's Partnership Government has been going into rural areas and really helping people on the ground; food cards, grants and home improvement. [*Crosstalk*] All of that. They are getting all of these things.

Hon. Member: Tobago was neglected too.

Hon. R. Ramdial: So therefore, what I am saying, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that we should not be ashamed as Government MPs coming here and listening to an Opposition MP who is in a state of mind that is unaccepted and unreasonable. They are being very unreasonable when they come here and they sit—Madam Deputy Speaker, I beg your protection.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Members, for the last time I am pleading with you, to please observe the Standing Orders of this Parliament. When you carry on like this, it is difficult for me to hear the Member's contribution. So, I am asking you one more time, allow the Member to speak in silence. You may continue, Member.

Hon. R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. There are other units or divisions under this new Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources—again, I cannot stress how important this new Ministry is with respect to protecting and conserving the environment and creating a sustainable environment.

Under the National Reforestation and Watershed Rehabilitation Programme, again, two major plans to be addressed soon: to reforest all of the abandoned quarry sites—as you know when you are flying across to Tobago and you look down, it is like a scar in the Northern Range. Therefore, this unit under the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources is going to be embarking upon reforesting these quarry sites. We are also going to be identifying degraded forest landscapes for rehabilitation and we are also going to be embarking upon the greening project for all urban areas.

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Again, I want to go back to the EMA, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I know the Member for Point Fortin asked about the achievements of different units. Now, remember these units were under different Ministries previously, before they were all brought together under the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources. I want to say that the EMA has been working on a reduction—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Browne:—of staff.

Hon. R. Ramdial:—in the noise pollution campaign. They have embarked upon a campaign to focus on reducing noise pollution in Trinidad. The campaign consists of a public education and outreach programme. It is going to be using all media channels to create awareness of the law pertaining to noise pollution and the effects of noise pollution. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Browne: You have to do that when Anil Roberts here.

Hon. R. Ramdial: They targeted enforcement action in selected areas with the intention to expand this effort with time. Initial focus has been placed on Port of Spain and environs and the programmes will be shifted to San Fernando in the short term. So this is a reduction in noise pollution. It is a campaign. As you know, as citizens, most of us over a weekend, we want to be very calm and peaceful and we have to face some noisy neighbours at times. Therefore, we have been seeing an increase—

Dr. Rambachan: Bars.

Hon. R. Ramdial:—yes, bars also—in calls to the EMA with respect to noise pollution and regulating such. So, we have been embarking upon that pollution campaign.

We are also going to be under the EMA reforestation of areas within the Nariva Swamp. This project is being conducted in collaboration with the Forestry Division and community groups from within Nariva. The intent is to reforest areas previously stripped of forest for rice cultivation and return these areas to their previous vegetative cover. This is a project that is ongoing. So, it is one of our achievements. Member for Point Fortin, listen carefully please.

There are two major activities that we plan to address soon. Of course, it is the development and implementation of a plan of action for the management of Grande Riviere. I spoke about that earlier on and, of course, the passage of the Air Pollution Rules.

I want to also make mention of the beverage container Bill that is going to be laid later on in Parliament this year. This is another achievement that was

spearheaded by the previous Minister of the Environment, the hon. Member for Oropouche East and therefore it is at LRC at this stage, of course, being fine-tuned. We are going to come into Parliament to lay that beverage container Bill.

I want to make mention that the Diego Martin disaster that took place a couple months ago, when we toured on site and on the ground, we noticed that there were increased levels of water pollution and land pollution. Of course, when you looked at the river channels and the garbage and the debris that came down, half of the debris were plastic bottles. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Browne: That had nothing to do with that.

Hon. R. Ramdial:—Do not say that, I was there half of the debris were plastic bottles that clogged and caused flooding in certain areas. Madam Deputy Speaker, I am not going to get into a debate with the Member for Diego Martin Central, but I am going to continue to say that the beverage container Bill is going to act as both an incentive and a deterrent with respect to pollution in Trinidad and Tobago; land pollution and water pollution.

Of course, that is one of major causes of flooding in Trinidad and Tobago, when we have citizens who are indiscriminate with respect to their disposal of garbage. We need to strengthen now environmental laws and legislation and therefore the beverage container Bill is the first of many environmental laws and legislation that will be coming under this new Government, in order to create and to have a sustainable environment. So, that is something we can look forward to and it is one of our biggest achievements to date. [*Crosstalk*]

Drainage Division, again. I could never speak enough about Drainage Division because they are responsible for so many infrastructural works with respect to mitigating flooding again. I want to again say that we are going to be implementing solutions from various drainage studies, north Oropouche, Ortoire river, Caroni river and the implementation of solutions from the Caparo river basin study incorporated in the Caparo/Mamoral retention pond. So, retention ponds are one of the solutions to flooding that we identified from this feasibility study. Therefore, we are going to be implementing and constructing these retention ponds. And of course, we are going to also have these wells provide water for farmers during the dry season. So, of course, we are going to have only benefits emanating from implementing this one solution of retention ponds.

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I also want to make mention that there are two ongoing projects which are a success of the Drainage Division. In Fairview Gardens in Freeport, there has been 60 per cent drainage upgrade. [*Desk thumping*] There are two pipe culverts complete, one box culvert complete and one more to commence. There is a detention pond to commence which will take place in 2013 and temporary ponds constructed. General maintenance within the area is needed as soon as funds are available of course, and this will lead to a reduction in significant flooding in these areas.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in Bamboo Nos. 1, 2 and 3: in No. 1, we have a sluice gate replace, mitigating flooding especially for the farmers. It is a detailed in-house design ongoing to restructure the pump house and to upgrade the drainage channels. In Bamboo No. 2, several box drains were constructed, and of course, work is ongoing there. Bamboo No. 3, upgrade of the pump house at Grand Bazaar. The upgrade and automation of the pump to commence and repairs to the sluice gate are also required, and we will be embarking upon that in this new fiscal year.

We are also embarking upon the reconstruction of a culvert and roadway at Andalusia, Maraval which was washed away not very long ago, and that is going to be completed, and I think it is already completed if I am not mistaken. These are just some of the works—sorry.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, before I give you the green light to continue, I just want to advise Members that dinner is here, and you may want to choose your time alternately so you can indulge. Hon. Member for Couva North, you may continue.

Hon. R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. So I have exhausted, for want of a better word, the amount of work that this new Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources will be embarking upon. I cannot explain in detail, it would take the rest of the night and I know my other colleagues want to speak.

So therefore, I want to shift focus to my constituency of Couva North. I want to say that the Couva North status update on developmental works is ongoing since 2010. From the accommodation and collaboration from my colleagues, we have been able to really develop the Couva North constituency in ways that the Opposition PNM could never imagine and would never have embarked upon if they were in Government, because they were and they did not. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Browne: Who was the MP before you again?

Hon. R. Ramdial: So, I want to make mention of one issue in Couva North that I had to rectify as MP, and that was the recent reopening, after 10 years, of the Couva Roystonia Community Centre. Madam Deputy Speaker, I take issue with this because this community centre was constructed under the previous UNC regime, under Minister Humphrey and hon. Minister Panday when he was Prime Minister.

After demitting office, this community centre lay unopened for 10, nearly 11 years, until this People's Partnership took Government in 2010, and I want to commend the Member for Mayaro and Minister of Community Development, and also the previous Minister of Community Development and Member for Naparima. We all worked closely together to ensure that this community centre was reopened under the People's Partnership Government. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to say that when I come here into the Parliament, and I sit and I listen to the Opposition MPs asking for community centres in their areas, it leads me to think that here it is we have a constructed—an already-constructed—community centre that lay unopened for 10, 12 years, depriving the constituents of Roystonia and Couva from utilizing this state-of-the-art building in terms of bringing their communities together. That is why I make reference to something must be wrong with the Opposition PNM when they come here and they speak. Something must be wrong with them! Where is their reasonableness?

So they come and they beg for their constituencies, yet still, when they were in Government, they refused to open existing centres. Therefore, again, I would like to commend the Member for Mayaro and the Member for Naparima for working closely with me to ensure that the Couva Roystonia Community Centre is now open. The people of Couva and Roystonia can enjoy the benefits of this community centre, and of course, under the People's Partnership Government, we care about our people, we listen. They came to me as MP and they said, "MP, yuh know, we need this community centre to be opened because there are so many things we want to do." That is what we do—we deliver, Madam Deputy Speaker, and this is one of the best traits of this Government.

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I want to continue. In Couva North, we have been embarking upon road works and I want to thank the Minister of State in the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure. She has been able, of course, to help us and to ensure that our road works are continuous, also to the line Minister, Minister George. WASA has been embarking upon projects. There are areas in Couva North for 25 years that never had a pipe-borne supply of water. I make reference to Carli Bay, and there are other areas in Couva North—Butler Village, after 25 years, we had repairs to that main being done. We have areas of Wyaby, John Elie, Carli Bay, the Southern Main Road and McBean, Couva, all getting new water projects and these areas were areas where there was an absence of pipe-borne supply of water. [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: McBean?

Hon. R. Ramdial: Yes, in areas of McBean. Therefore, we continue to deliver as a Government on these very good projects.

I want to also commend the Ministry of Food Production—the fishing facilities at Carli Bay, Orange Valley and Brickfield were all upgraded and there were improvements over the two and a half years. The fishermen on that western coast, as you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, Couva North has a very thriving fishing industry, Orange Valley being one of the biggest fishing ports, if not the biggest fishing port, and these areas have been very grateful for the upgrade with respect to carrying out their industry.

With respect to the lighting up of recreation grounds, we have been able, in Couva North, to light up the Ghany Street Grounds, and we are going to be embarking upon Mulchan Seuchan and lighting up that ground.

Skills training has finally come to the area of Waterloo and Carapichaima. As you would know, the People's Partnership manifesto had Carapichaima as one of the growth poles in central, and therefore we are bringing in mechanisms and structures in place where we are going to be able to further develop that area. I want to make mention of the YTEPP Waterloo Training Facilities where we have courses in aquaculture, videography, photography, grow box farming, et cetera.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is what we are talking about. When you empower your communities with resources, it is only then you can really experience true development. That is why I say the previous regime in Government never saw it fit to distribute the resources equitably, and therefore people suffered. [*Crosstalk*] No, but you see it is not wrong because in 2010, the people made the decision to get you out of power and to put a new Government in.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: And you are going out of power soon!

Miss R. Ramdial: They were not delivering and therefore the people's mandate was what counted at that point in time, and a new Government was voted in.

Dr. Browne: Still campaigning in 2010!

Hon. R. Ramdial: Madam Deputy Speaker, I also want to make mention of the community policing initiative that we embarked upon as a constituency and I want to publicly thank the Minister of National Security and the Minister of Finance and the Economy, Minister Howai, for listening to the constituents of Couva North and, of course, including in the budget, tax exemptions and import duties off CCTV cameras. That initiative came from the constituency of Couva North, and I want to publicly thank them tonight for really considering us and including it in the budget. The businessmen of central are very, very happy. They have communicated their joy to us with respect to being able to afford these security cameras to further protect their environment and their space.

Madam Deputy Speaker, with respect to community development initiatives, we have been embarking upon annual health walks, youth fairs, Eid, Divali and Christmas celebrations, and of course, we support all the NGOs, CBOs, and we continue to embark upon clean-up campaigns in the constituency. So, the constituency of Couva North is in good hands with this Government, of course. I intend, as an MP, to really serve my constituents at the highest level. I want to thank all my colleagues who have been very accommodating and considerate to us, or to me, and to the constituency of Couva North in really delivering to the people on the ground.

With that in mind, I also want to conclude by making reference again to the Leader of the Opposition's 2009 budget contribution as a backbencher. I want to say something again: when we come into this Parliament and we listen to their allegations of corruption within the People's Partnership Government—"yuh know" they always have an allegation and they are always coming with so-called new info of corruption. But, I want to say when their Leader of the Opposition sat as a backbencher, he was very, very, of course, blatant with the corruption taking place within that previous regime under another Prime Minister and I want to quote him a bit.

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He was referring again to his constituency and asking for a primary school to be built and he made reference to this and I quote:

“However, we are able to find a quarter billion dollars to spend on the upgrade of Maracas Beach.

It is not that Maracas Beach does not need attention, it is a question of the Government’s priority. How could we say we cannot find money to build primary schools, especially ones like Paramin and Point Cumana which have been on the front burner for the longest while, but we could”—afford and—“we could find \$250 million to spend on a beach upgrade?”

This is the Opposition PNM speaking. He went on to say:

“And when one looks at the beach upgrade against the background of what we have done before”—we see that they did work for \$6million under Nipdec previously and—“...By the time it was extended and”—cost—“overruns...it came up to \$10 million, and I think we were all very happy about the new Maracas Beach and the new facilities.”

But now another Maracas beach upgrade for \$250 million.

Then he went on, Madam Deputy Speaker, to say that these resources could have been channelled in a different way in terms of providing for the actual constituents, his constituents who he was begging for. So, the MO has not changed. He was begging under his Government and he comes here and is continuing with it. This is what—when I speak of a different state of mind this Opposition is in. It is in a different—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: Disconnected!

Hon. R. Ramdial: Disconnected, altered state of mind! Because they come complaining when in 2009, their own Member complained of the same thing. I must say our performance is the evidence that we are doing work on the ground. [*Desk thumping*] Our performance! We have been delivering!

I want to also make mention of another corruption allegation that he brought up in 2009 and this is a very famous one and I want to quote:

“The alkalization plant was estimated, when it was entered upon, at \$586 million; it is now \$1.8 billion. The offsite and utilities for this whole programme was estimated to be in the order of \$189 million in 2004, it is now \$1.7 billion.”

What happened at Petrotrin that the estimates were so wrong, so far out, or worse, what happened that caused us to enter a programme where the total, when we entered the programme, was \$3.3 billion, and we took a decision, ‘Yes, we could afford \$3.3 billion’? Most of those programmes are not anywhere near completion. When we took a decision to go down that road, and it may very well be necessary because we have to go into the correct markets and have better products”—at this time, that project is \$3.3 billion.

And I am quoting in 2009:

“Today”—he said—“we are looking at a cost of \$9.3 billion. We have to digest...the context now of, ‘De money done.’”

I am quoting the Leader of the Opposition. “De money done”, he is saying.

Mr. Sharma: The PNM done too!

Hon. R. Ramdial: So he was saying now we are going to be talking about raising revenue by taxation, household by household, land and building taxes, cigarette and rum taxes and revenue raising measures. Do not be fooled by that. This is the said Leader of the Opposition who in 2009 is making reference to his Government and what they were doing, and they have the audacity here now as an Opposition PNM to come here and accuse us— and it is not done here.

Dr. Browne: “Yuh ha tuh hire back Volney!”

9.10 p.m.

Hon. R. Ramdial: We would have heard of all of these corruption allegations from their own Member who is now the Leader of the Opposition, who is also making a bid to be the next Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. So, it is very hypocritical of the Leader of the Opposition and his Opposition Members to come here and accuse us—when they themselves could not have gotten out of the quagmire they created for themselves—of corruption. At the end of the day, I also want to—they talk about Chancery Lane project and all of that. It was under this Government—because that Chancery Lane project was, of course, we knew what went on there—that Chancery Lane project is going to be delivered.

I also want to quote one more piece from the hon. Leader of the Opposition in 2009. I want to end by that and making reference to that. The Opposition Leader in 2009 said:

“Most people in this country if you ask them what they want from the Government, or what they want from the Minister of Finance, it is something

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in the local area, something in their backyard, something in their neighborhood and I can tell you that much of what the Government has done has brought no political credit to us even though it should, because we spent money on some grandiose things”—and he is making reference to the then PNM Government—“and it should bring us some credit, but in fact, it is bringing us anger. There are many angry people in this country today because they believe that their small priorities have been displaced by other priorities. I would strongly—”

recommend.

“We cannot go back now and undo what we have done but we certainly can do things differently...”

Madam Deputy Speaker, this was the Leader of the Opposition making this statement in 2009, as a Backbencher in this august House. I want to say he identified what was going wrong with his regime. He identified and early elections were called and new government was voted into power under the leadership of Kamla Persad-Bissessar. At the end of the day, I want to warn the Opposition Members in front of me and I want to let the public take cue that never again can we and will we allow a PNM-led government to take office and govern this country. Never again can we allow that. Because if it is that one of their own Members can—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Browne: This is a democracy?

Hon. R. Ramdial:—of course, accuse them of their wrongdoings at that point in time and now come back as Opposition Leader and want to play holier than thou and taking this Opposition forward as Government, it is not going to happen. The people of Trinidad and Tobago will not be fooled again by the Opposition PNM. So, therefore, I want to end my contribution by saying that the People’s Partnership Government is on the right track. Again, I want to commend the Minister of Finance for a wonderful budget. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Browne: No, it is not a wonderful budget.

Hon. R. Ramdial:—for a proactive budget, and I want to commend the Honourable Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, for being a true leader, a transformational leader and really leading her Government to lead the people, to listen to the people and with that in mind, Madam Deputy Speaker, I foresee another five terms in Government, thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Fitzgerald Jeffrey (*La Brea*): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. Before I get down into my contribution on the debate, I want to respond “a little bit” to some of the comments that were made by our good friends opposite. One of the points mentioned by the Member for Couva North was neglect for the past 25 years. I was asking: where was the UNC in 1995 to 2001? Where were they? Why did they not do the work in 1995 to 2001?

Dr. Browne: They were looting the airport.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: The Member for Caroni East also spoke about schools 100 years old, and I am saying the UNC was there in 1995 to 2001. What did they do?

Dr. Browne: Nothing.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: There is a famous quote that I want to use here tonight from the Minister of Finance and the Economy. This is what he had to say.

Dr. Browne: What did he say?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: In the *Trinidad Guardian* of September 12, 2012. Let me quote:

“Howai praised UTT for making significant strides in achieving its mandate. The institution, launched in 2004, has provided young people with a wide range of education in the areas of arts and education including fashion, engineering, manufacturing, information and communication technology and sciences, agricultural, bio-medical and maritime research.”

That was under the People’s National Movement. Take “dat”.

Dr. Browne: A moment of clarity you call it.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: The Member for Pointe-a-Pierre was talking about the People’s National Movement. I want to make a statement that the Point Lisas Industrial Estate, the largest industrial estate in the English-speaking Caribbean, the flagship of industrialization in Trinidad and Tobago, was built by the People’s National Movement Government. [*Desk thumping*] Not only that—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: It was built in Couva.

Mr. F. Jeffrey:—it was built in Couva in the heartland of the United National Congress. I am asking a simple question, let the UNC show us, where under their administration they have done anything significant in a People’s National Movement stronghold? “Cyar show yuh dat.”

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: We are a government for all.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: The medical facility in Siparia, the home of the Member for Siparia, the People’s National Movement built it.

Dr. Browne: Modern facility.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: We all remember the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara who launched a scathing attack on the Member for San Fernando West for retaining two energy technocrats whom he assumed were People's National Movement members, and he wanted them to get out. That was under the UNC-led coalition.

Dr. Browne: He said it loudly too.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: And we all know of the Member for Chaguanas West, at the last local government election in Point Fortin, what he came down and told the people in Point Fortin.

Dr. Browne: What he told them?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: And also in La Brea at the general election when his good friend, Norris Ferguson, was a candidate. What did he tell the people in La Brea?

Dr. Browne: Tell us.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Madam Deputy Speaker, I do not want to waste too much time on that, because we need to understand what is true governance. He was threatening people and saying: "Aye, if yuh do not vote for the UNC, right, all yuh eh getting nutten."

Dr. Browne: No resources for you. But a Minister was on TV on the news saying that recently. Not so?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Let me begin with my contribution. For the benefit of those opposite, the La Brea constituency is more than the township of La Brea. The constituency extends from Aripero in the north-west to Quarry Village in the north-east, from St. Francis Village in the south-east to Salazar Trace in the south-west, 33 villages comprising that constituency. Those 33 villages represent a microcosm of Trinidad and Tobago and, therefore, when this UNC-led administration tried to strangle the people of the La Brea constituency, I am saying more often than not, they might be hurting their own relatives and friends down the road.

In the La Brea constituency, the average unemployment rate is of the order of 35 per cent—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Very true.

Mr. F. Jeffrey:—with Rancho Quemado, and the Coffee in La Brea having an unemployment rate of 50 per cent-plus.

Dr. Browne: And they praising themselves?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: The constituency of La Brea is in crisis and warrants urgent attention. Let me repeat that, the unemployment situation in La Brea is in crisis and warrants urgent attention and so I want to ask the UNC-led coalition to stop playing politics with people's livelihood. It may come to haunt them down the road.

I had the privilege of being invited to a meeting at First Citizens Bank Head Office on Queen's Park East, by the then Chairman of the National Gas Company, to discuss the challenges and the problems affecting the people of La Brea and I dare say, it was indeed a very fruitful meeting. We discussed the problems and we came up with a consensus as to the way forward to address these problems and these challenges.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you could imagine how elated I was when I heard that the new Minister of Finance and the Economy was the then chairman whom I had met at First Citizens Bank at Queen's Park East—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Browne: He is a transformed individual.

Mr. F. Jeffrey:—because I really believed here was a man who understood the problems and the challenges affecting my constituency and who knew the way forward for us to address these problems.

Dr. Browne: How many meetings he had since he came?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Monday, October 01, 1.30p.m., I took my seat—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Browne: Yes.

Mr. F. Jeffrey:—and I looked forward to the Minister of Finance and the Economy with his budget presentation.

Dr. Browne: The whole of La Brea was listening.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Of course the people of La Brea paid attention because I told them about the Minister of Finance and the Economy, but after hearing him speak, after reading the speech, the contents, my hopes and dreams were shattered.

Dr. Browne: Poisoned chalice.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: My expectations evaporated in thin air. There was so much of deception, so much of misleading statements that I was simply astounded. In a

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way, I called it a clause 34 budget and I would show that later on as I come to deal with the Union Industrial Estate.

Dr. Browne: He is the new Volney.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: I ask the question: this Government has been in power for the past two and a half years and had over \$100 billion to spend on this country—
[*Interruption*]

Dr. Browne: “Like ah dose ah salts.”

Mr. F. Jeffrey:—and I ask a simple question: what do they have to show—
[*Interruption*]

Dr. Browne: Where the money gone?

Mr. F. Jeffrey:—with that \$100 billion?

Mr. Peters: Paying off the debts all yuh leave.

Dr. Browne: Cowshed in “de” savannah.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: That \$100 billion was spent with large entourage going for extended periods, going to India, going to Brazil—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Browne: New York, London.

Mr. F. Jeffrey:—going to New York, carrying around families to the tune of over \$868,000.

Dr. Browne: Orange Sky.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: They were spending money like “dat”, rather than seeing about addressing the basic problems in the country. And so, I remember a song composed by a guy called Pete Seeger in 1955 and made popular by Peter, Paul and Mary: Where have all the flowers gone? You see—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rowley: Anything on a jetplane.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Of course, even on a jetplane as well. You see, where I come from flowers mean a lot. We have a lot of fruit trees and when you see fruit trees and you see flowers and so on, you expect truths. There is a promise of truths and sometimes, you know, with those flowers, you have the ambiance it creates, the aesthetics, and so on. It represents purity—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Browne: There is value to it.

Mr. F. Jeffrey:—honesty, love—[*Interruption*]

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Dr. Browne: New life.

Mr. F. Jeffrey:—respect, integrity and so on. You know sometimes what happens? If you have stormy weather, plenty rain, all the flowers could fall—
[*Interruption*]

Dr. Browne: Bitter harvest under the UNC.

Mr. F. Jeffrey:—and then you get no fruit. Well, since August—sorry—since May 24, 2010, we have had heavy rain and strong winds and all the flowers “and dem” have been falling, all the hopes and dreams and aspirations of the people have gone.

Dr. Browne: Hurricane UNC.

9.25 p.m.

But then you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, I have to excuse the Minister of Finance and the Economy. You see, the very first page of this document he says—and I remember those words:

“Mr. Speaker, I have had just three (3) months to prepare this budget statement.”

So, oh God—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Browne: “He begging for forgiveness.”

Mr. F. Jeffrey: “De man begging for forgiveness.” “Listen, aye, dat three months ah could not really do de thing, you know, so forgive meh.” But the UNC-led Government has been in power for over two and a half years so, therefore, they cannot be forgiven. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Finance and the Economy, given time, I know what is going to happen.

Dr. Browne: He would have done worse.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: “It is either this UNC-led coalition get their act together or else he gone, because I believe his heart is in the right place.”

Dr. Browne: “Geh him six months.”

Hon. Member: You know!!

Mr. F. Jeffrey: “But he with de wrong team.”

Dr. Browne: True. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. F. Jeffrey: In looking at the Minister of Finance and the Economy’s budget statement, I had a little problem when he was talking about the foreign

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exchange reserves and the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. You see, he talked about the reserves being US \$9.8 billion in 2011, and the balance of the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund being \$4.5 billion. What he did not tell the population, was that in 2010 when the PNM demitted office, they left a balance in the foreign exchange reserves of \$8.6 billion or 11 months import cover.

Hon. Member: “It come to \$14 billion now.”

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Now, by June 2012, it was just \$9.7 billion.

Dr. Rambachan: Good fiscal management, it up to \$14.3 billion now.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Hello. By June 2012, it was \$9.7 billion and so on for 12 months. In 2010, when the PNM demitted office, it was \$8.6 billion for 11 months import cover. So in two years “all yuh could only have increased de import cover by one month? Dat does not say very much about you all.”

Dr. Browne: True.

Dr. Rambachan: Three months.

Dr. Browne: One month.

Hon. Member: Fourteen months.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: It does not say very much at all. When we look at the performance of this Government, one has to take a bit of solace from Dr. Ronald Ramkissoon, senior economist at Republic Bank, and he had this to say:

“We still have a cushion of comfort in terms of T&T per capita...foreign reserves, low unemployment that we have built up over the years...it is a time of action to preserve and extend the gains that we have made over the last 15 years.”

And that last 15 years, the bulk of which was under the People’s National Movement. So the People’s National Movement in governance must have been doing something right for us to be in that rosy financial position that you all claim.

Dr. Rambachan: If Calder Hart was not there, you would have saved more you know.

Dr. Browne: “If Ish and Steve was not there.”

Dr. Rambachan: You would have saved much more.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: I go to the controversial five growth poles. There was a French economist by the name of François Perroux, and he came up with a

growth pole theory which this Government embraced. I want to draw to your attention, that in the 2011 budget speech this was the order of the growth poles.

1. Central Trinidad
2. Southwest Peninsula
3. East Port of Spain
4. North Coast

And Tobago, hear this.

5. North East Tobago

Tobago was at the bottom of the list in 2011, “but you know what happening, we have ah Tobago House of Assembly election coming up in January,” so the 2012 budget debate, hear what happen.

1. North East Tobago
2. Central Trinidad
3. South West

Dr. Browne: Shame.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Number 4, East Port of Spain

5. The North Coast

Hon. Member: Last shall be first.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: That is indeed very instructive and Tobago better be aware “dat de games start to play already with the budget statement.”

Miss Hospedales: That is right.

Dr. Browne: “Dey just manipulating Tobago.”

Dr. Rambachan: “Tell them about de hundred”—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Budget statement—and you see, we need to understand as well, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I would like the national population to understand the five growth poles. I see, for example, in the south-west, Penal, Siparia and Debe, I would like them to be excluded from that and put them with central Trinidad for obvious reasons, because in that south-western peninsula nothing will happen for La Brea and Point Fortin. [*Desk thumping*]

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You know, they were talking about how level the playing field is, but let me show you something. I have a list of projects that are earmarked for central Trinidad, and I ask you here tonight what project is earmarked for north-east Tobago?

Dr. Rambachan: What you have against central Trinidad? “Wat all yuh have against central Trinidad?”

Mr. F. Jeffrey: What project is earmarked for south-west Trinidad? What project is earmarked for east Port of Spain? What project is earmarked for the north coast? And I am simply saying that we have to understand that Trinidad and Tobago is bounded on the north-west by down Chaguaramas, by the east by Toco, in the south, by Guayaguayare and the other side by Icacos, it does not—
[*Interruption*]

Dr. Browne: Charlotteville and Pigeon Point.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Now, look at the projects that they have earmarked for central Trinidad, and what I mean by central Trinidad, I am talking about the four Cs: Charlieville, Carapichaima, Couva and Chaguanas, but I also include as well Penal, Debe and Siparia, and let me tell you about the projects that they have:

1. A children’s hospital for Couva
2. An international airport for Couva
3. A national center for non-communicable diseases in Penal
4. The national oncology centre

That was earmarked for the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex is down for Penal.

5. A technical/vocational centre for Debe
6. And workforce and development centre for Debe
7. A high court for Debe
8. Headquarters for the Industrial Court in Couva

And this is indeed starting because three years ago, the court was housed in the multi-million dollar headquarters on St. Vincent Street in Port of Spain.

9. A \$56-million market for Siparia.

Dr. Browne: What!

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Ten, UWI campus in Debe

Hon. Member: “So what wrong with dat?”

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Eleven, the commencement of the Golconda to Point Fortin highway from Golconda to Penal end, rather than both ends of the highway. [Crosstalk]

Miss Hospedales: Just imagine that.

Miss Cox: Discriminating.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Twelve, COSTAATT campus in Chaguanas

13. Ministry of Justice building complex in Penal
14. Industrial estate for Debe
15. The national aquatic centre in Penal
16. Ramleela Center in Penal

Dr. Browne: What!

Mr. F. Jeffrey: It goes on:

17. administrative building for the regional corporation in Penal/Debe. [Crosstalk]
18. Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education head office in Chaguanas
19. Ministry of Community Development head office in Chaguanas.
20. Ministry of Food Production head office in Chaguanas
21. Ministry of Trade and Industry headquarters in Chaguanas
22. UWI to open an open campus at Woodford Lodge
23. One must never forget that the former Minister of Works and Infrastructure boasted that he had spent over \$100 million in Siparia, and even promised to spend more from his \$400 million under the PURE unit in the Siparia area.
24. The Institute of Public Management and Administration in Couva.
25. The National Energy Skills Automotive Technology Centre for Couva. [Crosstalk]

Miss Hospedales: Couva? “Dat is not equitable distribution.”

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Twenty-six, there is a new development—and let me read this into the record. There is a new development along the El Socorro Road in San Juan where buildings once used to sell car parts are being converted into office space and rented for as much as \$80,000 per month. The Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprises Development, the Ministry of Food Production and the Ministry of Housing, Land and Marine Affairs are reported to have rented premises from friends and families. So the questions that we ask—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rambachan: Do not say dat—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. F. Jeffrey:—what will become of those soon to be empty buildings? [*Crosstalk*] Madam Deputy Speaker, I want your protection, please.

Madam Deputy Speaker: You have my protection.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Good. What will become of those vendors and taxi drivers who ply their trade around those Ministries? What would happen to the various store clerks who work in those stores in Port of Spain? Will they have to retrench workers due to declining sales?

Dr. Rambachan: “Wat about de people who need employment in central?”

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Where will the money come from to construct those new buildings? Is it an attempt to run down Port of Spain and develop central Trinidad? Is that the plan?

Dr. Rambachan: “Ask Louis Lee Sing dat.”

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Madam Deputy Speaker, I am just showing how this Government operates. You have five industrial estates, but 26 projects going in one of the growth poles, and the other four you neglect them. That could never be right and the population of Trinidad and Tobago must know that. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Rambachan: “It was not right when yuh failed to develop central Trinidad?”

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Madam Deputy Speaker, I also want to talk about the Union Industrial Estate. We are told on page 23 of the 2013 budget statement, and I want to read that:

“Transmission Infrastructure to move power from the recently constructed Trinidad Generation Unlimited 720 megawatt power generation plant into the national grid to ensure optimal utilisation;”

I want us to look back at this thing. The TGU plant 720 megawatts was developed to put 240 megawatts on the national grid—[*Crosstalk*] and 400 megawatts for the Alutrint smelter and the other plants on the estate.

Dr. Browne: “When yuh claim central was being neglected, leh we doh go dey. We doh have to go dey.”

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Now, the fact that you are taking the whole 720 megawatts to put it on the national grid, it means, therefore, that the Union Industrial Estate, you are not going to develop that Union Industrial Estate, because the power from the TGU plant will be going to the national grid and, therefore, it will not have the capacity to do any kind of development work on the Union estate. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, I want to go back a bit, because in 2011, the Minister of Finance on page 24 of the budget statement had said:

“This project shall cease and an alternative strategy will be put into place for the south-west peninsula.”

All right. The Alutrint project shall cease and an alternative strategy will be put in place for the south-west peninsula, and I predict that nothing will happen on the estate. But let me tell you something, in that same budget speech, the Minister of Finance had said:

“The area already has a power generation plant and port facilities. Building on these advantages, we will construct a new Industrial Estate which will create jobs in the area.”

“So yuh have ah power plant already, cool yuhself.” Because at that power plant only 60 persons are employed by TGU, so what are you going to do? That Union estate is 800 acres. The TGU plant is only 15.9 hectares which will give us roughly about 304 hectares remaining. “And whey he saying is dat you will build ah new industrial estate, so wah happen to de Union Industrial Estate?” It means obviously you are not going to develop the Union Industrial Estate.

9.40 p.m.

We are mindful because when the UNC was in power, the LABIDCO Industrial Estate was at a standstill. They refused to develop the LABIDCO Estate and now that they are back in power, they decide, “ay”, they are going to strangle the Union Industrial Estate; but the people of La Brea will stand by. We are going to stand by. This nonsense must stop. It is not right. I am certain that the hon.

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Minister of Finance and the Economy cannot be a part of this thing; not with the discussion we had at Queen's Park East, he will never be a part of this thing. This is something that was given to him.

Dr. Browne: It is the same person. He got a heart transplant.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Madam Deputy Speaker, La Brea Industrial Estate, I have never seen a place get so many promises—jobs, boy! Thousands of jobs! They tell us shipbuilding. We know that shipbuilding now going in the north-west peninsula; iron and steel plant to employ 3,500 in construction and 400 permanent jobs; photovoltaic plant; plastic recycling plant; the Reliance bitumen upgrader plant; methanol to polypropylene; silicone plant; glass plant; methanol to olefin and methanol to petrochemical plant, which all would have provided over 10,000 jobs.

Dr. Browne: How much “ah dat all yuh get”?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Not a single plant came on the Union estate.

I want to deal a little bit with the SABIC-Sinopec plant. Madam Deputy Speaker, you will recall the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs trying to justify the relocation of the SABIC plant from the Union estate to Point Lisas, when he said that there was not enough space at the Union Industrial Estate for this 200-hectare plant. The SABIC-Sinopec plant needed 200 hectares and the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs stated that it did not have enough space.

Well, the area of the Union Estate is 800 acres, as I mentioned before, or 320 hectares. The TGU plant, 15.92 hectares and, if you take away 15.92 hectares from 320 hectares, you are going to get 304.08 hectares. Now, it is only 200 you want for the SABIC plant and if you have 304 hectares remaining, how come you cannot put down the plant on the Union estate? More than that, the Union estate, on its eastern border, has flat, well-drained lands under secondary forest and we know that the basis on which the Union estate was established was as follows:

The Union Industrial Estate involves the establishment of an 800-acre industrial site at the Union in La Brea.

That is the NEC Newsletter.

The need to develop a new gas-based estate arose because of the limited space remaining at the Point Lisas Industrial Estate.

That was the reason for establishing the Union Industrial Estate—the Point Lisas Industrial Estate did not have space.

This development became necessary because the Point Lisas Industrial Estate was fast approaching maximum utilization. So how come, all of a sudden, you do not have enough space at the Union estate, but you can have space at the Point Lisas Industrial Estate, when in fact the whole plan was that because of the shortage of space at the Point Lisas Industrial Estate, you are developing the Union Industrial Estate? How come?

Dr. Browne: It is not making sense.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Madam Deputy Speaker, the plans that were proposed for the Union Estate were as follows: an aluminum smelter, an ethylene plant, an ammonia plant, ammonia nitrate, urea and methanol plant. Six plants were supposed to come to La Brea; not one came and what you are telling me now the SABIC-Sinopec plant cannot come to La Brea because you do not have enough space. Nonsense!

The whole question was that they want to put it down in their stronghold in central Trinidad where they do not have space. That is wickedness. That is wickedness to the highest order and we must reject that.

I want to go a step further. You remember that one of the reasons why the Alutrint smelter plant was not built was because there were some environmental concerns. Well, I see a cement batching plant going to Cunupia. As a matter of fact, they have started construction already and it is being built by Motilal Ramhit and Sons, RPM Enterprises Limited in Chin Chin Road, Cunupia.

Dr. Browne: The people are very unhappy there.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Madam Deputy Speaker, you would not believe this; but that cement batching plant is located near to the Cunupia Government Primary School, a health centre and the constituency office for the Member for Caroni East; a cement batching plant near a primary school, a health centre and, of course, you have the office of the Member for Caroni East.

I am saying, you do not seem to be concerned about the environment then, but for the Union Industrial Estate, you were concerned about the environment. Even though so we know that the so-called concern about the Alutrint had no basis at all, it was just wickedness. We live to see that the very said Kublalsingh that you were hugging up during the protest and so on, now in the Re-route Movement, "jammin' all-yuh".

I want to move a little towards the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development. In the budget speech, on page 14, the hon. Minister of

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Finance and the Economy spoke about an unemployment rate of 4.9 per cent. Madam Deputy Speaker, that has to be the joke of the millennium. Not even the printer's ink and the Croxley paper believe that unemployment figure. Those figures remind me of the homicide figures that they were giving the population earlier this year and it took the staff of the Leader of the Opposition, who were actually doing a count to say "aye", those figures are wrong and, similarly, I am saying now, that the 4.9 per cent figure is inaccurate.

I want to take a few quotations from a few of our technocrats. Senior economist Republic Bank, Dr. Ronald Ramkissoon, says this:

- (a) he was suspicious about the origin of the statistics;
- (b) it would be "a little unusual" for unemployment to decline when there is a drop in production at Trinidad Cement Limited, which resulted in a fall in construction, the major absorber of employed people;
- (c) from the last Central Bank economic survey, there was little evidence of growth in Trinidad and Tobago; little direct foreign investment, little domestic investment and no Government capital investment.

Mariano Browne, former Minister in the Ministry of Finance, indicated that direct foreign investment took a 90 per cent nosedive from US \$2.8 billion to US \$295 million due to the cancellation of the international contracts with Brazil and China.

Banking Insurance and General Workers' Union's President, Vincent Cabrera, hear what he said:

- (a) it does not reflect reality;
- (b) it is difficult to accept the unemployment, since unemployment fell when nearly every week groups of workers were losing their jobs.

Then we had senior economist Hayden Blades saying:

- (a) it does not matter what term is used to describe the economy, Trinidad and Tobago is suffering from a decline in income and employment;
- (b) we are not capturing all the people who have become disenchanted and are no longer looking for work.

That is Hayden Blades.

Hon. Member: Who is he?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Former President of the Greater Chaguanas Chamber of Commerce. Hear what he “ha” to say:

He would be happy if unemployment fell since it would kick up the multiplier effect.

Seemungal said:

Based on the current economic tailspin, he was a little bit sceptical of the latest figures. [*Interruption*]

That is “yuh pardner”, Seemungal.

Indera Sagewan-Alli, she says that the unemployment rate is closer to 16—18 per cent, and Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir says that the 4.9 per cent unemployment figure omits to highlight the youth unemployment figure which is estimated to be around 50 per cent.

So, the only people who believe in that 4.9 per cent unemployment are the partnership and “ah doh believe all ah dem”; not even the Minister of Finance and the Economy believes that.

I have a few questions for the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. How many small and micro enterprises were created over the past year? How many jobs did they create? Where were these enterprises established? What areas of business are they involved in? How many of those small and micro enterprises have folded up in the last year? How many persons were placed on the breadline as a result of the closure? I go a step further. How many small and micro enterprises were created in the south-western peninsula and how many of them have since closed?

I heard the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development talking about the industrial climate. Well, I have news for him because, quoting the *Express* newspaper of September 25, 2012, in this, the Industrial Court President Deborah Thomas-Felix revealed that the number of industrial disputes filed in 2010 was 781; in 2011, it was 778; and so far in 2012, it has already reached 566. She says, looking at the statistics for retrenched workers, the figures were as follows: 638 in 2010; while in 2011, the figure was 1,124. That is Deborah Thomas-Felix speaking.

9.55 p.m.

The stats show that in the manufacturing sector they had the highest number of retrenchments. She stated that the figures show a steady increase of unresolved

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disputes between unions and employers, and it also speaks to increasing volatility of the industrial relations climate in this country.

Hon. Member: She is directly contradicting the Minister.

Dr. Rambachan: She did not say how much agreements were settled?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: And that is why you see, last year, when you all called the state of emergency that is what you all were frightened about, the industrial climate, yes. That was the reason why they—*[Interruption]*

Dr. Rambachan: We settled the industrial disputes.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: That was the problem. Madam Deputy Speaker, I go a step further to look at tourism for La Brea. The Minister of Finance and the Economy says that a new La Brea port, which would enable access and docking for newer generation cargo and cruise ships. And, you know, I wonder who wrote that? Who wrote that, Madam Deputy Speaker?

Dr. Browne: Cruise ships?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Cruise ships.

Dr. Browne: Where?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: What kind of infrastructure have you developed in La Brea for cruise ships? Have you seen about the roads, the drainage? What about those tourist sites? What have you done about those areas there, but you are talking about cruise ships? I am telling you from now, you could not be serious, you could not be serious. “And we know that you only doing one thing”, in 2012 and 2013, as far as the port in La Brea for that cruise ship. In 2012 and 2013, not one cruise ship will come to La Brea, right, because you all have not put the necessary infrastructure in place to make it worth the while.

What about all those tourist sites, carrot shed bay, station beach, Vessigny, Vance River, Los Iros and Erin beaches? What about the rehabilitation of the World War II tower in La Brea, the site of the first oil well drilled in 1857 in Brighton? What about the rum still in Boodoosingh, the Aripéro wetlands, the Rancho Quemado Eco Park, the mud house and old headmaster’s quarters residence in Rancho Quemado. The La Brea Pitch Lake which, incidentally, I have always campaigned for, needs two CEPEP teams to be working permanently in the pitch lake to make sure that they clean out the grass in the pitch lake.

Dr. Browne: And how many they have now?

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Hon. Member: None.

Dr. Browne: Not one?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Not one, not one CEPEP gang is operating there.

Dr. Browne: “Nah, man”.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: And so on. We could not be serious, we could not be serious. You have the cashew patch and the rubber plantation, all which could offer employment, if properly organized.

Hon. Member: Couva has none.

Dr. Browne: Pure neglect. That is a rural area.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: You see, concerning CEPEP and this level playing field they talked about, how come between La Brea and Salazar Trace there is no CEPEP gang? How come between Santa Flora and Erin there is no CEPEP gang?

Dr. Browne: Not one.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: How come? But you have CEPEP gangs all over Siparia and Penal? That could never be right.

Dr. Browne: Every block. [*Inaudible*]

Mr. F. Jeffrey: That could never be right. We are talking about a level playing field, a level playing field. Treat everybody equally. In the budget, no mention is made about the water taxi. We have tremendous gridlock on the roads because of the number of vehicles going on the road. [*Crosstalk*] Now, if we had established the water taxi service from Point Fortin and La Brea, to go to San Fernando from Port of Spain, it would have eased up the traffic that people who are coming from Princes Town and Rio Claro, who going into Port of Spain, they would have less traffic on the road to deal with. But wickedness why you refused to establish the water taxi service from Point Fortin and La Brea. But as we are on that—

Dr. Browne: And they want to talk about traffic.

Mr. F. Jeffrey:—I want to recommend, as well, that on the San Fernando wharf there is need for a—[*Interruption*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member. Hon. Members, the speaking time of the Hon. Member has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, you may continue. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: You are on the right track.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: There is need for a multistorey car park by the San Fernando wharf.

Hon. Member: This is a good suggestion.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: It is a hell house; it is a hell house down by the wharf on a morning and so on. There is need for a multistorey car park so that motorists, sorry, passengers for the water taxi could park their cars and so on and travel, and so on, with that service.

Hon. Member: "Dai de first good thing yuh say for de night."

Mr. F. Jeffrey: The bus service: on page 44 of the document, the Minister indicated about the traffic hub, and I want to ask humbly that a bus service be established from Point Fortin, going through Parry Lands and Lot 10, in the first instance. And, secondly, you need a bus service going through the township of La Brea and going down to Point Fortin. We have the bus service going to all places in UNC strongholds, and I cannot see why in my constituency we cannot have a bus service operating inside La Brea and between Lot 10 and Parry Lands. I do not see why. What is the problem? Because the population of those areas is much larger than where I see some of those buses plying at the moment, so I want to put that on the table.

Food production, Madam Deputy Speaker: when I enquired about food production or agriculture, I noticed in the 2012/2013 budget statement, no mention is made about fishing. There is no fishing mentioned in the budget statement. And I am wondering, what happened? How come an important industry as fishing is neglected in the budget statement? Our fishermen, they face tremendous problems. They have piracy; they have storage facilities—storage problems, and so on. How come we leave that out? And I trust that—I hope that you find ways and means to make sure that something is done for our fishermen.

Mr. Peters: "Yuh ever fish in yuh life? You never even catch a cascadu since yuh born."

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Madam Deputy Speaker, let us look at the budgeted figures for agriculture. In 2011, the figure for agriculture was \$1.8 billion; in 2012, it was \$1.9 billion. You know what it is for 2013, \$1.3 billion, and we want to cut down our food import bill, but we cut it, we cut the expenditure by \$616 million. Mrs. Indera Sagewan-Alli on a CCN TV6 post-budget panel said that:

“Finance Minister Larry Howai has failed to adequately address the issue of food security...”

‘In looking at the allocation... agriculture, in this budget has gotten a lesser share of the pie than last year’s budget, even though in the same breath the Minister talked about the importance of food security and agriculture, so there seemed to be a”—big—“contradiction...”’

Madam Deputy Speaker, our Finance Minister mentioned that the removal of VAT from all food items was going to be on a temporary basis, but our Minister of Food Production, who I think is the person who we should be listening to—hear what he says. Let me quote from Geisha Kowlessar from the *Guardian*, from page A5, of October 04. She says:

“Minister of Food Production Devant Maharaj is denying that Government’s removal of the 15 per cent...(VAT) on certain food items is a temporary measure. Maharaj yesterday said he had no knowledge that the Government intended to return the VAT on those commodities. ‘To say we would be taking away VAT, then putting it back is totally erroneous and misleading’, he commented.”

That is my Minister of Food Production—[Crosstalk] “Wha happenin’ dey? “The Minister of Finance and the Economy saying it’s temporary. The Minister of Food Production saying uh-uh.”

Dr. Browne: The Minister of Trade is saying it is temporary.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: What are we to believe? What are we to believe? Madam Deputy Speaker, you know, I find it passing strange, when the PNM was in Government, and we had those food prices, high food prices, and we were talking about the external factors, we had drought, we had energy prices, we had demands in those home countries, and so on. And we got licks. It is our domestic policies, and so on. How come now we are using the very said argument to justify the high food prices? How come? I will come back to that in a while, Madam Deputy Speaker.

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On page 34 of the budget document, we see the distribution of two-acre plots to former Caroni workers. And I am glad for the former Caroni workers getting their two-acre plots. But, you know, I am asking a question: what happened to those retired oilfield workers on lands that were formerly used for drainage—for the oil industry and they abandoned those lands now? Why can we not give those ex-oil workers the very said lands on which to grow some crops because they are doing so? I am saying that let us level the playing field, and so on as you all going to do, give them some land as well, okay.

What is interesting, my good friend, Member for Caroni East, I will never forget this, in the budget debate of Friday, September 17, 2010, and these were his words:

Looking at sites where we do not encroach on agricultural lands—I think 2001, you know—agricultural lands must be for agriculture.

Let me read that again.

Looking at sites where we do not encroach on agricultural lands, agricultural lands must be for agriculture.

Well, instead, his Ministry authorized the bulldozing of over 50 acres of sweet potatoes, acres of pineapples and cassava, acres of bodie, pumpkins at Dass Trace, Egypt Village in Chaguanas, 100 acres of food crops in Pineapple Smith Lands in Crescent Gardens, in Mausica Road, D'Abadie, and Cashew Gardens in Chaguanas.

Newsday August 29, 2012, page 20:

Farmers at Sugrim Trace in Endeavour, Central Trinidad...counted their losses after several acres...were bulldozed to make way for a dual carriageway. A farmer said he lost 500 paw paw trees; hundreds of eddoes, and one farmer lost three acres of sweet potato and seven acres of pumpkin.”

Hon. Member: In La Brea?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Now, in addition to that, in Carlsen Field, 62 acres of land were cleared for the Ministry of Justice. The question is, “we bound to have food problems”? Our prices are going to be high. Miss Anna Sookoo, President of the Agricultural Society said:

Everyone is just afraid now, even those who have leases for their lands, are afraid to plant and inflation will continue to increase, if we do not get strong policies to protect the sector.

10.10 p.m.

I am quoting from the *Sunday Guardian* page 18, June 03, 2012.

“Food prices in Trinidad and Tobago are soaring, so says the Central Statistical Office. Fruits alone have risen in price by 62.4 per cent in the 12 calendar months to January 2012. Vegetables rose by 7.5 per cent and fish by 9.1 per cent...”

Year on year fruits and vegetables rose by 41.4 and 45.2 per cent, respectively for the month of May. Mr. Speaker, the mega farms—you will recall that under Minister Arnold Piggott, we introduced the whole question of the mega farms. We were told that they were creating problems for the small farmers, but now that they are in Government we say that they expanded the number of mega farms. So it is no longer a problem for the farmers.

The Agricultural Ranger Squad which was to deal with praedial larceny, when this Government came into power they closed it down, and now it is being reopened. “Oh, poetic justice.” Mr. Speaker, I come to a scandal that warrants urgent attention: Lake Asphalt (1978) Ltd. [*Crosstalk*] There is a questionable operation at Lake Asphalt. Lake Asphalt usually imports hardboard from a company called Pegasus from Brazil. They have been doing that for the past five years to make their barrels.

Early this year, the chairman of the board who it is said is a close relative to a senior Cabinet Minister, and is said to be a close friend of the Prime Minister, authorized the board and the CEO to stop importing the hardboard from Pegasus in Brazil and instead purchase the hardboard from a company called Fastec, that is owned by a close relative of another Minister in Government. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Imbert: All unknown.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: The cost of the hardboard from Fastec is twice as much as the hardboard from Pegasus. The quality at Fastec is inferior to the hardboard that is coming from Brazil. As a matter of fact, Fastec hardboard has a 20 per cent rejection rate because the strength of the board is inadequate and difficult to work with.

Earlier this year, the company spent \$1 million extra to import hardboard from Fastec than they would have had to pay if they had imported from Brazil. Not only that. They had to pay an additional \$300,000 to produce the drums. So, \$1.3million extra that this company, that is employing 185 persons only, had to pay.

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What is more staggering is that the chairman has ordered the CEO and the board to double the importation from Fastec. So that it is going to cost Lake Asphalt \$2 million extra to import the hardboard, and \$500,000 extra in production cost. That is a cause for concern. In an area where you have high unemployment, you could find ways and means to “feather yuh cap” by organizing to pay double the cost for a product that is inferior to what he used to pay for before. I understand as well from informed sources that at Lake Asphalt—
[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Indarsingh: The top cop!

Hon. Member: He better than that.

Mr. F. Jeffrey:—the former CEO of Lake Asphalt has gone to Canada to set up a company.

Dr. Douglas: What is with this big talk man?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: That company is going to purchase the raw asphalt from Lake Asphalt, carry it to Canada, refine the Asphalt and then sell it at the same market at which Lake Asphalt company has to sell. In essence the whole idea is to run down Lack Asphalt in such a manner to make it uneconomical and so for it to go up for sale.

Mr. Speaker, we will recall that under the UNC attempts were already made to sell Lake Asphalt to one of their financiers.

Hon. Member: Is that right?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: It took the population of La Brea to march around La Brea several times to stop the sale. I am putting Lake Asphalt on notice that the people of La Brea will stand by again if it happens again that they have to do that. Just remember that. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, I want to take a little bit with the sports. You see, I have a problem with what is happening in this country as far as sporting facilities are concerned. In the budget we are told that in 2011, 32 recreation grounds were upgraded, and I ask the question where are those 32 recreation grounds located. Because not one recreation ground in the La Brea constituency was upgraded. I was told that 64 recreation grounds and 41 play parks are being upgraded now.

Again, I am saying, in the La Brea constituency, not one recreation ground or one play park is being upgraded at present. [*Crosstalk*]

Miss Hospedales: Just imagine. Where are the equitable distributions?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Where are those recreation grounds and where are those play parks? We have, for example, in Aripero, one of the fastest growing communities they do not have a recreation ground; Daly Village, they do not have a recreation ground; Cochrane, they do not have a recreation ground. [*Crosstalk*] Then we have places like La Brea, Vessigny, Vance River, No. 4 road, their recreation grounds need to be upgraded. Rancho Quemado does not have a recreation ground.

I am saying, if you are fixing recreation grounds, do not leave out La Brea. La Brea is part of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Crosstalk and desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Exactly!

Mr. Indarsingh: Couva South was part of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Member: Oropouche was too!

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, I also want to deal a bit with this whole question of corruption. We have a situation where—[*Member mumbles to himself*] [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Peters: “Yuh missin someting? I believe yuh. Yuh missin ah screw.” [*Laughter*]

Mr. Indarsingh: State of mind again.

Miss Hospedales: That is not good.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Transparency International. They said that a large number of secondary school students feel it is okay to be corrupt. That is indeed a frightening proposition, that secondary school students feel it is okay to be corrupt. That was one of the findings from the Transparency International Perception [*sic*].

Mr. Indarsingh: What year?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: They also came up that in 2011 ranking, Trinidad and Tobago placed 91st from a listing of 183 but in 2010, Trinidad and Tobago was ranked 73rd out of 178. So, it means that corruption is something that we need to pay special attention to in this country if we want to go forward.

The Member for St. Joseph made a very interesting quotation that is worth repeating. I have heard some stories that I do not want to believe. I want to say that I am not “a money in bag Minister”. I do not take five and 10 per cent cutbacks in legal fees. My Ministry does not have those ties.

Miss Hospedales: Wow!

Mr. F. Jeffrey: That is the hon. Minister of Justice, Member for St. Joseph. I think this is a very loaded statement.

Mr. Peters: “He say is the last administration he was talking about, yuh eh read dat part?” Read it!

Miss Hospedales: At all! He was not referring to no last administration.

Mr. Peters: That is what he said. Read that part.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Quoting from the *Guardian* newspaper, September 16, 2012, page A5:

“Government official under FIU probe

...after spate of property buys At least one senior government official and an attorney have come under the microscope of the Financial Intelligence Unit. The duo, sources said, have been purchasing commercial and residential properties located in western, southern and northern parts of the country.

The properties—worth millions—have been classed as prime property and paid for in cash...

The most recent residential purchase was made two months ago in the Fairways, Maraval district, where a condominium was bought,

while a commercial building was also purchased in the St. Clair area.”

That is cause for concern. That is not under the People’s National Movement; it is under this UNC-led administration. [*Crosstalk*] We need to understand what is taking place. Mr. Speaker, as a former school principal, I have to take umbrage with a situation that is emerging in this country.

We had the situation with Resmi Ramnarine, and we say okay, we move on, but when we had the appointment of the Governor of the Central Bank, I think—“yuh know” we got to be careful with what we are doing because, what message are we sending for our children? Right.

10.25 p.m.

Now, we had three persons who were in line. We had Dr. Shelton Nicholls, who was the Deputy Governor for 10 years, having worked in the Central Bank before as an economist. He holds degrees in economics from UWI and his PhD is from the University of London. He is one of the finest qualitative economists in

the region with several academic publications, and now has 10 years of policy-making experience under his belt. He came from a humble beginning in Tobago, and is fluent in French and, besides, a man of considerable artistic ability.

Alvin Hilaire, the bank's chief economist obtained First Class Honours in Economics at UWI, and holds a PhD from Columbia University. He worked as an economist at the bank and then pursued a career at the International Monetary Fund, which included several missions and a stint as resident representative in Guinea, Africa. He is fluent in French. Hilaire grew up in humble beginning, again, from East Port of Spain.

Joan John, the current Deputy Governor Operations, has a career in the bank of over 30 years, has worked as an economist and has run the foreign exchange and banking operations department. She has been instrumental in modernizing the country's payment system. She is from Laventille.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at those three people, and we put them alongside the Governor of the Central Bank, is chalk and cheese.

Dr. Moonilal: What is his name?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Mr. Jwala Rambarran. I am saying, I have nothing against the young man, but all I am saying is, let us be careful about how we make our decisions, because it would have implications for our young ones at school, and we need to understand, let us do the thing right. If he is the most qualified person, no problem, but if there are other people who are more senior, then I think we have problems on our hands.

Mr. Speaker, in this budget presentation, there are far too many unanswered questions, and as we try to build confidence and trust back in our country, I am of the opinion that the 2013 budget is going to be another failure as was 2012 and 2011. [*Desk thumping*] The population is anxiously awaiting the next general election for us to exchange positions—those on that side to come here—and for us to run the country. [*Crosstalk*] I think the Member for Oropouche East is very uncomfortable on that side. [*Laughter and desk thumping*]

So, in closing, I want you to convey to the Member for Siparia to call an election at the earliest opportunity. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Community Development (Hon. Winston Peters): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am extremely happy to join this debate. Had this been a different forum, I would have been happy to delve into the useless banter and woeful babbling of my colleagues on the other side, but this is much too

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important a debate and an occasion for me to account to the people of Trinidad and Tobago for the efficient and effective running of the Ministry that I lead and, indeed, to account to the people of the constituency of Mayaro that I am so happy and willing to represent. I am happy for the honour.

You see, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Community Development has so much good to deliver to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, that I really cannot come here and get into all these useless talk that my friends engage in but, at the same time, I would have to empathize with them, because I understand how they feel, having been where they are myself for a considerable amount of time.

I know that when you are in Opposition you say things in a different way, and you see things in a different way. Just to say, my good friend from La Brea is complaining about all the things that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago proposed to do and has started doing, all because it is being done in Debe and Chaguanas. My simple question is: where is Debe? Where is Chaguanas? Where is Couva? Is this in Java? The truth be told, the last time I checked these places they were in Trinidad, not even Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

I am saying that if my learned colleagues on the other side, having spent 30 unbroken years in Government—if you want to call that ancient history, then let us come back to an even more modern time, and having recently spent almost nine years—if they had taken the time to decentralize Trinidad and Tobago as, indeed, this Government is seeking to do now, we would not have the problem of traffic congestion that we are having in the city centre, that is, Port of Spain. [*Desk thumping*]

Quite apart from the fact that this is what we are doing, I say to you that La Brea is in close proximity to Debe, and if a hospital is built in Debe or a university is built in Debe, let us look at the other side of the coin. When these buildings are being constructed, I am sure that quite apart from the myopic view of my good friend who represents La Brea, who is only looking at one side of the coin—where it is being built—the people of La Brea would get jobs when these things are being built, and long after they are being built, I am sure that they would use these facilities, because I am sure that it is further from La Brea to St. Augustine to attend university than it would be from La Brea to Penal.

So, Mr. Speaker, that is why I speak about useless banter. Having said all that I have said, I can assure you that I, myself, would not indulge in the historical antecedents of my good friends where they came from and how they happen to be where they are there now.

Miss Cox: You can!

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Hon. W. Peters: Please permit me to congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy on his maiden budget presentation. [*Desk thumping*] The objective of this budget statement addressed the needs of our people in education, health, housing, works and infrastructure, national security and encouraged productive activities in the areas of agriculture, tourism, sports and, you know, my pet, culture.

As the Government undertakes the activities, the budget also addresses mechanisms for the protection of our environment and the safety of our citizens. You know, this bundle that I have here [*Paper in hand*] is, indeed, what this budget is all about. I am the king of extempo, and I could have come here and talk from the top of my head, but lest I stray like my good friend who represents Laventille East/Morvant, and accuse me of not taking care of her constituency—I made sure that my pronunciation was correct—“of her constituency”—

Hon. Member: Ay ay ay.

Mr. Sharma: I think you should put a comma. [*Laughter*]

Hon. W. Peters: I cannot hold myself accountable if the representative for Laventille East/Morvant does not know where the Morvant Community Centre is or used to be. I know that the community centre was damaged by fire some years ago when they were in power and they did nothing about it. I can say to you—I have the evidence to bear me out—that on Wednesday, October 03, 2012, I visited that place [*Desk thumping*] and other places in her constituency, along with the Minister of National Security and, indeed, the Member for Laventille West.

Miss Cox: The Member for Laventille West was not there.

Hon. W. Peters: She does not even know who was there. She does not even know where the place is far more to know who was with me. I can assure you that the Member for Laventille West was, indeed, on the tour with us when I also visited the Beetham Community Centre, and did promise the people there that I will, in fact, finish the centre at the Beetham estate in short order. [*Desk thumping*] You see, I am the Minister of Community Development of Trinidad and Tobago

When we have people who represent places in our country that are so-called “hotspots”—I do not like those names—and so-called crime ridden places, I want to say to you, at the time when we had situations there that were untenable and

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we, as a Government, found it fit to do what the people of Trinidad and Tobago elected us to do, which is to create a safe environment for everybody in Trinidad and Tobago, we did exactly that.

Why I spoke just now about useless babble is when these very representatives would turn to the people of Trinidad and Tobago to suit their own myopic views and to meet their own opaque end, because they cannot see anywhere, they would say to these people, that we are shutting down their community in order for them not to create crime.

When people commit crimes in Trinidad and Tobago, and you are found guilty of committing the crime, they send you to prison and you are locked away. We have not sent anybody to prison. All that we did is exactly what any responsible Government would do. We have spoken to the people; we have dialogued with the people of these areas, and we have initiated plans that have brought about a certain kind of peace in Trinidad and Tobago, whether the people who represent them like it or not. [*Desk thumping*] If the people who represent them do not like it, we want them to know that the people who feel the effect of the goodness that comes from the action of this Government is well appreciative of what we have done and we would continue to do it.

Miss Cox: Nancy stories! Nancy stories.

Mr. Sharma: Well said! Well said!

Hon. W. Peters: Mr. Speaker, my contribution to this debate would focus on the achievements of the Ministry of Community Development for fiscal 2012 and provide an insight to the plans for fiscal 2013. Fundamental to the Government's achievement of its mission to promote a process of people-centred development are the seven interconnecting pillars for sustainable development on which the overarching policy has been built.

Four of the seven pillars have direct relevance to the Ministry of Community Development:

- (1) people-centred development;
- (2) poverty eradication and social justice;
- (3) national and personal security; and
- (4) good governance through effective representation, transparency and accountability.

10.40 p.m.

The Ministry's effort over the past year has impacted positively on the socio-economic fabric of the society to contribute to the process of people-centred development, mobilization and for sustainable development. Mr. Speaker, a key component of the national strategic development programme is the mobilization and engagement of communities throughout Trinidad and Tobago to allow for the establishment of stronger relationship between our administration and the communities, and hence the reason why we are working so hard in places like Laventille, Morvant and Debe—

Miss Cox: Since when? This week?

Hon. W. Peters: Well, we have been there even more than you because you “doh” know where the community centre is. [*Laughter*] So we have been there for a long while and, indeed, our impact is being felt much more than yours because the people are appreciative of what we are doing. This approach ensures that everyone benefits as we partner with the communities to implement the projects in their local area.

Some of the programmes and projects are: the construction and refurbishment of community centres, community education, adult education, handicraft, community action for revival and empowerment, the Prime Minister's Best Village trophy competition, the Geriatric Adolescent Partnership Programme (GAPP), Retiree Adolescent Partnership Programme, Community Development Fund (CDF) Programme, the Export Centres Programme. We have recognized that as a Government, we cannot function effectively in isolation from the people we are elected to serve. I should say that again. We have recognized as a Government, we cannot function effectively in isolation from the people we are elected to serve—and hence the reason why we are developing Trinidad and, when given the opportunity, Tobago. I will tell you later why I said, “when given the opportunity”, because everything that the central government tries to do in Tobago, we are met with some block by the Tobago House of Assembly, who resists every effort for the central government to take its rightful place and develop Tobago. But I say to you today that the people of Tobago have long recognized where the PNM-led Tobago House of Assembly, where they are coming from. Their only function, indeed, like when the PNM was in Government, was to stay there. I mean, that should be, really and truly, the objective of any political party but, at the same time, you cannot be a party that wants to develop and you are obstructionist. You cannot be.

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I remember when the tourism sector in Tobago wanted a Carnival in Tobago and every single step of the way, even though it was going to bring in millions and millions of dollars into the coffers of Trinidad and Tobago and help the people of Tobago with employment, and help the hoteliers to full their hotel, it was resisted because it was not an idea by the PNM-led Tobago House of Assembly. But just like the same way that God judges man for his deeds on earth, in the political arena, the people on earth judge you by your deeds. And when the people of Tobago pronounce on the PNM-led Tobago House of Assembly, the pronouncement would be one of deliverance from the yoke of that—
[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Albatross.

Hon. W. Peters:—albatross that is now the Tobago House of Assembly. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, in the past four months, I have undertaken a necessary exercise to visit and assess the physical space—[*Interruption*]

Miss Cox: Last week?

Hon. W. Peters: Yes, last week—that constitutes the hundreds of community centres, regional complexes and other facilities that fall under the purview of the Ministry of Community Development. Together with my permanent secretary and the hard-working and dedicated staff, we have set out to identify and prioritize the needs, development and maintenance of the physical space provided by the Ministry, and we are achieving this in consultation with those communities. We are not doing it in isolation, we are in consultation with—I am sure that if you looked on the papers some days ago you would have seen me in Morvant with a little child. When last you went to Morvant? When last you hug a little baby in Morvant and tell them you love them.

Mr. Sharma: When she was a little child.

Hon. W. Peters: When she was a little child.

Miss Cox: Is me you come to talk about?

Hon. W. Peters: You see, Mr. Speaker—

Miss Cox: Is me you come to talk here?

Hon. W. Peters: No, I am talking about your constituency.

Miss Cox: So why are you talking about Morvant?

Hon. W. Peters: Because you represent them.

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Miss Cox: Mr. Speaker, what is wrong with him?

Mr. Speaker: He is addressing the Chair.

Miss Cox: Address the chair.

Hon. W. Peters: I am. Mr. Speaker, I am saying that it is a holistic development that is taking place here, like you have never seen it before, but what is happening they find that things are going too good in their constituency without them. The chaos that existed when they were there, it does not exist now and they are afraid. They are afraid that they are losing their grip on the people. But I want to tell you that people are more intelligent than you all give them credit for. These people understand when they see good representation, and like Stalin would say in his song, “sufferers don’t care about where you come from. Sufferers don’t care who is who. All suffering people want to know is where their next meal coming from.” And in this case, when people make you to suffer and you have seen the light, all you care about is that your suffering is ending, and that is why we have what we have today.

Hon. Member: You preach.

Hon. W. Peters: You see, I tell people all the time—and I was in Morvant the other day. I was in Never Dirty, Morvant, on Wednesday as well, and I met a young man up there. It is a pity I could not remember his name, but this young man almost came to tears when he was talking to me and he was telling me how much trouble that they were seeing in Never Dirty, Morvant. I wished then that I was somebody like Donald Trump or even Michael Jackson in his heyday—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Warner: You close.

Hon. W. Peters:—then and there I would have given those young people exactly what they needed, because they did not need much. They want some little things to make them feel like other people would feel. Deprivation is something that causes people to act funny. Just as I do not believe there is no bad child, you know, like people always say, “This little three-year old child! That child is ah bad little child”, I do not believe that. It is the same way I do not believe that you have no bad people in no bad area. There is something that contributes, something that makes people that way, and when I spoke to those young people in Never Dirty, Morvant, I understand what makes them that way—it is neglect. It is PNM neglect. [*Desk thumping*]

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From 1956 to this present day, they have had one type of representation, one set of people who have taken them for granted and have given them nothing, and every time somebody else comes into office and tries to go up there and ease their burden, these very people would go and tell them, “All they coming up here to do is use all yuh. Dey coming up here because they want to try to take over your constituency.”

That is not what it is. All you have to do is—[*Interruption*]

Miss Cox: That is why two and a half years—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: Please! Please! Member for Laventille East/Morvant.

Hon. W. Peters:—try your best to help these people the way that we are helping the people now in Laventille and giving them hope and showing them that they are good people. [*Desk thumping*] That is what we are doing, Mr. Speaker. We are showing them that they are people. That is what is causing them to behave the way they are behaving now. “It is not that nobody lockdown no place.” These young people in Never Dirty told me, “Minister”—well, a lot of them does call me Gypsy and I like when they call me that, “doh call me Minister, call me Gypsy”, that is fine—and when they say, “Gyps”, they say, “Listen, this is wha we want up here, help us out.” That is all they want. What they want? A little job.

Some of them want programmes that they could go to. They want their community centre in Never Dirty finished because they doing something in the back and they want us to finish it for them—and God knows, I would endeavour to do my best with whatever little resources that we have now, because you know we do not have as much as when the PNM was in power.

Hon. Member: Spend it out.

Hon. W. Peters: I would use exactly what we have now to do the best that I can for them.

You might have to forgive me if I become a little emotional every now and then about this, you know, because I was born under two sheet of galvanize in Mayaro, literally, and I pulled myself up, and I know what it is to wake up in the morning at four o’clock and go on the beach. I know what it is to pick up bottles and sell so you can have something to eat, and I know what it is to go and catch crab. I know what it is, and I share the sorrow and the pain of these people. So, if I spend time talking about it you will have to forgive me, because that is how I feel.

Dr. Gopeesingh: You go ahead, Winston. Talk. Talk.

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Hon. W. Peters: Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Miss Cox: [*Inaudible*] last week?

Hon. W. Peters:—last week is not the only time I went in there. As a matter of fact, let me explain something to you just in case you do not know.

Mr. Indarsingh: Set the record straight.

Hon. W. Peters: I spent a lot of my youthful days in Laventille. My son is from Laventille.

Mr. Warner: One of them.

Hon. W. Peters: Not only is my son from Laventille.

Mr. De Coteau: More than one.

Hon. W. Peters: My relative—one of my sons, yes, and you are quite correct. One of my sons and he is a decent young man, very decent young man, but quite apart from that, that place that is called Mentor Alley is named after my great grandparents, that is why it is called that. My name is really Winston Mentor as well—yes it is. So, just to say to you that I have an affinity towards Laventille and I have an affinity towards all poor people, because I know what it is to be poor, and who feels it knows it.

Miss Cox: Nobody in Laventille “eh” poor, you know.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Laventille East/Morvant.

Hon. W. Peters: Well you see, the Member for Laventille—

Mr. Speaker: I am getting the impression, I do not know if I may be wrong, but there appears to be a kind of synergy flowing between Laventille East/Morvant and Mayaro, is that so? I would ask the hon. Member for Laventille East/Morvant to save her energy until you have completed your contribution. Continue.

Hon. W. Peters: Thank you for your protection, Mr. Speaker, but the synergy is that we both represent different constituencies. Mr. Speaker, during the visit we were able to hear the many concerns of residents, all sincerely seeking to transform their lives, all seeking betterment for their families and their neighbours, all empathizing, all emphasizing the need for facilities and tangible services at the community level, and we are responding to those concerns.

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I make mention also of the vibrant programmes throughout Trinidad, from Warrentville to my own constituency of Rio Claro, where citizens are acquiring the needed skills in sewing and craft and small business enterprises, all with one common goal: to make a better future for themselves and their communities. And I must make mention of one particular woman who proudly told me that before she entered this programme, she could not even turn a sewing machine. Today, she is a producer growing in skills and confidence. When you hear these stories, when you see these things, you feel good.

Mr. Speaker, under the construction and refurbishment of the community centres for the fiscal year 2011/2012, 18 new community facilities were opened, and they are from Guayaguayare all the way to Couva and Roystonia, and many, many places in between. I do not want to go into all of them now, but it is 18 of them that we did. Yes, and Malabar, everywhere. We did them all over the country. I could go into it, but I do not want to go into the geographical location for people to start back here to believe that people are doing things in a certain way. Even though it is well spread all over the place; it is a great spread all over the place.

10.55 p.m.

Another 22 centres are in various stages of construction or refurbishment, and four centres are scheduled for opening by the end of 2012. These centres are located in Talparo, Cocorite, Calvary Hill and Jerningham Junction. The community centres currently being constructed and refurbished are the hubs that facilitate the Ministry's community development philosophy, vision and mission. Essentially, this philosophy holds that everyone has the ability to make a contribution to the growth and development of their community. All persons are endowed with the ability to learn, to grow and to find solutions to their problems. People have the right to and should be encouraged to accept responsibility for their lives.

Participation in all aspects of community life is the essence of democracy, and a reflection of the existence of a truly democratic society. Change and development will be more lasting, and as a result would generate positive benefits and greater impact when spearheaded by persons from within a community, rather than by individuals and external agencies. This does not hold true for some of them, even though they are my words, they do not hold true, because some of them, would you believe, they were born in those constituencies, born in those areas, but they would not live there, not if you pay them in gold.

Mr. Warner: They are in Maraval, in the hills.

Hon. W. Peters: They move, yes, and “dey gone and live” where the opulent lives, like the Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Your relatives.

Hon. W. Peters: Yes, my relatives.

Mr. Imbert: Living by Gopeesingh.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Haleland Park.

Hon. W. Peters: Well—[*Laughter*] Despite the international financial challenges that are currently affecting the economy of Trinidad and Tobago and the rest of the Caribbean, the Ministry of Community Development continues to deliver on its construction and refurbishment programmes, as indicated above.

In fiscal 2013, the key infrastructural and social programmes that the Ministry will undertake includes the community centre construction programme. The Ministry proposes the completion of 23 centres that are currently ongoing at a cost of \$31,153,131, and the construction of 10 new centres, at an overall cost of \$55,329,627, during fiscal year 2013.

An accelerated programme for the refurbishment of community centres—the Ministry has proposed an accelerated programme for the refurbishment of 117 community centres for the period—and I want to get this clear—these 117 community centres are to be repaired between the period 2013 and 2015. Lest my learned friend say, “Allyuh say dat allyuh going and do 117 centres and allyuh eh do none.” During fiscal year 2013, the Ministry proposes to refurbish 38 community centres at a cost of \$29.7 million.

Refurbished community centre facilities in Trinidad and Tobago—the Ministry of Community Development promotes and encourages participation of all, by creating avenues for voluntarism and the promotion of harmony and social cohesion. One such avenue is through the volunteer Community Facility Management Committee that is appointed to each newly constructed or refurbished community centre to promote equitable use of the facility in areas that are of relevance to the various groups in the community.

We are doing this because in the past it was family and friends. In some cases when you go, this group cannot get to use the centre, and that group cannot get to use the centre, because the key is somewhere by some community activist attached to one party or the other, and we want to be equitable in all that we do to all the people in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

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The Community Facility Management Committee is comprised of volunteers from within the community who agree to give their time and talent to guide and oversee the use of the facility. Membership of such Community Facility Management Committee comprises two representatives of the village or community council, one representative of the local or private sector, one representative of the youth and sporting interest, one representative of the religious sector, one cultural representative and three representatives of the community interest groups. I am also pleased to advise that the Ministry is currently preparing a draft policy to enhance the governance arrangement of these facilities.

We are also promoting a cultural environmental awareness; by this I mean we are going green and maintaining the clean and beautified Trinidad and Tobago initiative year round. In this context, Cabinet has taken a policy decision to construct initially two community centres with the focus on being environmentally friendly, one centre to be located Ben Lomond Tabaquite Road, Williamsville, and the other in Bunsee Trace in Penal. These two centres will be used as a pilot project. [*Interruption*] Yes, Bunsee Trace is in Penal.

The major benefits to be derived from this initiative includes the following: increased awareness by the national population on energy diversification, increased sensitization, education and awareness on renewable energy, climate change and corrective action being taken at the local and national level.

Reduction of electricity bill in community centres—Mr. Speaker, let me just talk a bit about these community centres and their electricity bills. When I had a look at some of these community centres, their books and their light bills, half of them cannot pay their light bills. Imagine a community centre with a light bill of \$57,000—community centres with light bills of \$57,000. I do not care how you charge them, we need to have management that would create activities to make these places self-sufficient. I believe in self-sufficiency. You have to make them self-sufficient; it cannot be a free-for-all, and you need management to do that.

I went to about three or four centres that have air-conditioning. I know that the former Minister of Community Development, the Member for Port of Spain South, did in fact do quite a few community centres, including by me in Mayaro. And what happened? They put elevators in some of those community centres, but guess what? None of them are working now. None of these elevators are working.

Hon. Member: They worked when I was there.

Hon. W. Peters: Yes, but they are not working now. [*Crosstalk*] When you were there—[*Crosstalk*] I am not blaming anybody. “Why you so jumpy, and everything has to be so political?”

Miss Mc Donald: I am not an impetuous person. [*Laughter*]

Hon. W. Peters: You might not be impetuous, but you might be “impackuous”. [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

Miss Mc Donald: Spell it. I do not know it. Spell it.

Hon. W. Peters: What I want to say to—I was not even talking to you at the time, I was actually giving you credit for what you did.

Hon. Member: “She jumpy.”

Hon. W. Peters: Very. I was just emphasizing the need to have proper management at these community centres.

Miss Cox: And maintenance. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. W. Peters: I am not going there; I am not going there.

To reduce dependency on petroleum and other fossil fuel, subsequent decreases in greenhouse gas emissions and more sustainable and disaster resilient communities, the Ministry has also identified 15 community centres which would be retrofitted with solar power perimeter lights. I could go into a couple of them. They are in Malabar, Diego Martin, La Seiva, Thick Village, Gulf City, La Gloria, Hindustan, Marac, Ortoire, Sisters Road, St. John’s Village and, of course, Bunsee Trace. [*Interruption*]

I know I was going to get that reaction as I said “Bunsee Trace”. [*Laughter*] That is why I deliberately said it. I said everywhere else, but my dear lady, my dear colleague, this is Trinidad and Tobago and all of them are being done.

The clean and beautify initiative was promoted by the hon. Prime Minister in 2010. The Ministry of Community Development has since adopted this programme as one of the components of the Prime Minister’s Best Village Trophy Competition. This initiative promotes total community involvement. As we all know, environmental awareness is an ongoing thrust of the Government, and clean and beautify programme is geared towards the promotion of this objective.

Some current and prospective benefits derived from the Clean and Beautify T&T include: beautification of spaces within communities that allow for people interaction; sensitization and participation through plant distribution to

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community groups, schools, churches and households; clean beaches and rivers, and collaboration with various groups and non-governmental agencies. For fiscal 2012, 109 communities participated in the clean and beautify component of the best village programme.

I would like to turn to adult education. I did in fact say, Mr. Speaker, that under the purview of the Ministry of Community Development, we have a lot of responsibility for indeed some sensitive areas of Trinidad and Tobago, and our existence as a people here.

The adult education programme seeks to develop and deliver a range of academic, vocational and leisure programmes outside of the formal school system. This includes the raising of the national level of literacy and numeracy through organized programmes; the development of other basic skills; support and technical assistance to community groups desirous of developing and delivering their own programmes, but with the aim of making such groups—again that word—“self-sufficient”. Anybody who “know me”—my colleagues know me well—would know that my mantra is self-sufficiency. The only way a country can prosper is when you make the people of that country self-sufficient, and not, as we would say in Trinidad and Tobago, a “gimme-gimme society”, and “gimme-gimme” from the Government.

Mr. Sharma: That is a departure from the PNM.

Hon. W. Peters: We have to make them sustainable; we have to make them self-sufficient. We have to have a country and a people where we can use our resilience instead of using our begging ability.

At the end of this course, students are awarded an NEC Level 1 certificate. Over 240 persons have been trained in fiscal year 2012 at a cost of approximately \$3 million.

We have the Community Education Programme, or CEP. Mr. Speaker, the Community Education Programme is a major component of the Ministry’s portfolio for social action programmes aimed at capacity building and poverty alleviation. Its main focus is the promotion of educational skill enhancement opportunities for persons in local communities, with the ultimate goal of creating and nurturing a culture of entrepreneurship. This is just a different way of self-sufficiency. The overall mission and objective of this programme therefore, seeks to focus on the needs of householders, the unemployed, the underemployed and the vulnerable, less fortunate and at risk in our society, by providing the opportunity to learn a skill which can be used to improve their quality of life.

11.10 p.m.

CEP consists of a number of programmes: Skills training: training is provided in a variety of marketable skills geared towards home-based production of goods and services and employment generation. The project includes training in both the basic and advance level. A total of 9,134 trainees benefitted from this programme in fiscal 2012. Mr. Speaker, we are also promoters of small business. Recent graduation exercises at county level saw the display of skills acquired in craft and vocational courses of a very marketable standard.

In 2012, the Ministry introduced a new element of the CEP programme—I know you are not going to wonder why, and I know you are anxious to hear. This was a sale day exercise at each county where participants were able to get hands-on experience in preparing products, high in quality, for sale on the local market. You see, after you train people to do things, you have to give them an avenue where they can make a living.

Hon. Member: Monetize it.

Hon. W. Peters: We are in the process of identifying and selecting the trainees for the advanced courses, and advise that in the course of the skill training programme, participants are exposed to the tenants of small business establishment and development.

Community awareness and sanitization: this programme provides a platform for the dissemination of information on social, economic and other issues and development that impacts upon the day-to-day lives of people in local communities. Such programmes serve to assist individuals and groups in particular, in making the choices that improve their lives, and by extension their community. The programmes address the following: Lifestyle diseases, like obesity; heart disease and diabetes; family life; crime and safety; sexually transmitted disease, like HIV/AIDS and anything else that comes with it. Conflict management, consumerism, disaster preparedness, et cetera.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. W. Peters: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. These 30 minutes are very welcomed since I have so much to deliver—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Oh, Lord!

Hon. W. Peters:—in the Ministry of Community Development. In fiscal 2012, 143 community awareness projects were conducted: Craft training, partnership initiatives between the community development division, and the Export Centre Company Limited. The handicraft development programme is an annual feature of the Handicraft Research and Development Unit. The CEP and adult education programme, is one initiative of the Ministry of Community Development which directly addresses poverty, promotes skill training and initiates employment generation.

We plan during the fiscal year to harmonize the work of the Handicraft Research and Development Unit and the Export Centre Company Limited in order to create a seamless value chain for handicraft training at CEP classes and to the promotion of finished goods for both the local and export markets.

Mr. Speaker, the Export Centre Company Limited, an agency of the Ministry of Community Development, proposes to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry for the streamlining and standardization of the training programmes initiated and offered by both agencies, in an effort to eliminate duplication and realize a holistic and increased value for the respective investment in handicraft training.

The benefits of this plan will include inter alia standardization of all craft training courses throughout Trinidad, pooling of staff resources between two units in the Ministry. Craft training would be taken to an advanced level ensuring master craftsmen and women are produced. Mr. Speaker, new and improved avenues for citizens to have sustainable income, revitalizing the existing craft industry and boosting the economy.

In fiscal year 2012, 3,403 persons graduated from the handicraft programme. Consistent with the strategic plan for 2012—2016, the company proposed for inclusion in the 2013 estimates the establishment of a craft research and design centre, and the commercially viable community craft business outlets. The latter involves the establishment and operation of eight community craft retail outlets which will offer for sale the outputs from the production of trainees of the programme.

The Craft Research and Design Centre is expected to provide entrepreneurial support for craft practitioners through consultancy engagements, re-craft

development and research with partners; a research programme for the development of indigenous materials and partnership with CARIRI—UTT and in collaboration with international agencies and conducting a total of 20 craft design workshops for practitioners.

These initiatives are expected to increase the availability of local craft, raw material, increase the number of trained local craft practitioners, encourage market-driven product, manufacturing by craft entrepreneurs, and build working class capability within the local craft industry.

Community Action Revival and Empowerment Programme (CARE). Another programme which the Ministry of Community Development was able to impact positively and successfully on the national population is CARE programme. This social direct impact programme provides priority funding for human development activities. It is a critical community intervention strategy which focuses on interaction, community cohesiveness and employment generation. Between October 2011 and September 2012, CARE programme invested 4,415—let me just do that again—\$4.459 million in programmes and projects which address the basic needs and development aspirations of communities.

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's Best Village Trophy Competition is an annual developmental programme with a comprehensive element. Its overall purpose is to discover and develop talent and preserve the traditions of our communities. This programme was conceptualized in 1962, and next year, 2013, will mark its 50th year anniversary of the competition. Over the years the flagship programme of the Ministry has been expanded to include environmental practice and sporting skills of people within the context of indigenous traditions. The main objectives are to provide an opportunity for communities to develop a sense of self-worth and national pride, and build community spirit and cohesion through healthy competition and social interaction.

An evaluation of this programme was conducted in fiscal 2011. The purpose of this evaluation was to assess the extent to which the programme had achieved its objective, and to examine the continuing relevance of the programme, as well as strategies to widen its base of support and participation.

My Ministry will continue to implement the recommendation arising out of this evaluation. The Prime Minister's Best Village Trophy Competition is a major social initiative reaching communities across Trinidad and Tobago, and the sum of approximately \$8 million was invested in the programme in 2012.

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Mr. Speaker, during the fiscal 2012, 50 groups participated in the Best Village Food and Folk Fair; 64 young women in La Reine Rive; 159 groups in the folk show presentation; 17 groups and folk theatres; 109 communities in the Clean and Beautify T&T; 45 groups in handicraft; 51 communities in the Village Chat; 70 groups in traditions of Carnival; 107 groups in the village Olympics; 675 participants in the Junior Best Village competitions. This has to be significant in terms of preserving and developing the culture of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the Best Village programme has left an indelible mark on the social landscape of Trinidad and Tobago, contributing most significantly to shaping our cultural identity and helping us to embrace who we are as Trinbagonians. Yet, even as we celebrate its successes, the evidence of social decay in the society suggests that the potential of this is yet to be realized. As we celebrate the achievement of this programme over the last 50 years, we are conscious of the needs and opportunities available for Best Village to move beyond its current potential of preparing groups for participation in the competition.

Mr. Speaker, we see Best Village as an ideal tool for setting the foundation for the burgeoning art industry in each community. We see Best Village as a platform for the development of character, productive ethics, positive attitudes, and a true unity within and among our people.

The Geriatric Adolescent Partnership Programme, Mr. Speaker. GAPP is a social programme which trains and empowers caregivers, 18 to 25 years of age, on a short-term basis to look after senior citizens. This programme commenced operation in 1998. This programme is ranked highly among the list of social programmes, administered by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. This programme ensures that support and care are administered to senior citizens who either live alone or whose relatives are unable to look after them.

Senior citizens who benefit from GAPP come from all sectors of our community. They come, Mr. Speaker, from all sectors of our community. This programme is of major relevance to our society because our statistics show that over 150,000 Trinbagonians are categorized as senior citizens—I am just about to join them. It is therefore, critical to design and establish policies and standards for proper elderly care which are benchmarked to international standards.

The reality is that we need to address the fact that we are an ageing society. Moreover, in our society senior citizens are more inclined generally to show a

preference for their own homes or the family home environment, rather than a commercial or a state-owned home. Mr. Speaker, how much more time do I have?

Miss Cox: One minute.

Mr. Speaker: Till 11.43 p.m.

Hon. W. Peters: Okay, good. "I got quite a bit of time."

11.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, just to say that level one graduates from this programme have also been inducted into the Red Cross in October 2011; 216 persons graduated from the level two programme in August 2012; home care continues to be provided by GAPP graduates to 600 senior citizens through the government financed programme. The sum spent per annum is \$18 million. GAPP continues to provide caregiving service and companionship for the elderly while equipping young people with caregiving and self-development skills and attributes.

Mr. Speaker, I did in fact say that when I came here I want to make sure that I get in this before I even do anything else, because had it not been for the constituents and the constituency of Mayaro, of which I am extremely proud, I would not be here today. They have reposed a certain amount of confidence in me, so much so, that they have elected me as their representative on four separate occasions. [*Desk thumping*] My gratitude for the people of the constituency of Mayaro runs deep because not only was I born in Mayaro, raised in Guayaguayare and raised in Rio Claro, my grandparents are from Biche, so I am definitely from the constituency of Mayaro. What I am today, they have indeed contributed in no small way. So it is for me to be representing them, it is a form of giving back to the people of Mayaro, and by extension the people of Trinidad and Tobago, but indeed, the people of Mayaro, what they have given me.

Mr. Speaker, when I was campaigning, I remember walking around and telling these people, listen, if I get in there and my Government gets into power, I will do this for you and I will do that for you, and I made a list that I had printed, it is at the house. It is printed. I have about 10,000 of them printed there only to wait until the end of my term so that I can hand it out and I can say to them, this is what I did.

But, so far, Mr. Speaker, I am glad that I was able to give, through my representation, to the people of Union Village in Mayaro, water. [*Desk thumping*] You would not believe, Mr. Speaker, that in this day and age up to about four months ago, when you drive up to Mayaro and you pass through Union Village,

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all you would see there is black barrels, blue barrels and barrels of all other different complexion, lining the street, and I just want to say to you, Mr. Speaker, I am extremely and exceedingly happy that the Government of the People's Partnership along with my representation was able to deliver to these people pipe-borne water. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Sharma: Have some water for that.

Hon. W. Peters: [*Drinks water*] I brought this down from Mayaro, from Union. Mr. Speaker, as I speak, in a next couple of months, the people of Biche and Navet and all along the way would be much better off, because, they too, would be having a pipe-borne supply. And I see the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla tapping the desk, because we share a boundary on our constituency, and he knows the suffering that these people have been going through.

I want to tell you something, in the election of 2007, the PNM came and they cut the road and they stockpile pipe as high as this building on the side of the road, and you know what happened, Mr. Speaker? As soon as the election of 2007 was over, they took up all the pipe and the road remained as an emblem to their stupidity. [*Laughter*] Right now, we made sure that what we did is to not put the pipe on that side of the road, we leave the road where they cut it in 2007, and today we have cut the other side of the road and pipe-borne water is being given to the people. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, since I was a child going to primary school in Mayaro, they said to us that they were going to build a library, and I want to say to you that that was the PNM, because when I was going to school, I went through my whole life with the PNM in power. I knew nothing else but the PNM, and they promised us a library. I would be 60 years old on October 20 this year, and, Mr. Speaker, I say to you that it took me to grow up to be a big man to build a library in Mayaro. [*Desk thumping*]

As I speak, the people of Mayaro would have their library. As I speak, Mr. Speaker, the people of Rio Claro where I was also raised, are going to have their spanking new library in the next couple of months. I want to say to them that we have a bit of a problem with money so we did have a bit of a problem, and there was some hold back, but we have just gotten \$18 million to finish them, and we are going to finish your library for you.

Mr. Speaker, on the campaign trail—and I want to send notice out to my colleagues once again—I publicly stated to the people of Mayaro that I was going

to give them a fire station that they were also asking for since we were children. We never had one. The closest fire station is in Rio Claro, and that too, needs upgrading, so we are going to do that, but we have to build this fire station in Mayaro. But I said to them, if I did not get your fire station for you during this time that I am here in Government, I would walk away from this Government. Mr. Speaker, let me put it on record on *Hansard* again—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: You do not have to walk.

Hon. W. Peters:—I am saying to you that my colleagues promised me that now they are going to build this fire station, they are going to finish it, and I am saying to my colleague, good. And this is also my colleague—[*Points at the Minister of National Security*—]—who is also from Rio Claro, who happens now to be the Minister of National Security, he promised me that he is going to build it—

Mr. Warner: That is right.

Hon. W. Peters:—and he is a man to his word just like myself, because our upbringing would not allow us to be anything else. [*Desk thumping*] So, I promised them that if we did not get it, I was going to walk—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Warner: It is beginning in February.

Hon. W. Peters:—but I would have no reason to walk—

Mr. Warner: Nowhere.

Hon. W. Peters:—because we are going to get our library.

Hon. Member: Fire station.

Hon. W. Peters: I promised the people of Biche that if we got into Government, the school that the PNM did not want to open—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Oh yes. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Peters:—for reasons only known to themselves—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: Yes, “douen” and “lagahoo”.

Hon. W. Peters:—and for speculation known to us, they did not want to open it, because they believe they could spite the people of Biche. Mr. Speaker, that school is now open, operational and fully manned. [*Desk thumping*] If that is not good representation I do not know what is. I have never known a Government to do so much in such a short time with so little.

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Mr. Speaker, I hear my good friends on the other side talking about how expensive, that the budget that we passed is the biggest budget ever. But I want to say to my friends on the other side, at any given time in the life of any political party or Government, the budget that they pass would be bigger, because when they passed the budget at one time it was the biggest budget ever in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Crosstalk*] Because the need for the budget at the time—\$53 billion at that time—

Dr. Gopeesingh: And that was 2008.

Hon. W. Peters:—and that was 2008, Mr. Speaker, and I am saying to you at that time, that was the biggest budget we ever had in the country. This budget that we pass here, one of these days, the budget that is going to come after it may be the biggest budget that somebody, if not us, I feel it is going to be us, but I am just saying that that is going to be the biggest budget ever as well. [*Crosstalk*]

That is why I talk about babbling. People have to do things according to the needs of your country, so when you have that, what they are not telling you is what is a big component of this budget that we have to pass is to pay back some of the debt that they have left behind. [*Desk thumping*] How else are we going to do that? They speak about deficit budget, but at the height of an oil boom in this country they were running a deficit budget. [*Desk thumping*] They were!

So I am saying to you, when I speak about babbling, useless babble, that is all they come here to do. I am saying to you, Mr. Speaker, that the Government, that I am proud to be a part of, the People's Partnership Government, we have done more in two and a half years in Government than the PNM has done in the last eight years. [*Desk thumping*] I feel very proud to be a part of this Government and I am going to continue to represent my constituents; I am going to continue to represent the people of Trinidad and Tobago through the impact of the Ministry of Community Development that I am proud to be the Minister of.

Again, let me once again empathize with my friends on the other side, because when they speak, I know that is all they could do, and I am prepared to sit here and listen to them, because what they are speaking or who they are speaking to are the people who share their own sentiments and would like to remove us from this side and have them here and have us over there. So, we are doing what Government does, and what Government does is to work hard for the benefit of the people. And what Opposition does is to stay on that side and talk to try to bring down the Government to try to come on this side and be the Government. [*Crosstalk*] So, I really empathize and in a lot of ways I feel sorry for them.

But, Mr. Speaker, once again let me thank the hon. Prime Minister for giving us such a wonderful and brilliant Minister of Finance and the Economy, [*Desk thumping*] that he can come here and pass such a wonderful budget that, indeed, would take in all the people of Trinidad and Tobago and seek to alleviate some of their suffering. Mr. Speaker, let me thank, again, the Minister of Finance and the Economy, for a wonderful budget, and let me thank my colleagues for all the support that they have given to this Government, and let me thank my colleagues on the other side for doing what Opposition does best: talk, talk, talk, and they have 15 years to continue to babble.

God bless you. [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

The Minister of Tobago Development (Hon. Dr. Delmond Baker): Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the privilege of contributing to the debate on the third budget of the People's Partnership Government in this honourable House. It is also my distinguished pleasure to congratulate the Minister of Finance and the Economy for his sterling presentation of the 2013 fiscal package.

Mr. Speaker, in his contribution, and I must say his maiden contribution, Sen. The Hon. Howai was quite exemplary at the parliamentary crease. The Ministry of Finance and the Economy is a big Ministry, one that requires quite a steady hand, and I must say from my interaction with Minister Howai, even before he took up the position, we thought of him as quite a team player, substantive in his expressed positions and more than willing to assist when and wherever it was possible.

Mr. Speaker, we are, as the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, honoured to have such a distinguished Minister of Finance and the Economy in the person of Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai. Added to that, being one of the former junior Ministers in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, I must also congratulate the former Minister who served this nation well, coming out of the difficult and dark days of the PNM, he has brought us to the point where we now have a solid and steady platform on which Minister Howai can build.

11.40 p.m.

Tobago West supports the TOP and Tobago East also supports the TOP, and therefore we support in full measure the Government of the People's Partnership under the leadership of the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar. [*Desk thumping*]

You know, if I am to judge by the way the people of Tobago treated the hon. Prime Minister when the Olympians came back to Tobago and travelled from

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Crown Point up to Charlotteville, I am to say that possibly second to only Arthur Napoleon Raymond Robinson, that this Prime Minister perhaps is one of the closest to the hearts and the minds of the people of Tobago. There is so much love for this Prime Minister in Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Robinson is called “ah we boy”. I think the hon. Prime Minister should be called “ah we Prime Minister”. [*Desk thumping*] I will not call her “ah we gyul” in this honourable House; maybe on the road when we start the campaign in full throw. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Warner: Saturday, Saturday.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Mr. Speaker, let me at the outset correct an error made by the—and I must call it an error—Member for Diego Martin West in his contribution. I see the same patterns emerging even in all of his contributions that I have researched over the last 10 or 15 years in the House, two things come to mind; one, it was only after he was put out of the Manning Cabinet that the now leader of the PNM, the Member for Diego Martin West, suddenly recalls often his “Tobagonianess”. For some reason he becomes a Tobagonian whenever an election that requires some sort of input from himself comes up.

I am Tobagonian, proud of that and my sister, Mrs. Toppin, is Tobagonian also. We have the hon. Member for Chaguanas West, the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara who also have Tobagonian roots. [*Interruption*] There is more?

Hon. Members: Yes.

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Moruga/Tableland.

Hon. Members: Arima.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: The Member for Moruga/Tableland and the Member for Arima also have some Tobagonian roots. But we are as much Tobagonian as we are citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. We love all our fellow citizens as the love in the Partnership is still strong between all the Members of the group that make this Government.

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Stronger than ever.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Mr. Speaker, when the Member spoke, he said—and I want to be fair to him, as you know there are some familiar links. He is still by marriage a member of my family also.

Dr. Moonilal: Who is that?

Hon. D. Baker: The Member for Diego Martin West.

Hon. Members: “Whaat!”

Hon. D. Baker: Let me quote from the *Hansard* record of October 5, 2012.

Dr. Moonilal: Do not say that in the daylight.

Hon. D. Baker: It is almost morning indeed.

“Mr. Speaker, consider the contentious proposal of the Minister of Finance about a so called growth pole in northeast Tobago, forgetting the fact that it is the second time we are hearing that or the third time. No growth, no pole. But, the idea is that he is simply resurrecting an idea mooted in the budget of his predecessor of 2010. It survived 2011. It is now here 2012 for 2013.”

He continued:

“It was true then and remains true today that this idea has never been discussed, either with the Tobago House of Assembly or with the people of Tobago and Tobago says no to that.”

That was the contribution of the Member for Diego Martin West. It was a small clip in which he came to this House and discussed a matter on which he was not even in the presence of the people who sat in that meeting. The Member for Tobago East was there. The Member for Tunapuna was there. The hon. Chief Secretary and also the Secretary of Finance, sat in that room, in that meeting in the Ministry of Finance while I was there as junior Minister in that Ministry.

At that time, it was not the Chief Secretary or the Secretary of Finance who had raised the issue of the north-east growth pole which in fact was in the budget presentation of 2011. It was the hon. Member for Tobago West who leaned over to the Minister of Finance and said to him, “Minister there is \$800,000 available to the people of Castara, Parlatuver and Speyside for development of culture, for development of heritage foundations in Tobago.” The Chief Secretary, after the Minister of Finance had raised the matter with him, turned to the Secretary of Finance, and the first thing he said to himself, “we in Tobago are proud people.”

He reminded everybody in the room that he received a PhD in Economics in the United Kingdom and that he was as bright as everybody in the Ministry of Finance, and therefore nobody in the Ministry of Finance or in Trinidad could tell him where, or how to spend any money in Tobago. And he at that point rejected the \$800,000 offered to the people of those villages.

We came to this honourable House to hear the Leader of the Opposition, the hon. Member for Diego Martin West, political leader of the PNM and leader of the

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Chief Secretary and the Secretary of Finance, stand in this House and said that we as Tobagonians said nothing when that issue was raised. But that Member must be very careful from whence he gets his information, as I will share with you over the course of the few minutes that I have. You have to be careful who you trust in the political leadership in Tobago at this point in time. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, money was turned away because of the arrogance—[*Interruption*]

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Housing Land and Marine Affairs (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Mr. Speaker, I think that revelation deserves daylight. I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Wednesday October 09, 2012 at 10.00 a.m., when we will continue the debate on the Appropriation Bill. I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 11.48 p.m.