



REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

# Debates of the House of Representatives

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4th Session – 10th Parliament (Rep.) – Volume 21 – Number 7

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**OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)**

THE HONOURABLE WADE MARK  
SPEAKER

THE HONOURABLE NELA KHAN  
DEPUTY SPEAKER

**Wednesday 18th September, 2013**

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

**EDITOR: KATHLEEN MOHAMMED**  
Telephone: 623-4494

(TYPESET BY THE HANSARD STAFF, PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY THE GOVERNMENT PRINTER, CARONI,  
REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO— 2022)



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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Wednesday, September 18, 2013*

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

**PRAYERS**[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

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

**APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2014)****BILL, 2013**

[Fifth Day]

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

That the Bill be now read a second time.

*Question again proposed.*

**Mr. Speaker:** The hon. Member for Diego Martin Central. [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Amery Browne** (*Diego Martin Central*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to be able to contribute to this year's budget debate. I must confess that I have not had the opportunity to follow the entirety of the contributions, thus far, because I was very much occupied in bringing some relief and treating with the issues in the constituency of Diego Martin Central. [*Desk thumping*]

So I am here today, Mr. Speaker, to do my duty, of course, on behalf of my constituents and in solidarity with my colleagues and persons right across Trinidad and Tobago, but my thoughts and my heart are not really here at all. They are still in Diego Martin because I have had cause to see and hear some of the most distressing scenarios that a human being can imagine, and there are persons, right now, who are still striving and struggling to extract themselves from some very, very, difficult circumstances.

So I stand here and I think of persons like Miss Rosetta Singh, who woke up very early on Friday morning, and when she climbed out of her bed, she was knee-deep in water—this is a senior citizen—unable to leave her house, and it is a young man from the community who had to come in—swim in to the house—and

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literally take her on his back, and that is the reason she is alive today. My thoughts are with people like her. [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. Member:** He swam in knee-high water?

**Dr. A. Browne:** Mr. Speaker, my thoughts are with the paediatrician who, in a prior flood, was on duty and came home to find his family—his two young children and his wife—trapped in the house in a bedroom with burglar proofing, and they had to be extracted through the window. Thank God the previous owner had put a padlock and a gate on the burglar proofing on that window, otherwise they would not be alive today.

I stand here and I think, Mr. Speaker, of a young national hockey player who lives on Tesheira Street in Diego Martin, who lost all of her uniform and other hockey equipment, and is wondering how would she be able to rebuild that aspect of her life and possible future career. And, I see some signals from across the aisle.

I stand here, Mr. Speaker, and my thoughts are with a young lady on St. Lucien Road, who is expecting a baby in about two weeks' time. She came outside and she said she lost the crib, everything from the—what is it?—baby shower and all of the preparations that she had made for this child. She has to start over, and that little baby is already at a disadvantage and will be struggling from day “zero”, simply because of circumstances outside of her control.

Mr. Speaker, so I stand here and I am a bit tired; I am also grateful. I will explain why—and I am also disappointed, and I will explain why. And if I am tired, grateful and disappointed, the persons in Diego Martin, right now, are also very, very, tired, much more tired than I am. They are also very grateful and they are also very disappointed, and I will explain why.

Mr. Speaker, they are tired because at 1.30 in the morning—and I see the Member for Oropouche East is making glee in all of this. This is serious business, and I invite him to be silent, Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** “Stop mamaguying de man.”

**Dr. A. Browne:**—because I came here with a message for him, his colleagues and the House. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, at two a.m. on Friday 13, these persons lives' were shattered, and they are very tired today because they have been struggling in the midst of a relief effort.

I want to acknowledge all of the agencies, including agencies of State, that have been trying to provide some measure of ease for the citizens in Diego Martin

and Petit Valley at this time. It has been a team effort. I want to acknowledge the volunteers that have worked with me at the MP's office and continue to do so, as we speak. When I am through here, I propose to rejoin them because the work does continue.

I am also grateful, Mr. Speaker, and the people are grateful because there have been efforts from churches, non-governmental organizations, charitable organizations, a number of individuals—right across the spectrum—people from outside of Diego Martin have come in and brought some relief. There are persons who have brought soup. There is a church called Jesus is the Answer. Every evening they come in with some vans with soup and just distribute and feed persons. That must be acknowledged. [*Crosstalk*]

There is a police officer who has a little cafeteria outside of Diego Martin, in Maraval, a catering business—he comes in on evenings. He was there yesterday with his little station wagon filled with bake and cheese, bake and salt fish. It tells you that there is still a heart in Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] and I want to acknowledge all of that, [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my constituents. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to go further with the gratitude and I want to acknowledge, Mr. Speaker, that on Friday, on Saturday and some on Sunday, there were public officials, including some Government Ministers, who came into Diego Martin to meet and treat with some of the issues—I have to be fair—and I want to acknowledge the presence and participation of some of those Government officials and Government Ministers, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

I did see the Minister of National—the brand new—Minister of National Security, Minister Ganga Singh, Minister Ramadharsingh was there, well covered in the media. I acknowledge that.

**Dr. Khan:** I sent the ambulance.

**Dr. A. Browne:** No. Well, no, Minister Khan, you were not present at all. There may have been Minister Emmanuel George, the Minister of Justice. I guess he was there as a concerned resident because I am not sure that the Ministry of Justice had any role, but I would speak a little more about Minister George and his past efforts in Diego Martin, very shortly, but I just want to express that degree of gratitude.

It would not be complete if I did not express some degree of disappointment as well, Mr. Speaker, because this nation has been warned many times about impending disaster in Diego Martin. Everyone here will be your witness to this

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Member of Parliament, standing time and time again in this House—sometimes to grumbles and complaints from my friends, particularly those behind—and spoken about flooding; spoken about what needs to be done and, unfortunately, I will have to give some of those same recommendations today because they have fallen on deaf ears.

Sad to say, the citizens themselves are paying a price today. They paid a price on Friday; they may continue to pay a price during the rest of this rainy season and year after year. The problem is these floods are getting more frequent.

Government of Trinidad and Tobago, the flooding in Diego Martin has gotten much more frequent in recent years, and they are also getting much more severe. That is the reality we have to treat with. We cannot pretend the residents there are on Mars or on Jupiter. They are right here on planet Earth; they are right here in country Trinidad and Tobago, and they are citizens that pay taxes and contribute to the economy just like anybody else. Mr. Speaker, they were warned—we begged them, they were pleaded with—and the situation is getting worse.

September 13, 2013; August 10, 2013, Petit Valley and other parts were devastated by flooding as well—August 11, 2012; October 2011; August 2010. While flooding is not a new phenomenon—my grandmother on St. Lucien Road experienced flooding back in the 1960s—it is not a new phenomenon. What is new is the severity and the frequency which must be quite alarming, which is certainly alarming to me. There is real distress; there is real terror.

Now, the Met Office has been putting out almost nightly bulletins about impending bad weather and thunderstorms and so on. Mr. Speaker, people are not sleeping, people are not sleeping. I wonder besides the food cards and the grants and the other assistance, there needs to be some degree of emotional intervention.

The best way we can assuage that terror is if people see real action in terms of reducing the risks of flooding, and I demand such action here today in the Lower House of Parliament. [*Desk thumping*] I would be very, very, specific in terms of things that the Government can do that are within their resources, and they need to do with immediate effect; not next year, not in 2016 as a lot of their plans point to, but right now, that would be essential.

Mr. Speaker, and then, my contribution would not be complete—I do not intend to stay long because there is other business I have to attend to—if I do not rebuke the stigma that has been cast on some of the persons in Diego Martin. I have seen that being cast on people in East Port of Spain; I have seen that being



cast on people in Laventille and other parts of Trinidad and Tobago, when people are in genuine distress.

Some people respond in the right way, and then others respond in a manner, and their public pronouncements are such that, an additional stigma is cast on ordinary hard-working caring citizens of this country who are just trying to raise their families, have a decent job and take care and advance their lives. Some of those statements such as, “those people are living in de river, they are just squatters”, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, the entire Diego Martin community is basically a series of hills and a valley running in between. So you have tens of thousands of persons living in the Diego Martin Valley and the worst thing any Government Minister—whether it is Minister Ganga Singh or anyone else or the Member for Tabaquite—the worst thing anyone could say, in these circumstances, is to talk about those people are living in the river because the thousands of persons that were affected between 2012 and 2013 are not living in any river. They are living on their own properties. They are not squatters as well.

I heard some of those references on the news and in passing, and while these may be glib comments in Parliament, and it may sound good coming out of a Minister’s mouth—it may be catchy—it has a very toxic effect, and there is already a lot of toxicity out in these communities. So I am inviting all Members to just delete and erase that kind of talk from the lexicon. It does no good.

**10.15 a.m.**

Mr. Speaker, many of the citizens in Diego Martin Central did not have the opportunity to listen to the budget debate in any great detail. Some of them had their radios on and they would listen, and I guess—I would not dwell on it—but some have adopted the habit of when the Members on this side would speak they would turn it up, and let us be honest, when Members on the other side would speak they might turn it down, or right down or to OFF.

**Hon. Member:** [*Inaudible*]—the other way around.

**Dr. A. Browne:** It happens, and I am sure in other parts of the country—  
[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** [*Inaudible*]

**Dr. A. Browne:** Yes. Exactly, elsewhere it is done—I am sure in Toco/Sangre Grande, Mr. Speaker, everyone is rooted when the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande speaks, and for good reason as well—rooted.

**Hon. Member:** [*Inaudible*—stop talking, be quiet.

**Dr. A. Browne:** Mr. Speaker, so not many of them listen to the budget debate, but some of them did listen to the budget, and I have to say that the pervading feeling across the country on the reading of that particular budget presentation was a sense of being underwhelmed.

Time and time again we have had Ministers of Finance of the UNC stand here in the Parliament and deliver budget presentations, and time and time again the response from the population is one of being underwhelmed, because in the absence of any other signal of the Government's intentions for this nation after four years, in the absence of any vision being presented to the population in any other forum by this Government, in the absence of any clear plan or specific policy programme that would lead to things—remember the phrase, Mr. Speaker: “national development”? Whatever became of that?

We seem to have been reduced now to speaking to the lowest common denominator, and I heard some of the contributions and will have to respond to some of them, not just on the UNC side, but some on the former UNC side as well, because some of that is pitched to the lowest common denominator, and it really is more a case sometimes of parroting what people say as opposed to trying to elevate or lift the discourse, or enlighten, or empower, et cetera.

And, yes, this is a political chamber, and even some of what I would say today would have a bit of thrust to it, but I would hope that as Members we would all seek to ensure, at least in part, that there is some degree of edification, that there are constructive recommendations and there is always—in everything we do and say, it should be imbued with a concern for national development. If that would be applied, I think we would have a better place and, ideally, a better country.

So people are very much struggling out there, and there are health concerns as well. I heard the Minister of Health glibly say he did not go down to Diego Martin but he sent an ambulance. But, Mr. Speaker, that is not a joke because there is an emerging public health nightmare. A river that size spilling its banks across the community, retreating, leaving mud; you have issues of asthma, you have concerns about leptospirosis; you have ongoing concerns about dengue, the effects of dust, et cetera. So I would have expected a Minister of Health to make a comment that would have been less glib and in no way try to celebrate the fact that he did not come into the peninsula himself.

And what are the factors that have led us to this increased frequency of flooding, and if you listen to the Government, carefully, you would extract some of the truth, because we have heard talk of several factors and it is no one factor, and if anyone were to say that, it would not be conveying the truth. There are factors such as improper development, unplanned development, improperly approved development; and that is a reality in Trinidad and Tobago. It has been a reality in the past, it is a reality today. But, when you really examine, and a media journalist called me yesterday and asked about new town houses and so on, because that is sort of the urban legend with this increased frequency of flooding. And I invited her to drive into the valley, into Diego Martin, and look on the hills on the left and look to the hills on the right.

Mr. Speaker, the economy of this country cooled considerably in the period 2008—2010, and even to this day, as my colleagues have fleshed out very well. There have been very few—this is the reality—very few new town-housing starts in the hills surrounding that valley. There is very much less development now than there was previously, but for some reason, the floods in the last two to three years have gotten much more frequent as I demonstrated and much more severe.

So that is one issue we need to examine. We need to match the urban legend with the reality, because all our decisions and our analysis must be based on evidence. And the few new developments that did occur in the last three years would have occurred under the watchful eye, or the non-watchful eye of the Government-controlled Diego Martin Regional Corporation, and I will have to speak a little more about them in a little while. So that is one factor: improper development/unplanned development, especially on hillsides.

Another factor, and it seems these days that is the most popular one to come out of some minds, is the issue of dumping of garbage. I do not know if the theory is that in the last three years, all of a sudden the good people of Diego Martin and Petit Valley have emerged with a vendetta to fill rivers with garbage, and that is something new, because that is the only way that that observation can explain this increased severity and increased frequency of flooding in Diego Martin.

Mr. Speaker, I will demonstrate in a little while, with your kind permission, some of the watercourses in Diego Martin, and while you may find a bottle or other items, pieces of plastic, et cetera, that is not the number one factor at all; it is a factor, it is not the number one factor, and I will treat with that. I have spoken to some Members of Government and at length to the Diego Martin Regional Corporation about the issue of dumping of garbage.

It is not something to be ignored, and some of the recommendations that have been advanced is the implementation of cameras at some of the common dumping sites so that these things could be monitored, but this Government has boasted about cameras for four years now, three and a half years, and I am still awaiting anyone to stand up and give an example of a single solitary case that was prosecuted and brought to justice based on the use of these cameras. Without that you just have IT infrastructure, you just have old talk, but you have no compulsion, you have no incentive really for the citizens who have errant behaviour, to change their ways.

So, yes, people are talking about dumping; yes, the country is concerned about it; yes, there are cameras, et cetera, but if they are not put in the right positions to help us treat with that issue, and if we do not make examples of persons who are detected doing this type of illegal dumping, then we are wasting our time and the danger will continue to grow. The Government has made heavy weather of litter wardens, of course a People's National Movement initiative, but the fact of the matter is we need a little more accountability. How are these individuals selected first of all? And I know the Member for Tabaquite, he may have spoken already.

**Dr. Rambachan:** By advertisement in the newspaper.

**Dr. A. Browne:** No, not at all. That is number one. Secondly, how are they distributed? Because they are not visible in the communities, and even if one or two may have been visible elsewhere, they do not seem to be making a difference in terms of our ability to prosecute or deter persons from doing this dumping, because if that were so then we would not have the Government today pointing to the issue of dumping as causing this flooding.

So I just want us to analyze some of the rhetoric and to realize that there is a demand for action on all of these factors, Mr. Speaker, otherwise we are just wasting our time here; this is not connected to the lives of people, and it has to be connected to the lives of people. So we need to have enforcement of existing laws, that is zero right now, and the Member for Tabaquite, if he is able to give me any example of anyone being prosecuted for dumping via the use of this technology, et cetera, I would be happy to invite him to do so, but I suspect he has other troubles on his mind today, Mr. Speaker.

The third factor, if you listen very carefully, the third factor that is cited is the lack of maintenance, and the lack of improvement of drainage infrastructure. And, Mr. Speaker, this is one of the factors in which you can demonstrate, you can observe a very clear distinction between what was happening pre-2010 and what

has happened post-2010. Oh, that is easy for me to say, and if you listen to what the Diego Martin Regional Corporation and the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, which has stolen drainage from the Ministry of Works; if you listen to what they say, you would get a different picture. But the reality on the ground, and every single resident of Diego Martin knows otherwise, because they look outside their doors and we have heard of examples of even Government Ministers who live in Diego Martin who should be aware that the maintenance of these watercourses has gone down to zero, or very close to zero.

But what have they been saying about this, Mr. Speaker, because there is an issue of accountability here, you know. When things happen in this country, when things go right, there is a lot of boasting on the Government side, but when things go wrong there is an issue of accountability. Some things are beyond our control. There is a God above who sends rain or does not send rain, but if I am responsible for an agency and the job of that agency is to clear the watercourses, and they are not cleared and there is flooding, you have to hold me to account, and that applies to every other agency of State and every other public official.

Mr. Speaker, let us see what they said about this drainage infrastructure, maintenance and improvement of drainage infrastructure, and I want to refer to a *Trinidad Express* newspaper article of May 27—this was not five years ago—May 27, 2013, author, Kim Boodram:

“In the east, chairman of the Tunapuna Regional Corporation Khadijah Ameen...”

—who is well-known to some Members in this House.

**Hon. Member:** Chaguanas West.

**Dr. A. Browne:** Chaguanas West, yes.

“...chairman of the Tunapuna Regional Corporation...said there were no reports of serious flooding...”

This was in May this year.

“...there were no reports of serious flooding and field officers of the Corporation’s Disaster Unit are well-prepared.”

This is Tunapuna:

“Ameen, in a telephone interview, said one report of mild flooding was made as a result of a clogged drain, which was dealt with immediately.”

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She went on to say:

“We have done a lot of flood mitigation work and so areas that were usually prone to flooding have been spared so far...”

The article goes on, and the article leaves Tunapuna and goes elsewhere:

“...chairman of the Diego Martin Regional Corporation”—Anthony Sammy, same article—“said residents should be spared...”

Mr. Speaker, this is May 2013.

“...the massive flooding that last year descended on that area, causing widespread damage...”

Sammy said the corporation has engaged in heavy mitigation to clear waterways, both natural and man-made...”

And shockingly, listen to this:

“...including some that do not fall under the remit of that Corporation.”

So the chairman of this regional corporation is taking responsibility and claiming credit for having engaged in heavy mitigation to clear waterways, both natural and man-made, including waterways that do not even fall under his purview; that is the kind of gumption that we are dealing with here at the regional corporation. In other words, the larger waterways that fall under the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, and drainage, he is taking the blame even off of them, so they are cleaning down the place. He went on—this is May 2013:

“We have spent between \$700,000 and \$1 million...”

Apparently he is impressed by these figures.

“...cleaning up to 40 waterways that do not fall under our remit,...”

—going beyond the measure “man”, yeah, and congratulations. Hear this:

“With the 2013 rainy season having been declared open by the Trinidad and Tobago Meteorological Service last week, Sammy said up to 92 per cent of the area’s waterways...”

*Trinidad Express*, May 2013:

“...up to 92 per cent of the area’s waterways...”

A waterway is a river, a drain, an underground drain, an overgrown drain, a watercourse, a canal.

“...92 per cent...have been cleaned and cleared.”

The minute those words came out of his mouth, every citizen in the western peninsula knew this was absolute—this was more garbage than you would find in the river. This is absolute rubbish.

**10.30 a.m.**

Mr. Speaker, I sought your permission a little earlier to just demonstrate. I know I am limited, so I am counting the number of photographs that I would be able to show, just to offer this House, the national community and the Government particularly, an example of what they mean by cleaning and clearing waterways and heavy mitigation work that occurred during the dry season.

Mr. Speaker, this is one of the main rivers in Petit Valley taken two weeks ago. [*Dr. Browne displays photo*] All of these photographs I will make available to Members of the Government, and if they are so minded and so concerned, they will engage in immediate work to make this a reality. This is the Morne Coco River in Petit Valley, running right up to Ravine Road. [*Dr. Browne displays photo*]

**Dr. Khan:** “The PNM never clean it at all.”

**Dr. A. Browne:** You seeing any word PNM inside there? Mr. Speaker, what is in the brains of these individuals?

**Hon. Member:** Who said that? [*Crosstalk*]

**Dr. A. Browne:** What is in the brains of these Members of Government? This is serious business.

**Dr. Rowley:** PNM stupidity!

**Dr. A. Browne:** Does anything here look like it is 10 years old or five years old? This is a lack of basic maintenance and this is why the people are suffering today! [*Dr. Browne thumps desk*] [*Desk thumping*] Do not make those kinds of jokes. This is one, Mr. Speaker; thank you for the permission.

**Mr. Sharma:** “Good TV; knock de table again.”

**Hon. Member:** Lose your cool again.

**Dr. A. Browne:** I am not losing my cool. This is serious business.

**Mr. Sharma:** Good TV shot. [*Crosstalk*]

**Dr. A. Browne:** I did not take their word for it. You see this phone, [*Dr. Browne displays cell phone*] this has a camera in it. I went with a volunteer into

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these rivers and watercourses. I cannot show all of them; this morning I was only able to print a few. I have hundreds of such photographs, and I can email them to any Member of Government that wishes, but they do not want that. That is No. 1, Mr. Speaker.

**Dr. Rambachan:** What is the other river?

**Mr. Sharma:** Show more.

**Dr. A. Browne:** They are asking for some more, but I will show the ones—  
[*Interruption*] [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, look at the water line. [*Member displays photo*] Look at the water line on the house of a citizen. This is not a house in any river. This is not the house of a squatter. This is someone who pays their taxes like anyone else. This may not be the only factor, but this is something that is within our control. There is a saying that you cannot be held responsible for things outside of your control. Not so, Member for Diego Martin West? You cannot be held responsible for things that are outside of your control. Rain falling, God send thunder and lightning, you cannot be held responsible for that, but you can and will be held responsible, and must be held accountable for things that are within your control. [*Desk thumping*] [*Members displays photo*] This article is an indictment on this Government.

**Dr. Rambachan:** You are only bringing that after the fact.

**Dr. A. Browne:** And hear what the Member for Tabaquite is saying. I will have to rebuke him for saying that, through you, Mr. Speaker. Bringing it after the fact—I am on record and other Members on this side are on record, every single debate standing and talking about flooding. When we rise to our feet you have Members here grumbling, “Oh de flooding man and de flooding people.” I rebuke that. That is not true. They have been warned. This is not the first time. This is a further warning, but the rainy season is not over, and I am not over as yet, I have a bit more to say on this matter. [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. Member:** They took money!

**Dr. A. Browne:** Exactly, well, we are going to get to that. Mr. Speaker, \$30 million the Cabinet approved for drainage improvement, after last year—he is talking about after the fact—major disaster. You know where that money was spent? I could tell you where it was not spent. It was not spent in Diego Martin. Not a single dry penny or wet penny was spent in Diego Martin—approved by the Cabinet, \$30 million for flood mitigation.



Mr. Speaker, I have only five photographs that I am allowed to show. [*Dr. Browne displays photograph*] This is another one. This is not the same house; this is in a different house. This is the after-effects. [*Interruption*] I know you want to see; I know you care. This is the kitchen of the home of a citizen. Those Ministers who would have come and did not stay in the road and actually went into people's houses would have seen many sights like this—many, many, many. Up to last night I was seeing more, and when I leave here and go down there, there are more. People are still in this condition. That is the truth—that is the truth.

I did not want my opportunity to show five photographs to end without at least something a little additionally edifying. There are citizens, recognizing that the watercourses are not being cleaned at all since 2010, recognizing that the flooding is getting more frequent—that is a fact—recognizing that the floods are getting more severe, there are citizens who have been trying to take some action on their own. I think it would only be fair to the House and the members of the national community to maybe share some examples of that and to invite everyone who is listening, who might be in a flood-prone area, besides waiting on the Government—because you might be waiting in vain, as the song goes—there are some things that you can do on your own property that can make a big difference.

This is a citizen of Petit Valley in a very flood-prone area, who took action. [*Dr. Browne displays picture*] His son is an engineer or something like that. We do not all have the privilege of having engineers in our family, but they erected a floodgate at the entrance to their porch. Mr. Speaker, the water line on Friday was almost to the top of this particular gate. [*Interruption*] Yes, this week, last week Friday—almost to the top of this gate. This is an aluminium sheet, pure aluminium, which is backed by a steel frame and there are butterfly bolts right around.

They designed this at home and installed several of these at the entrances to their house. Not a single drop of water came in through these gates. There is a black sealing around it, a rubberized soft sealing right around. They did this at home, so it says that there are citizens who might be empowered or who we can empower to help make a difference, and to save some of the costs to themselves and the taxpayers that are incurred every year. I want to congratulate those who already made that effort.

The reason I am holding this up is not to—I mean, I do not even have the wish to share the gentleman's name, not to publicize him or his family, but to share the idea that we should not just sit and wait for the Government to deal with this.

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There are some steps that we can take—while holding them to account—steps citizens can take.

I want to go further with my last opportunity to show a photograph, because I have so many more, and Mr. Speaker, I thank you. This is a little different. This is a citizen—he is also here, but I cannot show his picture—who lives in Petit Valley as well, next to a drain in a very heavily flood-prone area. He has written, through his MP and also on his own, and spoken innumerable times to the Ministry of Works when drainage was under it, and to the Diego Martin Regional Corporation, about suggestions of how that drain could be improved. In August 2012, his property was wiped out, flooded to the extreme. He again wrote, spoke, they did nothing.

Do you know what this citizen did? I am sort of glad I do not have his picture because he went a little beyond the pale. He did a little prototype at home with a plastic bottle—sounds comical—then he went and bought some steel sheeting. He went into the public drain, on behalf of himself and all the residents on that street, Chuma Monka Avenue. He did his own installation that he designed—this is to tell you how simple some of these things are—and he installed a floodgate, because behind here is the Diego Martin Highway and the Diego Martin River.

When that river gets filled—and we have been telling them this loudly—the water backs into the neighbourhood. This is a one-way gate that he installed. For the massive flood on Friday 13 last week it worked beautifully. All of the mud and silt that normally comes in there and comes into houses, none of that occurred. Again, this is a citizen on his own volition. I want to commend people like that. [*Desk thumping*]

It is to tell the Government, “You are not helpless; you do not just have to stand and talk and share cards and so on.” There are things that can be done and things that must be done now, and you have living examples. I invite the Member for Tabaquite to go down to Chuma Monka Avenue, whether you like it or do not like it, at least look or send your engineers. Citizens in desperation have taken matters into their own hands because they have heard the representations made. Even the media have been championing this cause, particularly since August last year. But when we look for results, the Government has not done anything. Their regional corporation has done, not zero, but precious zero, and certainly not 92 per cent—certainly not. I challenge anyone to demonstrate that there is any truth to those figures.

Mr. Speaker, that is my allotted five photographs, but there are many more, and I take your suggestion in terms of passing some of them to colleagues to

demonstrate what is going on—what has been going on. The motivation for taking these photographs was the flood on August 10, 2013, which was almost an anniversary of the massive flood on August 11, 2012.

After August 10, 2013, the Chairman of the regional corporation came into Petit Valley—this was after about 20 minutes of rain, 25 minutes, 30 minutes, let us be generous—30 minutes of rain—and there was flooding there. He came down, and confronted with the mud and so on, he said, “Normally this flooding would have been much worse”—this was last month—“but thanks to the good work of the Diego Martin Regional Corporation, it is clear that we are able to reduce it from last year to this year.” That is the kind of thinking we are dealing with, and he said it was because of the mitigation efforts they did. That was just one month ago.

This month, the flooding is worse now. Do you know what the response is? Global warming—so when you have a small flood it is due to the great mitigation work of the Diego Martin Regional Corporation, and when water comes in and mud comes in the people’s homes, it is global warming. I do not want to describe that as schizophrenic, but I am having trouble finding any other word. It is very unfortunate, and we must hold them accountable.

They boasted—[*Member coughs*] but the Member for Chaguanas West—and I am choking almost when I am—

**Dr. Rambachan:** Drink some water. Make sure you do not vomit.

**Dr. A. Browne:** “Yes, cough and choke.” The Member for Chaguanas West was also one of those—he tends to be a first responder. I think the ODPM should sign him up.

**Dr. Rambachan:** “5.30 in the morning with cameras?”

**Dr. A. Browne:** No, no, no, he was way after me, but he came.

**Dr. Rowley:** “Ignore Tabaquite!”

**Dr. Rambachan:** That is why the country is ignoring you.

**Dr. A. Browne:** I will ignore the Member for Tabaquite. That is sound advice, Member for Diego Martin West.

He comes into the flood zones. I am not sure he went to Chaguanas as quickly when they had their flood a few weeks ago, but he came down into Diego Martin. I want to give him credit, you know. Out of all the Members here, he was one of the very few who had something to say about the flooding. So I give him credit for that. But what did he have to say?

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“Mr. J. Warner”—Appropriation Bill, 2013, and I thank those who—they have it. I am quoting now:

“Mr. Speaker, and you say, why flooding? You have to clean the drains and the watercourses in the dry season, and prepare for the rainy season...And hear the Chairman of the corporation, Anthony Sammy, he build ‘ah’—ODPM centre and he has a very nice room for the media. That is it, that is it, I tell you.”

“You have to clean the drains and the watercourses in the dry season, and prepare for the rainy season.” Genius, brilliant! But I have to say, I have to report to this House, it was when the Member for Chaguanas West was Minister of Works, and drainage was under that Ministry, that this neglect of these watercourses began. [*Desk thumping*] That is the reality. In spite of all the talk about stopping flooding, it continued very nicely under—

**Dr. Rowley:** “You loss track.”

**Dr. A. Browne:** Minister Emmanuel George, not so?—who lives in Diego Martin and who came out in his gears and so on, on Friday. The neglect continued there. Sadly, the Member for Tabaguite probably lives far away and he is not a resident in Diego Martin, but the lack of attention—[*Interruption*—] drainage was moved before it came to you? [*Interruption*] “Yuh not even sure.”

**Dr. Rambachan:** But it does not matter, we still take responsibility. [*Crosstalk*]

**Dr. A. Browne:** But I was told to ignore him, Mr. Speaker, so I need to follow that advice. [*Interruption*] So [*Crosstalk*] right they do not take responsibility and I hear—[*Interruption*] So [*Crosstalk*] right, they do not take responsibility and I hear you—[*Interruption*]

**10.45 a.m.**

**Dr. Rambachan:** I said that we still take responsibility.

**Dr. A. Browne:** Thank you, okay, okay.

**Dr. Rambachan:** We are not running from it.

**Dr. A. Browne:** I salute that.

**Dr. Rowley:** Do not let him disturb you.

**Dr. A. Browne:** He says that he takes responsibility for this. [*Crosstalk*]

But, Mr. Speaker, I have to go further, you know. There is more to say. [*Crosstalk*] There is more to say, there is more to say. Because [*Crosstalk*] yes. Thank you.

So that was the Member for Chaguanas West—started the decline in maintenance, but the incline in talk, decline in maintenance from 2010, come on.

Again, the Member for Diego Martin North/East may have his faults I am not aware of many of them—he may have his faults—he may have his flaws, he is a human being, and the Diego Martin Regional Corporation, pre-local election 2010 did have their faults. I do not think that road paving was one of their fortes, but many of them being resident in the western peninsula there was one thing they were very circumspect about, not perfect, but very circumspect about—that is, cleaning and maintaining those watercourses. That is a fact, and the residents themselves would have noticed a severe decline in that particular factor. Out of several factors that contribute to flooding, that is one that helps us explain this increase in frequency and increase in severity of these floods.

And you have trees, I mean, my colleagues have the photographs. You have trees, a noni tree, right where the Diego Martin Main Road crosses over the Diego Martin River. People picking noni from the—I “doh” even know what they do with noni, picking noni from the tree, in the river. And you are talking about heavy mitigation and 92 per cent of watercourses cleaned and cleared.

Mr. Speaker, we have spoken ad nauseam on such matters; ad nauseam, and the public record is there to show. I have some advice for this Government, some further advice: stop obsessing about the People’s National Movement when it comes to dealing with national challenges. [*Desk thumping*] You are the Government of today. You are the ones who promised change. We did not promise it on your behalf. You all came to the people, Member for Barataria/San Juan, and promised change to the people. So you are responsible for either the failure or the success [*Crosstalk*] in bringing that change. You promised it. You promised improvement; not deterioration. You promised improvement and not deterioration. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, I would crave some silence from the Member for Tabaquite, he is continuing to interrupt me. I know that he is trying to guide the Member for Caroni Central who has been [*Crosstalk*] yes, who has been hiding during the debate and hoping to speak after myself, but I will not be treating with too [*Crosstalk*] many issues directly affected—and also Barataria/San Juan as well—because today I have been mandated by my constituents and we have a mission.

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So that is one word of advice: stop obsessing about the PNM. You are the ones who promised change and you are the ones who are failing to improve the lives of the people in any significant way. So when people went to vote—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central has expired.

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

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

**Dr. A. Browne:** Mr. Speaker, I accept the extension of my colleagues including colleague in the green shirt and—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Rowley:** “All ah dem in green shirt.”

**Dr. A. Browne:**—all in green shirt, well we know a few, but next debate I will dwell a little more on that. [*Crosstalk*] Now, the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara generously grants an extension, or moves an extension, then starts interrupting. That is not fair.

**Mr. Roberts:** Sorry, sorry.

**Dr. A. Browne:** All right.

**Mr. Roberts:** Member for Diego Martin West...

**Dr. A. Browne:** Mr. Speaker, so that is one word of advice: stop obsessing about the PNM. People really do not want to hear that anymore because we reach four years now; you all realize that?

**Hon. Member:** That is right.

**Dr. A. Browne:** Four.

**Hon. Member:** No, they do not realize that.

**Dr. A. Browne:** No, they do not realize that. So that chapter has gone, that verdict was cast and when people went to that polling booth they voted on all, all of the phantoms—the Calder Hart, the church. You see what is happening with that. They voted on the flood, the traffic, all the promises, the poverty, they voted on the crime, the murder rate. The black jerseys helped some of them to vote, all of those things. What else? Property tax. They went to vote with all of this.

So in some of their minds flooding was part of it because those promises came, they came and they have fallen flat because they have failed to improve the lives of the public. So stop obsessing—part of the problem is their obsession about the PNM and their inability—I remember the first budget debate I contributed to under this Government, Mr. Speaker. I told the Prime Minister, a little audaciously, one of the mistakes Governments make in this country—and I have seen it myself—is that you become so obsessed with corruption and failures on the other side of the aisle, you fail to look at the people sitting to your left and to your right and you fail to monitor sufficiently. I knew why I was saying her left and her right—especially what was it?—her right. I knew why I was saying that, you know. That is on the *Hansard* record. Lo and behold.

As I said last time, we warned this Government about the Member for Chaguanas West. They ignored our advice [*Crosstalk*] and they paid a price and you know what, we warned Chaguanas West about this Government and guess what, he is paying a price as well. Two sides of the same coin. Stop obsessing about the PNM. Treat urgent issues as urgent.

Do not allocate \$30 million to improve drainage infrastructure, Member for Caroni Central and then—I do not know where it went, I could tell you where it did not go—then failed to spend that money on improving drainage infrastructure in the area that had the worst natural disaster in the recent history of this country. That just does not make sense. That is insulting and it is a dangerous operation, a dangerous mode of operation. Treat urgent issues as urgent. Stop being so thin-skinned. If you are on the public record making pronouncements, and those pronouncements are demonstrated to be untrue, stop being so thin-skinned about it. Do not expect everyone in this country to keep singing your praises. Sometimes when they stand up here and respond it is like they are expecting us to be singing your praises. No, we are here to hold you to account. That is our job under the Constitution, and that is what we shall do without fear or favour. We will continue to do exactly that.

These are recommendations: Expedite the processing of all grants. I know, I want to acknowledge some of the hard-working staff members within the Ministry of Social Development who have been out in the field collecting information, taking reports. The problem there is twofold, the number of—[*Crosstalk*] “you wanna hear or you doh wanna hear”?—the number of individuals out in the field. The Member for Caroni Central is taking this as a joke, you know, because he got his photo op already. [*Crosstalk*]. He got his—I am praising the staff of the Ministry, hold on—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** Member for Diego Martin Central.

**Dr. A. Browne:**—the recommendation: We need more of those staff out there after a disaster, that is number one. I think there are two teams right now, I was told. We need many more staff members because it is a large area to cover; that is number one. And that is something within your control.

Number two, Mr. Speaker, ensure that the processing of these grants is both expedited and comprehensive. There are still persons from 2010—the flooding of 2010—who have not gotten [*Crosstalk*] the promised grants and the follow-up that was promised to them.

So people seem to be left out sometimes and that is very demotivating. [*Cell phone rings*]

**Hon. Member:** “Ayee! Ah ha. Ah ha.”

**Hon. Member:** Imbert, is you?

**Mr. Roberts:** What!

**Dr. A. Browne:** Mr. Speaker, after these disasters when people’s fridges and stoves—and I am going to have to ask for injury time because there are lots of interruptions. [*Crosstalk*] The people’s fridges and stoves are down to this day, they have not yet gotten the grants to replace them, and therefore they are unable to prepare meals. Some of the hampers being given out are not fully facilitating of those conditions. So food also needs to be provided. Some agencies have been doing that.

These are things that have to be put in place for the future because— [*Crosstalk*] it is not a criticism. Right! Because we have seen it up close and personal. Things like school supplies and so on—we need to find various strategies, improve the strategies—and clothing. We have been out at the MP’s office, very poor MP’s office. We have been trying to do that with some support. I want to acknowledge the Member for Point Fortin who has been extraordinary in lending collegial support to Diego Martin Central.

The food card situation: I know the Minister gave out a few on his little cameo appearance, and there have been staff members who have been giving out others. We need to ensure that people who were really affected by floods get these cards.

Secondly, some of them were told that the cards have \$700 on them. A gentleman on Teishira Street went to the supermarket, he loaded up his cart with, an average of \$700 in groceries, when he got to the cashier only to discover there



was only \$410 on the card. This is this week. And he had to go, shamefacedly, and replace items on the shelves, and it caused a little embarrassment. So clarity there is important and I think—I am not blaming the Minister personally, but some of the staff members are not sure of how much money is on these cards.

Do not give false numbers. What is the Member for Diego Martin Central talking about? Do not give false numbers. Mr. Speaker, I was astounded—*[Crosstalk]* you look at that river. The Member for Diego Martin North/East is distracting me because he is astounded by some of these photographs and the neglect.

Mr. Speaker, do not give false numbers. Look at this one. I congratulated the Minister of Nation Security, Gary Griffith, for coming in—I think at one stage he was a resident of Diego Martin before the good times struck, but he was one of those who went to some doors and actually went into houses and was, you know, communicating well with the people. He went to Gopaul Avenue and Vanderpool Lane and some of those areas, and people were surprised because he was very quick to give them a phone number. When they want to talk too long, “here, look meh number, cell number, call meh if yuh having trouble”—and he mentioned some of the Ministries with social development—“call meh if yuh having trouble getting through.” Fair enough, I would not argue with that.

Mr. Speaker, the number he gave out, and they came to me afterwards 729-4400. I do not even know if I have your permission to dial that number and put that phone next to the microphone, but I will tell you what you will hear because I did so yesterday and I did so this morning. The phone rings, it goes to voicemail: “this is Gary Griffith the Minister of National Security.”

**Mr. Speaker:** Let us not impute improper motives to any Member of any House, because you are alleging that somebody gave you this number. You are imputing improper motive to a Member, even though he is not in this House. If you are querying the conduct or the veracity of a Member’s conduct I ask you to bring a substantive Motion, but do not use the Parliament to impute improper motives to an hon. Member of Parliament. Continue.

**Dr. A. Browne:** Without imputing any improper motives the general point that I wish to make is that Members should ensure—public officials should ensure—*[Crosstalk]* 729-4400. I would not connect it with anyone. Public officials should ensure that when numbers are given out, especially in times of distress, it is connected to an actual individual because in a hypothetical case when persons call such numbers they may hear the phone ring, it might go to

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voicemail and you might hear the words of a recorded message saying, “Jack Warner, please leave a message.” [Crosstalk] “I doh know what is the explanation for that. I doh know what is the explanation for that.”

**Mr. Roberts:** It is a national security number.

**Dr. A. Browne:** Yeah but, come on. [Crosstalk] Yes, and of course the mailbox is full. All right. Moving right along because I am astounded that I am running out of time, Mr. Speaker.

More staff in the field response. Stop the stigmatizing. I dealt with that earlier. Stop talking—Member for Tabaquite is here—saying people are living in the river and they are squatters because—the thousands—they are not, they are not, and it is demotivating.

Fund and monitor a massive programme of cleaning from the source in Blue Basin and Bagatelle to the mouth. Sounds simple, but they are not doing it, and the evidence is there. Urgent improvement in infrastructure. There are some simple things that can be done and there are some more complex things. The river needs to be deeper and wider. We need increased capacity; and the secondary watercourses as well. The inlets to the Diego Martin River from the secondary watercourses, some of them are angled the wrong way.

All this has been documented and sent to the relevant authorities. It takes some commitment and some funding to make some strategic and intelligent changes. That can make a big, big, big difference and can save the taxpayer a lot of money, and save people a lot of distress and personal cost. Some people lost everything; their car. They lost their car last year, bought a new car. This little old lady in Petit Valley bought another car, let us say, and guess what happened to it this year? I would not even tell you. Pearl Goodman Avenue is the address and many others. Pearl Goodman Avenue is the address.

Silt traps and detention ponds—we used to hear a lot about that from the Member for Chaguanas West and all the plans and intentions. Nothing has been done in the western peninsula. Some acquisition would need to be done to deepen and widen the river and straighten certain aspects behind Temple Street and so on, behind Surprise Grounds. But is that too hard to do? Because they are doing the acquisition for the Mon Desir highway, that link road, but they are not doing it in treating with this urgent issue.

**11.00 a.m.**

An alarm system through the valley, Mr. Speaker: that is something that can be fairly easily implemented because when it floods at the top, people down the road know they are going to get flooded, but if they are home, asleep in their beds, they may not be able to rescue their children, their family members, their pets, their personal belongings and all of those could be lost—an alarm system.

A team of engineers going from house to house, this can be implemented—just looking at the people's individual situation and giving them some simple recommendations. One of the things I did, I am no engineer, I told many persons raise your threshold about two-block heights. Bricks, mortar, raise your threshold about two-block heights. Some of them did it and some of them were spared, those living a little further up.

What is the cost? Yes, it is going to be costly to implement these recommendations, especially the river changes. But it is cheaper than \$7.8 billion, and I would say it is more urgent than the Mon Desir link. It is cheaper than the corruption the Member for Chaguanas West accuses this Government of all the time now, and it is certainly cheaper than the corruption this Government accuses Chaguanas West of all the time now. Just do it. We beseech you, we beg you.

The Member for Couva North is here, and normally she is very verbose about flooding. She just had one line in her contribution this time, representing the Ministry that is responsible for drainage and that was shocking. Further advice—forget about extending that highway from Wendy Fitzwilliam Boulevard up to Bagatelle, just forget about that project and let us focus on the river for now. Massive investment is essential. Where is the Drainage Division in all of this? I do not know. Given the failure of the regional corporation, they need to take a much, much stronger hand—Mr. Speaker, how much more time do I have?

**Mr. Speaker:** You have up to 11.18 a.m.

**Dr. A. Browne:** Okay, I have a few more recommendations and some other issues I would like to flag, Mr. Speaker. And you will realize that on this occasion my contribution was compelled by the issues that were at hand, and you know some things need to be ventilated.

Other recommendations, Mr. Speaker; I need to alert this House and some of the Ministers present that there are hundreds of unattended issues from previous floods: certainly from the October 2010 floods, from the 2011 floods, from the

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August 2012 floods, from the August 2013 and now the September 2013 floods; unattended issues. It is easy to give out cards and grants, but some other relief must be also expedited, and this involves multiple Ministries.

Many people were promised cheques and did not get them. They fell through the cracks and I have been sending some of the information to the Minister: I do not know what has been happening with it. Many issues were referred for solution, some people go to the people resolution unit, they have to stand outside, sometimes rain falls and wets them and they do not get a sense of traction in some cases. There are many families in distress, but it seems the Ministers have moved on.

I want to quickly read a report—and I got his permission to read his name into the record—from Waterhole, Cocorite, Mr. Dave Peters.

**Mrs. Alleyne-Toppin:** [*Inaudible*]

**Dr. A. Browne:** Yes, Mr. Dave Peters, Member for Tobago East. I have a little report from a social worker.

The home occupied by Mr. Peters and his family received extensive damage in the floods of August 11, 2012. He was unable to contact the aired emergency numbers so he travelled to the Disaster Management Unit of the regional corporation in Patna. Promises were made to visit with a view to assistance. Further heavy rainfall fell after that first flooding and the house suffered even further damage when a landslide destroyed all three bedrooms...

This is a family man with children.

...all three bedrooms, and there was partial damage, a huge crack in the living room area.

Reports were again made to the disaster unit. There followed visits by a range of personnel, and after about a month the hon. Minister—I want to credit her—Vernella Alleyne-Toppin paid a visit. Very nice—Both of these personnel and the ODPM declared that the damage was so severe the house was unsafe for habitation...

Yes?

**Mrs. Alleyne-Toppin:** Yes.

**Dr. A. Browne:** And she agrees:

and that relocation was urgently necessary.

I wrote to Minister Moonilal—this is August 2012, “eh”, I wrote to Mrs. Alleyne-Toppin as well and spoke to her subsequently. The Ministry of the People and Social Development, the HDC, some Mr. Reese, floating around there drawing a salary as well, all of these people were involved in this particular case.

Let me tell you the outcome. The CEO of the HDC was involved. They referred back and forth. This gentleman had travelled to Port of Spain more than a yellow-band maxi taxi; back and forth, back and forth, back and forth; bedrooms gone, big crack in the house. I will tell you where the children are today. More than 50 telephone calls, buying phone cards, endless visits to these Ministers and Ministries. Up to August 6 this year he visited me at my office. This is part of the report:

Call was made in his presence; failure to follow up. The Ministries did not meet their word. The situation continues to traumatize the family. All members are now separated. Mr. Peters and his wife are huddling in the unsafe house.

This is a taxpayer, you know, this is not somebody living in a river. This is not somebody who is squatting. This is a taxpayer of Trinidad and Tobago living in an unsafe house. These are human beings and they should not be stigmatized with those labels. They are afraid that the house would be burglarized; items will be stolen so they are there. The children are scattered with other relatives and they are having other social issues based on separation of the family. The PTA has gotten involved and all sorts of other things. This family is very hurt by those types of broken promises, and after many discussions with many Ministers who told them: “Do not do anything to the house because rebuilding is impossible;” they are tired of the runaround.

There are other houses in Cocorite and elsewhere which have been declared unsafe and we are not getting the kind of empathy from the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development in treating with these and the other Ministers who promised to intervene and are supposed to be interlocutors in these matters. They come in after disasters; yes, it is a good media coverage, photo ops; they get people to say all sorts of things when they get a TT Card in their hands and so on, but the people—there needs to be follow-up and that is where you rely on the caring and you rely on the staff to follow up in these cases. I gave the example of the phone number that goes to a very strange voicemail.

There is another one, Laverne Alleyne from Simeon Road, took two years to get grant assistance from the Ministry of the People and Social Development. Up

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to now I cannot understand what happened in that particular case; back and forth, people blaming the PS, people blaming the unit, this and that, chaos, but the citizens feel left out, and then afterwards you hear a Minister visits a house in one day and the next day they get a cheque, elsewhere in the country. How are people supposed to feel, Mr. Speaker? How are they supposed to feel? The country belongs to all of us.

Crumbling retaining walls, river walls, landslides, lots of things unattended to, adding up to increased risk of flooding when this rubble collects in the watercourses. I have all the letters related to Mr. Peters and his issue here. It is a saga of shame; and this file is filled. I wish I had more time; outstanding matters related to drainage, cleaning of watercourses.

You know some people do not even understand the work of a Member of Parliament. I think on this issue, I speak on behalf of all Members that sometimes even among your colleagues, and particularly if you are sitting where I sit today, when you are seeing the danger and you write so much correspondence, you follow up, you make calls and you beg and plead, you can be so disappointed with the results, and you see the negative impacts.

So people listen to the budget and budget debates and so on, and they are wondering: What does this have to really do with me? And, did I hear anything that would benefit my personal situation? I think I have just a couple of minutes remaining—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Hypolite:** Ten minutes.

**Dr. A. Browne:** Thank you. Unattended issues: I am sorry the Member for Caroni East is not here because I do not like to treat with these matters in his absence, but I am forced to as time is not with me. I heard him stand here and make some declarations about education that are relevant to the people of Diego Martin Central—I will leave out Miss Ramdial—the Member for Couva North for now.

**Miss Ramdial:** Thank you.

**Dr. A. Browne:** You are welcome. And this is what he said in this budget debate:

“When this Opposition says we do not do anything for them, we forget them; in their constituencies we do not do anything; that is tremendous nonsense. They try to give the population that we only want to focus on central and south Trinidad but that is a lie.”—It—“is an unmitigated falsified veracity.” He likes to hear himself—“falsified veracity.”

“My colleague says it is a terminal inexactitude.”—tra la la. “It is a false impression they are trying to give...that we do not care...”—about the people.

And he went on, I mean. This was even more shocking when he said:

“...I want to publicly compliment the members of the Board and all the workers from the Education Facilities Company Limited...”

**Mr. Imbert:** What!

**Dr. A. Browne:** That is in this budget debate. The most corrupt organization, in my humble view, in the history of the Caribbean is that same one that he was complimenting there today, Education Facilities Company Limited; ridiculous.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know how he could say those things about equity in education, and look at the situation in Diego Martin Central with the primary and secondary schools and match the two. It is complete lunacy, Mr. Speaker. He is not a lunatic, but what he was saying was lunacy. It is a nightmare across the school system and I have a report, Mr. Speaker, I checked with all of the principals, vice-principals; in Petit Valley Girls RC School, dilapidation, broken promises. The Sunday before school opened the principal got a call at 4.00 p.m.: “How are things going?” She said, “Well, we made the report, nothing was done. We put the report in on time; nothing was done. Toilets on the infant side not working, they came in after school started and fixed one of the toilets. So everybody is cramming into one toilet, completely insufficient. No one has returned to complete the work.”

Cocorite Government Primary School, the Minister had visited, made all grand promises. I was right there. These poor little children, some of them came asking for his autograph and so on. I mean it was a lovely sight to behold; I was uplifted. He waved his hand: “We will fix the toilets”, because they are atrocious, library, new block across there and expansive. Holiday came, holiday go, holiday came, holiday go, and these poor children coming back to the same school and worse every single time. They came in. So I visited the school late last week and they said the people had come and done some repairs. Honestly, I could not identify anything that had changed. I think a couple of the toilet tanks were replaced. The one in the teachers, staff room was replaced and it has been leaking ever since; it was not leaking before, it has been leaking ever since, but the general dilapidation of that school in a vulnerable area remains and gets worse.

And again, I am appealing to the Minister of Education to take a look at these schools: the Petit Valley Girls RC, Cocorite Government Primary, Crystal Stream Government Primary, Diego Martin Government Primary, and then the Diego

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Martin North Secondary School—they have added chemistry and biology to the curriculum, but there are no labs. There are no lab facilities. They are matching up against children who have the best lab facilities, what do we expect? After all the torture these children went through earlier this year and last year, when many of them were on shift, a bizarre shift system because of slowness to do repairs, you are going to put them through this now? It is unfair, and you are setting them up for risk of failure in life. There are challenges enough and it is across the board.

The Diego Martin Central Secondary: I want to say there was some work done there and I acknowledge that. A guard booth was built at a cost of \$60,000 and there was some other expenditure, and I will examine the figures at a later date and time, but I just want to say there was some work done there with queries. But again, there was promise of a hall. There is no hall in the school. The Minister—it is not to say that we just waiting on it—he made specific promises to the principal and to the MP for the area on that, of course completely broken. Diamond Vale Government Primary, et cetera, et cetera. All the schools that I visited, poor furniture, terrible security, low morale, very little student support service, poor infrastructure, poor governance, poor Government. That is the reality in terms of education; it does not match very well.

I am not going to be able to deal with my colleague in terms of the health sector extensively today, but I just want to say that the Diego Martin Health Centre which serves several—physically located in Diego Martin West, but serving two plus one, three constituencies, at minimum—is in a condition of complete and total disarray and requires urgent attention. I did not hear him speak about that at all, even though we have spoken about that. There was an arrangement with the Child Welfare League regarding an exchange of property. When they went to the health centre in terms of the exchange they said: “‘Eh-eh’ this place is too terrible. We cannot go through with this, Mr. Minister.”

So we are stuck. The citizens are now stuck, they are not hearing anything, but they need—and the staff, that is their workplace—urgent assistance. I could not believe the Minister of Health started boasting about the Mount Hope Women’s Hospital; while there may be some good staff members in there, I do not know if he is getting the reports coming out. Some of the reports, of course they go to the media, and it is a big sensation, and it is a witch-hunt and so on, and then there is the reality of the cover-ups and all of that. But when you hear cases of neonates having broken bones due to medical manipulation—do you know what I am talking about, Minister?



**11.15 a.m.**

The first case since the 1980s occurred very, very recently, as in August, in Mount Hope Women's Hospital, where a mother came into the hospital to visit her baby—it was a preemie—who was recovering from a lung infection, only to be told by a senior doctor that while trying to put in an IV line—because sometimes the lines are put near the ankle because the veins are so thin—“we are sorry to tell you, Ma'am, but we ended up breaking a bone.”

**Dr. Rowley:** To put in an IV?

**Dr. A. Browne:** Mr. Speaker, I will have to revisit this at a later date. Since the 1980s, that is a sign—there are different vitamin deficiencies; other things can lead to fragility, but that is a sign of very, very poor standards. It may be a lack of a senior neonatologist or fully qualified neonatologist. It just flags the whole sector immediately and tells us, all is not well, and if that is happening—it happened in the 1980s. If it is happening now, we need to be alarmed.

It is not just a case of complimenting, and so on, you know. While that may be good for morale, there are other things that are damaging the morale of the health worker, and I could give a number of examples. But there is an HR disaster in the health sector right now. In the education sector, as well, with student support services, but in the health sector, a disaster. It is a free-for-all, Mr. Minister. It may have been bad before you, but it is terrible right now. The Minister probably knows what I am talking about, where you have all of these managers, most of them unqualified and they are just feeding on the system, and the real workers are suffering—suffering.

Then there was a decision recently that affected so many nurses and travelling officers and some physicians where, despite their terms and conditions—and these are travelling officers—some of their benefits in terms of VAT and duty and so on; a little 30 per cent, not the same thing you and I might enjoy—was taken away with a memo, and the registered nurses and others are asking—*[Interruption]*

**Dr. Khan:** That is by your CPO.

**Dr. A. Browne:**—why is that happening. My?

**Mr. Speaker:** One more minute.

**Dr. A. Browne:** I working in the Ministry of Health? Come on “nah man”!  
*[Interruption]* Mr. Minister, come on. At least treat with them—*[Interruption]*

**Dr. Khan:** [*Inaudible*] That is your CPO!

**Dr. A. Browne:**—explain it to them. Tell them that.

**Dr. Khan:** They create the issues in the health sector.

**Dr. A. Browne:** But the point I am making—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Member for Barataria/San Juan, please, allow the Member to speak.

**Dr. A. Browne:** I will take that too. Mr. Speaker, the point I am making is, there is a morale disaster—and you see the attitude—and there is an HR disaster in the health sector, certainly in the education sector. And you could build any structure you want on any fault line you want, if the people are not properly motivated, you are doomed.

In the United States and other places, they find very intelligent, flexible ways in states that have low morale. You have teachers sometimes who are given tax-free salaries in particular areas, to help build it, and even nurses, et cetera. We need to start being very creative; look at our labour sector; look at the HR dilemma and take steps to treat with it.

Mr. Speaker, so in conclusion, I have dwelt a lot on Diego Martin Central. A lot of that was impelled by what they are experiencing. I thank all of the responders and those who have contributed, but I cannot thank this Government for this budget because, like the Member for Chaguanas West said, it is—I think he described it as a brainless budget; he was very disappointed. That is a bit bizarre because just one year ago, with the same Government, the same Minister of Finance and the Economy, the same Cabinet, he was lauding and praising the same type of budgetary approach, not one with the best view of the national development of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Mr. Speaker:** Before I call on the hon. Minister of the People and Social Development, may I just remind hon. Members of Standing Order 36(6). I think on about 20 occasions throughout this debate, Members were referring to Members by their names. The Standing Order prohibits Members of Parliament referring to other Members of Parliament by their names. You either refer to Members in terms of their portfolio or their constituency. So I just say this to remind Members, do not refer to Members by names in this honourable House. The Standing Order prohibits that.

Hon. Member for Caroni Central, Minister of the People and Social Development. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of the People and Social Development (Hon. Dr. Glenn Ramadharsingh):** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to this debate. I must, indeed, say I was taken aback by the Member's contribution. He took the opportunity to dwell on the flooding in Diego Martin, which is very important, I understand, as a Member of Parliament, but failed to add his voice to all the economic areas of concern in the budget, which I am sure—[*Crosstalk*—]is also of concern to his constituents.

He was also deafeningly silent on his much mooted campaign finance reform, something that he is very passionate about. I thought he would have spared at least 30 seconds on that—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** PR; the PR run out.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—but it seemed not to be today.

**Dr. Khan:** Public relations.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** And also he, out of all his colleagues—Balisier-wearing and non Balisier-wearing—he thanked the Member for Point Fortin, as is consistent, but never once looked the way of his political leader—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Sharma:** True. True.

**Dr. Khan:** Amazing. Amazing.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—to say thanks to his political leader for leadership and for direction and guidance. [*Dr. A. Browne rises to depart Chamber*]

**Dr. Khan:** “He running away now. He running away.”

**Dr. Browne:** I am going to Diego Martin.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** It is good that he goes to Diego Martin because I have a *Newsday* article which says that, “We don't even know what our MP looks like in Diego Martin”.

**Mr. De Coteau:** “He trying to make up.” He is trying to make up for lost time.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** So it may be very important for him to grace his presence in the fields of Diego Martin so that people could finally see what—

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and also the Member for Diego Martin North/East, you know. They said they do not know what he looks like in Diego Martin. [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. Member:** “Dey thought he was de MP.”

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** Maybe you should follow him and get yourself acquainted.

**Dr. Khan:** “Dey thought he was de MP when he went.”

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** “Dey thought that he went up for”—or, local election. He absconded from the battlefield and took to far north-eastern countries.

**Dr. Khan:** “Dey thought—was Colm Imbert.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** I think he was going there to acquaint himself with socialism, or communism, or something like that. He did not want to participate in the first-past-the-post system in electoral politics in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Crosstalk*]

But, you know, my colleague, the Minister of Health, was also taken aback because he says if he goes to speak about the amount of hospitals he visits on a daily basis, and the pan yards in his area and the community centres and the blocks, then his entire contribution, too, would be about the grass-roots politics of Barataria/San Juan and what obtains in that community.

But I am moved when I think about what St. Francis of Assisi said. He said: “Go and work with the people and, if necessary, then speak to them. Only if necessary.” That type of work—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Imbert:** “What you know about Francis of Assisi?”

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** That type of work is work, when you work with the people in such a way that your work speaks for itself.

**Mr. Sharma:** Listen and learn. Listen and learn.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** It reminds me of what was said by Kahlil Gibran. He said:

“When you work you are a flute through whose heart the whispering of the hours turns to music”.—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Sharma:** Excellent.

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**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** “Which of you would be a reed, dumb and silent, when all else sings...in unison?”

**Mr. De Coteau:** “Quote de book. Quote de book.”

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** “Work”—Mr. Speaker—“is love made visible.”

**Hon. Member:** Yes, it is.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** “And if you cannot work with love but only with distaste, it is better that you should leave your work and sit at the gate of the temple and take alms of those who work with joy.”

**Mr. De Coteau:** “Ay-ay-ay!”

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** “For if you bake bread with indifference, you bake a bitter bread that feeds but half man’s hunger

And if you grudge the crushing of the grapes, your grudge distills a poison in the wine.”

**Dr. Khan:** “It sour de wine.”

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** “And if you sing though as angels, and love not the singing, you muffle man’s ears to the voices of the day and the voices of the night.”

**Mr. De Coteau:** Good book! Good book!

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** When you work, you work. You do not speak about your work. Let the people speak about your work! Let them not say that “dey doh know what yuh look like, so yuh have to abscond from de budget debate, run into your constituency to prevent another article like dis, an den come, tongue-in-cheek”—*[Interruption]*

**Mr. De Coteau:** Opportunistic.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—“as if you so care about the drain. “He never see dem drain before! Da why he taking picture wit all kine ah camera now.” *[Interruption]* Go and serve the people of Diego Martin! They put you into office!

And by the way, I want to tell the Member for Diego Martin—and a few other Members on that side.

**Hon. Member:** North or Central?

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** “Nobody obsess with de PNM anymore, yuh know.”

**Mrs. Mc Intosh:** We obsessed with—

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** You all keep saying, “you obsessed with the PNM”. “Nobody not obsessed with the PNM.” You have to now get them interested in the PNM once again. “Dat is your duty.”

**Mr. Roberts:** [*Laughter*] Well said.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** And by “de way, all de potshots about Chaguanas West, leh meh tell yuh someting. Is 500 votes all yuh fightin for dere, yuh know. Yuh could tell people what yuh want. Yuh forgettin to say is 500 yuh fightin.” Clifton De Coteau could take up his phone now—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Do not refer to him by name.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** MP for Moruga/Tableland can take up his phone and get 40 maxi outside “dere and wipe dem out in Chaguanas West”.

**Hon. Member:** One time.

**Dr. Khan:** One more maxi to take away North/East.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** But, you know, let me get on to the business at hand, and I want to say that when I went—[*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, when I went into Diego Martin on the Friday afternoon—I got a call at 4.43 a.m., just to put this Diego Martin thing in perspective—from the Minister of Justice, and I immediately alerted my team.

**Mr. Sharma:** What time?

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** Four forty-three in the morning—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Sharma:** And you are a recently married man.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—and we dispatched a team at six o’clock in the morning. The full Ministry’s team was out there at 10.00 a.m.

And I want to tell you, the MP for Diego Martin Central says: “It is not enough people.” Well if you stop terrorizing the staff and the Permanent Secretary and the DPS with all these allegations, [*Holds up papers*] all the Members across there—allegations, attacking the public servants, public officials—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** My God.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—attacking them! Every day in this Parliament—*[Interruption]*

**Mrs. Gopee-Scoon:** That is not true.

**Hon. Member:** Terrible! Shame! *[Crosstalk]*

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** You are causing the lack of efficiency in the system because they are putting greater safeguards in place. You are blocking the people from services.

**Hon. Member:** Shame!

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** When you call the names of senior public officials, you are causing them to act out of fear and not out of the love for public service in the public domain. *[Desk thumping]*

Look at it, *[holds up papers]* some 53 allegations, calling the names of some 102 public servants in the Ministry of the People and Social Development. What a—shame on you! And you want more people to go outside there and put themselves on the line in the service of the people?

**Hon. Member:** Nonsense. You are grasping now.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** The MP for Diego Martin Central—*[Interruption]*

**Hon. Member:** Run away.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—said that the public servants from Point Fortin, the social welfare officers, should not come to the Hyatt once a year and participate in a staff appreciation dinner.

**Dr. Khan:** “What wrong wit dat?”

**Mr. Sharma:** That is your business. That is not his business.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** He said that the TT card officer from Toco who services the people way up in the hills and goes up the mountains to find clients who are pensioners, who are sick, and differently abled, should not get a bus to pick them up and bring them to the Hyatt—*[Interruption]*

**Mr. Sharma:** That is not his business.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—so that they could have some food. That is the kind of gratitude that they have for the public servants of this country.

**Hon. Member:** “You treat dem good.”

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** And “yuh know what? Dey shootin deyself in de foot”, but, you see, they probably know that they will not ever get back into power—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Sharma:** Quite true.

**Mrs. Mc Intosh:** Wait and see.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—so that it makes no difference to them.

**Mr. Sharma:** Quite true. Quite true.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** They are shooting up the place like the old Wild West and hoping that they get a hole big enough to crawl through.

**Hon. Member:** Good one.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** But you know, these public servants will find it very difficult to work with you, the way you are calling the people’s names, young graduates of the University of the West Indies. They have nothing to do with politics. They never sit in this Parliament and attack you. They never campaign against you. They have no beef with you; they have no bones with you. They just want to come into a Ministry and serve.

They want to counsel; they want to give psychosocial support to a woman who is traumatized because she thinks that her child is being abused. She thinks that her child is being bullied, and the child is being counselled and the parent. “Buh yuh know you callin dey name?”

Member for Arouca/Maloney, how could you have been a Minister in the Ministry of Social Development and call the names of public servants? They are very disappointed in you, Ma’am; very, very disappointed. You have reduced yourself to where a politician should never venture. To call the names of innocent citizens and vilify them in your speech is very unfair.

**Mr. De Coteau:** Quote their family.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** And the Member for Laventille West, I do not want to mispronounce his name, Mr. Speaker, so I will call him the MP for Laventille West. It is very easy to mispronounce his name, with the contribution that he gave—his last name, that is, [*Laughter*] because he goes—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** Not “Hypolite”, hypocrite.



**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—on a trend of attack, attack, attack, attack; attack, attack, attack, attack. You know, that is the only way now he can mobilize his constituency, by telling them to attack “dis one, dah one”,—[*Interruption*]

**Miss Hospedales:** That is not true.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—so he can diffuse all the requests that are coming to him—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Hypolite:** Mr. Speaker, 36(5).

**Mrs. Mc Intosh:** “Yeah, ah find so.”

**Mr. Hypolite:** That is not how I mobilize my community.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—by sending them in different directions.

**Mr. Hypolite:** That is what he is saying! 36(5).

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** That is what he has been reduced to.

**Mr. Hypolite:** You need to fix the old lady’s home! [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** All right. Okay—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** That is wrong.

**Hon. Member:** Attack, attack, attack.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members, please. Hon. Member for Caroni Central, the hon. Member for Laventille West is indicating that you are imputing improper motives and you are saying things that really cannot be associated with him, so I ask you to desist from that trend of thought.

**11.30 a.m.**

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I desist immediately. In fact, I think I was spending too much time on that anyway. [*Crosstalk*] Let me focus my contribution now.

**Mr. De Coteau:** Focus my brother. Focus.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** Mr. Speaker, the field and landscape of social development is very much like life. There were times when men just fished and farmed and hunted for food; when they preferred that it rained, rather than the sun shine; that they prepared for feast, prayers and made babies to ensure that their civilizations survived.

But there are sometimes a time in life when men lift themselves to a new high; when they rise up and distinguish themselves from the mundane existence that

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lingered before them; when buildings that looked like cottages rose up and became like colossuses, giant buildings that would reach and touch the sky; when, before, they had their pestilences, they would paint the Lord as if he was rising in the air and out of touch. At that time when they rose, they began to paint the Lord as a man who walked among them. Their creative energies were released; it gave way to a zeitgeist, a spirit of the times, that was almost spiritual in nature.

**Mr. Sharma:** Well said, man.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** That is what has happened to the Ministry of Social Development. [*Desk thumping*] It has experienced a renaissance with the Ministry of the People being added to it. It is now a Ministry that is alive and rising to the challenges of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Dr. Khan:** Excellent. Excellent.

**Mr. De Coteau:** Excellent.

**Dr. Khan:** You sound like the prophet.

**Mr. De Coteau:** The prophet leader.

**Mrs. Gopee-Scoon:** Talk boy!

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** To quote Henry Clay, an esteemed American politician of the 19th Century:

“Government is a trust, and the officers of the government are trustees; and both the trust and trustees are created for the benefit of the people.”

Mr. Speaker, this country is not without challenges. In fact, floods are a natural course of something that we deal with throughout the landscape of Trinidad and Tobago—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** Global thing.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—and therefore, challenges will come and we will meet and greet and engage them.

When we came into office there was the Clico debacle and the HCU matter and we had a Minister of Finance who engaged that, and now we are moving beyond that. Barriers are something we must surmount. There is no need to complain and moan and groan. And therefore, when we look at the budget today, we are not talking about a daunting task anymore, we are not talking about a challenging period of economic turmoil, we are talking about strengthening the platform of

growth and development in all four sectors of the economy and looking to a brighter future for Trinidad and Tobago, [*Desk thumping*] sustaining growth and securing prosperity.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank all the partnering agencies, all the NGOs and stakeholders that continue to work with the Ministry of the People and give it that ability to deliver to the people, to address the issue of social inequality and social exclusion.

As you know, our manifesto identifies four pillars, the first of which is people-centred development; poverty eradication and social justice; a more diversified knowledge-intensive economy; and good governance, people participation. Against this backdrop, Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the work of the Minister of Finance and the Economy, Sen. Larry Howai, for a great budget presentation and all the work of his staff. [*Desk thumping*] And certainly, our Prime Minister has been a visionary Prime Minister, who created in fact this Ministry of the People and Social Development and has given us the goals that we must pursue in order to lift human development in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, there are two important developments in our times that must be considered: globalization and technology. How do we phrase globalization? The world is becoming a smaller place and we are living in the global village. The actions of our neighbours and international partners influence our behaviour at home. We only need to look at the cars we drive, the tools we use, and the clothes we wear, to notice the foreign presence and influence on our daily lives.

On the second point, Mr. Speaker, technology and its advancement in the 21st Century, even today, we can attest to the relevance of Moore's Law, a law that states that the:

“...processing power for computers will double every two years.”

Mr. Speaker, this means that information is processed and accessed all the more quickly as time progresses. For example, the use of the Internet has increased our knowledge about goods and services. So if we wish to obtain these items, it may take a couple of weeks to attain. Our access to information now makes it immediate. When we look at the Samsung s4 cell phone, the iPhone 5c and the 5s; even music pop star Rihanna did countries in seven days, in Trinidad movies are being released simultaneously with the US, even a couple days before; such is the technology that has developed in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, in addressing the mandate of the Ministry of the People and Social Development that was built on the platform of social development, which

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is our 14 regional offices spread throughout Trinidad and Tobago, the main products that we deliver to the population: pension, disability, public assistance, the TT Card, poverty reduction, the URP social, the NSDP, the People Issues Resolution Unit, the inter-agency unit that deals with street dwellers and social research, are now critical areas that are coming into the mainstream.

But when we look at the pension and we see the Member for Arouca/Maloney asking for a probe for the \$3 billion being spent by Social Development, how disingenuous can you really be asking for a probe, knowing fully well that 88,000 pensioners access \$3,000 a month, which amounts to \$2.4 billion that comes to the Ministry of the People and Social Development. But yet, for cheap politics, you bandy about that \$3 billion should be probed, knowing full well that \$2.4 billion goes directly to the pensioners of Trinidad and Tobago.

You know, when I came into office, Mr. Speaker—you know, I have no difficulty with them asking about the operational issues in the Ministry of the People and Social Development because it never existed in their time. They were only concerned about policy, research and “shoulda”, “woulda”, “coulda”.

**Mr. Sharma:** They still are.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** When I came into the Ministry, I would see in the newspapers—and you would remember hotline, some pensioner in San Fernando crying because they lost their pension cheque. Some pensioner in Arima crying and they called the hotline, and you know what they would tell the pensioner? Sorry, the Member for Diego Martin Central had to rush off. Do you know what they will tell the pensioner? Six months you have to wait. “Hear nah, you lost your pension cheque; somebody thief it, steups, oh wait six months nah.” A pensioner who they talked glibly about, and they talked about the senior citizen. He just read from a letter about a senior citizen. You care so much, well change the law, change the rules.

Do you know that with the assistance of the former Minister of Finance and Member for Tunapuna, the hon. Winston Dookeran, we changed that in the first budget [*Desk thumping*] so that in one month’s time you could get the pension cheque. But we are not satisfied with that. We were not satisfied with that because one month is too much, one day is too much, because if someone collects your pension cheque from the mail before you take it up and steals it, “da is” your fault? How can that be your fault? That is not your fault. That is a crime perpetrated against you. In a sense, that is elderly abuse because they are targeting you at that time of the year—I will come to that as well. We fought that as well.

Do you know what we did, Mr. Speaker? We went about a process: we called in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, we called in the printers who print the pension cheque, we called in all the stakeholders and we said, “Listen, why can’t we give the pensioners the option of putting that money directly into their accounts so that they do not have to go in the bank”. Just about a year ago, a lady went in the bank, collected her \$3,000, went to buy a doubles and somebody grabbed the money and gone.

That last administration, they gave any thought to that they were exposing these senior citizens, to be walking with these large amounts of cash every month as a routine? And when they go back home, some neighbour who cuts the lawn, marking them and telling them, “Look, you better gey meh \$200 or else”, and they pass the money to be quiet because they cannot say—that is elderly abuse. That has existed for far too long. How we fought it and how are we fighting it?

For 18 months we worked with some 74,000 pensioners and got them to do the paper work. In four stages. We worked with the banks, we went back and did field visits, we checked that there was no elderly abuse with the social services and the police, then we went back to the bank and we signed up some 78,000 pensioners with direct deposit. So the money goes directly into their bank accounts, so no one can touch it and they can access it with the swipe of a card. “So a pensioner goes into Até Logo, take a shoe; yuh go in to the grocery, pay for some groceries; yuh want go Price Smart, swipe it away.” Safe, secure, no elderly abuse, care for the elderly, something that could never have been done before under the People’s—

**Mr. Roberts:** You want to buy a wig?

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** And Arouca/Maloney, the Member, Mr. Speaker, “ah want a probe for the \$2.4 billion”. Probe that!

**Mr. Sharma:** She must be talking about a different kind of probe.

**Mr. Roberts:** “You doh give them.”

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** Probe the fact that you did nothing for the pensioners, for their safety and their security while you were there.

So therefore, Mr. Speaker, in January 2013, the direct deposit has taken almost 80 per cent of the pensioners, and the rest they tell us, “Listen, leave that pension, nah, I doh get to go out. Meh son does come and pick me up and I does go and he does carry me for ice cream. So leave that.” The next 20 per cent, they

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want to go for that cheque for recreation, and in a democratic society we understand that. [*Interruption*]

In February 2013, the disability grant—

**Mr. Speaker:** Please, please, allow the Member. I am not hearing him. Please!

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** Mr. Speaker, at the cost of some \$236 million, the disability grant last year was increased from \$1,300 to \$1,500, giving increased purchasing power to some 24,100 differently abled.

**Mr. Sharma:** Well done. Well done.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** In February 2013, the special child grant was increased from \$800 to \$1,000, helping 2,336 persons. Mr. Speaker, I want to—you know, these accusations, I really do not know if I want to go through these accusations and if it worth—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** Deal with it nah man. Tell them.

**Mr. Roberts:** Deal with it. Deal with it.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** All right. Okay. Because what I was going to do was to do a 30-minute programme to refute all of your accusations by showing you the work that has been done.

All right, let us go to—[*Interruption*] I was planning not to, but my colleagues—all right. Let us go to your famous TT Card. All right, Mr. Hyp—MP for Laventille West.

**Hon. Member:** Hypocrite.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** He said:

“The Ministry of the People and Social Development promised to give each one of us on this side 50...and I got a list of 50 persons before school opened.”

He is referring here to school supplies. The last administration never bothered to give poor people, challenged people, hampers; never gave them a hamper for Christmas. While they were eating ham, lamb and jam, the poor people suffering without Crix—[*Interruption*]

**Mrs. Gopee-Scoon:** That is not true.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—and cheese.

**Mrs. Gopee-Scoon:** We gave hampers.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** In your constituency you do not have people who have food? Please? Mr. Speaker, let me focus my attention on you. They never thought about the poor people for Christmas, while they are having—  
[*Interruption*]

**Mrs. Gopee-Scoon:** That is not true. [*Inaudible*] yard fowl.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—they bar-b-quiring, while they are putting in the oven all kinds of—[*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Please, please.

**Dr. Moonilal:** I want to listen.

**Mrs. Gopee-Scoon:** But I cannot have him call me a yard fowl.

**Mr. Speaker:** Please, please. Members, could I ask you to at least observe Standing Order 40(b) and (c)? The crosstalk is interrupting the flow and the Hansard reporter is having difficulty. So I could ask you to allow the Member to speak in silence? On both sides, stop the crosstalk and allow the Member to speak in silence. Continue, hon. Minister of the People and Social Development.

**11.45 a.m.**

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. My colleague was saying while some people were currying yard fowl—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Sharma:** Yes. [*Inaudible*]

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** [*Laughter*] currying yard fowl—barbequing different types of meats, seasoning and preparing to put in their ovens, they are not thinking about the fella, the pensioner in the valley.

**Mr. Sharma:** Very true, very true!

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** They are not thinking about the family with 10 children; “they eh thinking bout no hampers”. This Government, this Prime Minister said, “Give the poor people food for Christmas under the people’s Ministry” and we were mandated to give 100 hampers to every Member of Parliament to give to the neediest of the neediest in the constituency. This Government did that for the first time. You know, when we did that, they say, “we eh wah that, our people go do without that”. Their leader said, “We eh wah no hampers, we doh want that, let the poor people suffer” until the poor people began to creep up and rise up and say, “Where are my hampers?”

**Miss Mc Donald:** Mr. Speaker, a misleading statement, please.

**Mr. Sharma:** “Yuh cyah say that!”

**Miss Mc Donald:** He did not!

**Mr. Speaker:** You are overruled. Continue!

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** Right. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That is a fact. [*Continuous crosstalk*]

You know, it was the first time that—and people have to understand that when you are doing a pilot project, you do not want to complicate arrangements for the first time you do it, so you have a pilot project that you run. So we say, listen—I volunteered my constituency, I said, “Listen, we doh want to put the Member for Moruga/Tableland, yuh know, out of sorts, he has to put diesel in the van and so on. We doh want to put Diego Martin out ah the way, he ha to gas up his vehicle too and come from Diego Martin.” Let us have it in the central of the country and let us have the army assist.

You know what the Leader of the Opposition said? He say, “And, by the way, in any case, I eh coming in no back road in central to pick up no hamper”.

**Hon. Member:** Oh lord!

**Dr. Moonilal:** He said that.

**Hon. Member:** “He doh care about the people.”

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** As if central Trinidad is not part of the landscape of Trinidad and Tobago. I mean, I could forgive the Member for Diego Martin Central who said, “Once I went to south—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** Once?

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—and I was amazed there were roads and drains and the roads were paved too”.

**Hon. Member:** How you get [*Inaudible*]

**Miss Hospedales:** That is not true. Speak the truth! [*Continuous crosstalk*]

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** He said “As I saw the road turn, I drove up”—I get it from the *Hansard*—he said, “I drove up and as I watch around the corner, the road was paved too”.

**Dr. Moonilal:** “It had human dey.”



**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** “Oh my! oh my! What ah marvel!”  
[*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Sharma:** “He thought it only had yard fowls dey!”

**Miss Hospedales:** Yes, he is overdoing it now.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** You must learn that you are part of the country of Trinidad and Tobago; [*Desk thumping*] that Icacos and Moruga and Toco and Sangre Grande are part of Trinidad and Tobago. Do not be Port of Spain-centric, they moved you out for that. [*Crosstalk*] Understand that you must go out and serve the people throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] and have mercy for them too.

**Hon. Member:** All the people!

**Mr. Sharma:** Well said!

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** All the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Miss Hospedales:** That is creating stories.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** But we will continue to give and “we give it to them, yuh know, we eh playing no politics with that”. We get it to the MPs and they—the only thing is that one of their MPs this last Christmas gone and take the Ministry bag and cover it and put their logo on it, but we will deal with that.

**Hon. Member:** “Oh good!” [*Laughter*]

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** We will deal with that. Somebody who is very verbose on that side, but we will deal with that to prevent those matters from—  
[*Continuous interruption and crosstalk*]

**Hon. Member:** Pat, you do that?

**Hon. Member:** La Brea?

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** I want to announce to this august House that for the 50 most challenged children in every constituency—

**Mrs. Gopee-Scoon:** When that coming?

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—they will receive from the Ministry. We have it in our possession; we are waiting until the Parliament—[*Interruption*]

**Mrs. Gopee-Scoon:** But school started!

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—debate has ended. Yeah, we know. And in Government, “yuh cyah do yuh own thing”.

**Mr. Sharma:** Correct! Correct!

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** “Yuh cyah go and pick up card and do yuh own thing.” They are devolved by the Permanent Secretary, and the legal head of the Ministry had to ensure that the contract was properly done with the bank. We waited our time and we told the people, “Please, do what you can, we will help in a few cases here and there, but you have to wait until proper procedure and process”—because you know if you rush something and they pick up on it from the people they have in the system, they coming right here and “licksin” every single Member of Parliament.

**Mr. Sharma:** Quite true!

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** They are not for the people, bandying about probe \$3 billion, disingenuous, knowing that \$2.4 billion is for the pension alone. But I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, as soon as the debate is finished and we get on to our MPs—and some of them are errant in supplying the list of 50 persons in their constituencies—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Sharma:** What a shame!

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—who needs the school supplies.

**Mrs. Mc Intosh:** “Needs?”

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—who need it. And I think I want to communicate with the people so I am not paying attention to grammar and English here too much, if you will excuse me, Ma’am. [*Crosstalk*] I want to talk to the people out there, Mr. Speaker, through you.

**Mr. De Coteau:** She is the principal!

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** They will get \$500 of school supplies and they will get 50 persons assisted in each constituency in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

So I turn to the Member for Laventille West and here is something he once said. You see, this is why—I do not want to take up too much of my time with this, but this is an allegation from the Member for Laventille West:

There are written instructions to continue to pay officers travelling and upkeep and they have not been entitled to in Social Welfare Division and Research. The post has not been approved by CPO as travelling. Madam Deputy Speaker, the recommendations were made for all officers to continue acting in the social welfare stream who do not have a certificate in social work. According to the requirements of a social welfare advisor, this must be qualified with a certificate in social work.

You see, the detail that they are coming here with little aberrances.

The social welfare director says—

I would not call the name of the—but he did, they do and they should desist from that. I appeal to the Members, if you have a problem with the Ministry, talk to the Minister, speak about the Minister, let the Minister speak to the Permanent Secretary. And in accordance with the way that Max Weber built the public service, you will get your lines of authority and accountability and bring people to task—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** Very good!

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—but do not use the hallowed halls of Parliament under the cloak of parliamentary privilege to destroy the reputation of young people who are eager to serve in our public service of Trinidad and Tobago—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Moonilal:** Well said! [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—to demotivate them and cause the system to not perform at the level that it is.

Anyhow, the first name: this matter was referred to the DPA and the officer was appointed in the lower office of Supervisor I. Again, misinformation in the public domain. The other name that was called, this matter was referred to the DPA and the officer was appointed in the lower office. Should I continue like this, all afternoon, all morning? I think I will do a documentary for them, “a CD”, where we will certainly answer all of the allegations and we will show them the work that is taking place despite some of the challenges that beset us in the Ministry of the People and Social Development.

**Mr. Sharma:** Move on, move on!

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you about the differently abled community. While we gave them \$200 increase last year at a cost of \$36 million, what we are doing for them is to affect their lives for time immemorial.

**Mr. Sharma:** Well done!

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** We are giving the differently abled community a new lease on life. We are raising from the ground, which is almost 95 per cent complete—Minister of Works and Infrastructure, 95 per cent complete?

**Dr. Rambachan:** Which one?

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** Centre for the differently abled.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Yeah, yeah.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** Ninety-five per cent complete. We are raising from the ground, with our own hands as a people, the first differently abled centre to be built by the people of Trinidad and Tobago and the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] It was modelled on a centre in Alabama when we worked with the volunteers of America in south-east America.

I want to tell you, Mr. Speaker, when we went there and we looked at the way that they were caring for the differently abled and the way that they had a policy that no one would be left behind and I saw the differently abled community being taught to cook, being taught to use the computer, being taught to use the gym— [*Interruption*] Yeah—when I saw them in classes and they were learning and engaging— [*Crosstalk*] yeah—in the processes of learning skills, I thought, I said but how do you all, I mean in the differently abled community— [*Continuous crosstalk*]

**Mr. Cadiz:** “Leave de boy alone!”

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** Mr. Speaker, I am getting serious difficulty to speak above the din of noise that is being created by these two ladies.

**Mr. Speaker:** No, no, no, not ladies, they are Members of Parliament.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** Members for Port of Spain South and Port of Spain North/St Ann’s who spoke at length— [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** You have my full protection, continue, please.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** Yes, thank you! [*Continuous crosstalk*] And they said to me the differently abled community is protected by legislation.

**Mr. Sharma:** You talk and we deliver!

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** Legislation and we have taken a first world model and transplanted it and built it even more beautifully than in Alabama. We have lifted the bar without legislation in Trinidad and Tobago to treat the differently abled community like everyone else, to bring back the differently

abled community as equal partners in the society in Trinidad and Tobago, and that \$11.5 million centre that we built for the people of Trinidad and Tobago will be a legacy to the differently abled community under the People's Partnership Government.

Mr. Speaker, in December 2012, we also launched, together with the Ministry of Transport, the ELDAMO project which is the Elderly and Differently Abled Mobile Service. The only part of Trinidad and Tobago where this service existed in a reliable manner was Port of Spain through the Port of Spain Rotary Club, and so if you want to dial a ride in Port of Spain, you could have dialled a ride as a differently abled community, and the Port of Spain Rotary Club facilitated this exercise. Why could this not have taken place in all parts of Trinidad and Tobago? Well, I want to tell you, Mr. Speaker, Tobago has three, south has, the east, the north, the west—everywhere you see the ELDAMO bus traversing the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Member:** “Take dem for a ride, nah!”

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** Information has come to me that some 13,000 rides have taken place in the short space of time.

**Mr. Cadiz:** No, no, incorrect—19,000.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** Nineteen thousand persons have been facilitated back and forth. Mr. Speaker, every Tuesday at my constituency office, the ELDAMO buses keep pulling up, bringing and taking away the differently abled community. Those people had nowhere to go and they keep thanking the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

With regard to the TT Card programme, we know that the household and budgetary survey tells us that poverty has dropped from 24 per cent to 17.4 per cent in the short time that we have been in power. [*Desk thumping*] How have we been able to do that? We have been able to do that by providing ambulatory food support immediately to the people. We hold dear to the mantra that you cannot postpone hunger. You could postpone going to the mall, you could postpone going to the market. “Yuh could postpone buying a new dress, yuh could postpone buying a new shoe”, but when a hungry man comes to you in your MP's office, you cannot postpone hunger. [*Desk thumping*]

We created the most innovative social technology product in this part of the world, which is the temporary food card which can give a person immediate

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access to food. Albeit with any new system, there will be attendant frailties, and there will be room for persons, maybe someone who is in fact delivering the card to give it to the wrong person because of a lack of proper assessment. That can happen if it is put in the wrong hand because we devolved this service over 14 regional offices and 41 MPs' offices throughout Trinidad and Tobago. There can be aberrances, but I will tell the national population if and when that comes to our attention, let the chips fall where they may and let the persons account to the TT Card programme for the delivery. [*Desk thumping*]

Because we had to balance interest, we had to say create a product that could be given very easily to the poor, to the weak, to the differently abled and challenged, and we had to say we have to trust the human beings in the programme who deliver that. So therefore we go and continue to deliver the temporary food card that has been the saviour for many a poor person in this country, and that has tided them over until they get their next salary, until things get better. But if there are any instances in the programme where there is abuse, it must be reported to the TT Card office to the Permanent Secretary and those matters and all matters will and are being investigated.

But, we have given out under our term—because of the Direct Impact campaign—you have to understand that from January 2010 to June 2010, this Ministry of the People and Social Development—I asked for the information—only attended to 3,000 persons in six months throughout 14 regional offices; only 3,000 persons, and I said, “Well, what is the poverty rate like?” They said, “Well, the poverty rate is about 24 per cent. I said, “So how much people we have in Trinidad and Tobago?” One point three million.

### **12.00 noon**

Therefore, if that is correct you should have at least 200,000 persons who are in need. So where are they? How can you only see 3,000 persons in six months? I say no, we have to reach out to the people. We have to go out there, there are lots of people—I remember the MP for Diego Martin Central said all the letters he wrote. I remember being a veterinarian and having a colleague, a friend who worked with me who had diabetes and he had part of his toe cut off. And I tried for two and a half years to get a food card for him.

He only got the food card three months after I became a Minister; and it took three months because the food card department was not working, it was not delivering; it was not so geared as to deliver. It was only geared to deliver to

networks, to social networks and I say social networks and I mean that because even now when we go out to the communities, PNM people say “oh God thank yuh, we never get this under de PNM.”

So I do not think they gave it out politically but social networks that could have had convoluted networks to the political networks but, however, never to the poor. And therefore we were able to give out, in the last three years, some 12,000 food cards. “Yuh know how we did it?” Because the first year with the Direct Impact campaigns, from that measly 3,010 persons they saw in the six months, the next six months, when we visited different parts of the country, we visited some 12,000 people throughout Trinidad and Tobago; a four-time increase in six months. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. De Coteau:** Well done, well done.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** The next year we took the figure to 30,000 and we are averaging, Mr. Speaker, between 50,000—75,000 persons who we interact with through the Direct Impact and Direct Effect [*Desk thumping*] campaigns throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

**Mr. Roberts:** Yes, man.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** But I take the point, giving out food card is not all. We need to get our people and move them from welfare to work. Everyone who accepts a donation or a grant or a facility from the State must account for it because we want this budget to get better and better. We want this budget to cut out some of the fat and focus on areas of growth and development. And therefore, Mr. Speaker, in the next two years you will never see a more aggressive approach to poverty reduction than you have ever seen before.

Mr. Speaker, we started off already at DRETCHI, the people waited years, those who are hearing impaired. Mr. Speaker, you know on April 09—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Caroni Central and Minister of the People and Social Development has expired.

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** You may continue, hon. Minister.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I was telling you that the persons who are hearing

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impaired, they wanted “a lil grant because yuh know they doh want to depend. They come to us and they say listen we doh want this lil cacadah, yuh know, we want to work, we want to get money and I have a lil business here, I does do word processing and type up things for people buh ah doh hah money to buy a computer, ah doh hah money for a good printer.”

We worked with them and on April 09, 2013, after years of crying in the wilderness, the poverty reduction programme launched a business training programme and 27 hearing-impaired persons were given \$5,000 for the first time. [*Desk thumping*] Fifty per cent went to materials and 50 per cent went towards a training programme: life skills for business, business planning, how to finance a micro business, marketing and record keeping.

Mr. Speaker, under the URP Social programme—you know, in central Trinidad and in south when you have a cerebral palsy child it is sometimes the last child that you see because “dey” parents have them in a back room because you know they do not want the child in the way and so on and sometimes when you go to people’s funeral or you go to “dey” prayer they would bring out the child and you ask how they getting by and they would give you their stories.

Under this Government we sat down with the cerebral palsy mothers and did not leave the room for eight hours and I went to Minister Mc Leod and I said Minister Mc Leod, we have a situation. These women—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—sorry. The Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. I went to the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre who had the responsibility for the URP programme and I said, listen they are unemployed, they want some relief “buh” hear what, they want a programme; they “doh” want it for free. They want to be in something that they could develop. And the MP for Pointe-a-Pierre spoke to a Mr. George, and he found a facility where a training vote existed in the Ministry, where they could be the caretakers of their children and be in a programme where they could move up to supervisor. And each cerebral palsy mother today receives \$84.50 a day from which they had never had a cent before.

**Mr. Roberts:** Well done, well done.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** Close to 500 mothers in Trinidad and Tobago benefit from this programme.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Fifteen in Couva South.



**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** Fifteen in the MP for Couva South's area alone and that is 15 people who had not a cent and had to be struggling with these children who have special dietary needs and special medical needs. Under the NSDP, we have had some difficulty in the moving of NSDP but I guarantee the Members of Parliament that it will involve a more holistic intervention.

Do you know that the National Social Development Programme, Mr. Speaker, when you go to electrify somebody's place, you go to electrify it, you know the people bawling, the children bawling because they "doh" have food? When you go to connect water, "yuh" connecting the water but "dey doh" have bathroom facilities to the back. When "yuh" go to do a house repair grant, there is a differently abled child inside there that they have no clue what to do. So, we said that this programme needs to be housed in a Ministry that can make a holistic approach to development of a particular home.

So that when the NSDP goes now, they go in partner with the TT Card programme and the social welfare officers to tackle the problems of the challenged, the needy, in a way that has never been done before, and this programme will be rolled out in this new financial year. Already 380 persons have benefited from electrification, 471 for minor house repairs. Mr. Speaker, so many have benefited from the people's Bridge of Hope where there is a cruel and twisted irony that where you have the extractive industries that take out the resources of our people from the earth, you have the highest levels of poverty.

Where we take out asphalt in La Brea, we have high poverty. Where we siphon millions of cubic feet of gas from the south-east—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Peters:** Mayaro.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—Mayaro and Guayaguayare, we have high levels of poverty. We have been lobbying—and where we have quarrying as well—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. De Coteau:** They passing through Moruga.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—the National Energy Corporation, the National Gas Corporation to give blood pressure kits, glucose kits, wheelchairs to the poor people who live in these communities, under the people's Bridge of Hope and we will expand this programme in this year.

We have also had the poverty reduction through empowerment social strategies where we use artistes to go into the communities such as Cocorite, get the youths into "deejaying" by teaching them broadcasting first and electrical

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installation and electronics, and then they participate in a programme where they can become deejays and there are other innovations that we want to bring on board, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. De Coteau:** Very good work.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** Mr. Speaker, as I said before, in the area of poverty reduction, we have sent a team to India where we have examined, just like the work done at the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, the incubator small businesses—and Trinidad and Tobago does not have the kind of poverty that is endemic in parts of India—and they combat this poverty by getting persons together, in a communal effort, with machinery that is ready-made so as to get someone into business.

We are partnering with the Indian Government, through the High Commission, to bring some of this equipment to small communities to run a pilot project. We will also have \$2 million which we will devolve to communities in the Grameen Bank method where we will give to NGOs who will then fund small persons to get into business through the Grameen model and in that combative effort we will take \$5 million to be injected into poverty reduction throughout Trinidad and Tobago in this fiscal year.

Mr. Speaker, we will continue to give the micro enterprise training grant. We have increased this figure. The last administration was never able to give more than \$250,000. Today, we have given 437 enterprise and training grants totalling \$2.162 million.

The People's arm of the Ministry of the People and Social Development is important in networking and connecting services to other state agencies. We have been building capacity in this regard and so the People's unit can now deal with matters that are dealt with in WASA, in T&TEC, in Self Help with the click of a finger and with the click of a button. Therefore, you would have heard in the contribution of the MP for Princes Town—public utilities—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. De Coteau:** Naparima.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—for Naparima, for Naparima—last night boasted about the successes of working with the people issues resolution unit. And every department, including the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, is building a unit where they can connect to the People's unit so that we truly have a Ministry of the people that is connected throughout the government service and we are building capacity in this regard.

Mr. Speaker, in the area of the socially displaced: when we came in to the Government and we looked at what was in place, it was for the Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development, Mr. Speaker, to deal with this issue, but every time someone was attacked on the streets, the Mayor of Port of Spain and others would clamour—what is the role of the Ministry of the People and Social Development, and I thought that while the Ministry of Planning had the overarching responsibility for planning of our capital city and other areas, that we as a Ministry should operationalize this issue of the street dwellers or the vagrants.

Mr. Speaker, it is now public record that for some two years we have had aggressive consultation, stakeholders' consultation, planning. We generated a Cabinet Note that facilitated \$18 million for a pilot project for six months. I am proud to say that that pilot project has generated enormous success.

**Hon. Member:** Well done.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** And I wish to publicly thank the Vision on a Mission through Mr. Wayne Chance who has been one of the proponents of that campaign; Mr. Abdul Aleem who was an advisor at that time also participated and our dear deceased brother Mr. William Latchman, not only helped spearhead that effort to take care of the socially displaced, but volunteered himself to head the deportees support unit, a task force that we created to deal with the deportees.

For the first time in Trinidad and Tobago, after knowing that there is a problem with deportees in the Caribbean that is a threat to our national security, the first effort was made by Mr. William Latchman. Eight months he struggled on that committee, Mr. Speaker, and passed away at one of our last consultations. Such was the gravity of the man.

When he came on board I asked Mr. Wayne Chance, I said we need to do something about deportees. Who is the man to chair this committee? And he said “boy”, he checked high and low, “there is only one man who could do this work.” I said “but he is involved with ex-prisoners with Vision on a Mission. He said “but dais de only man who have the energy and the vibes to do it.” And I said well let us go to the PS and discuss. And today I pay tribute to his memory and the work that he did for the Ministry of the People and Social Development, and we will benefit from that work as we build the deportees support unit.

Mr. Speaker, this is very important. People come here, I have met them, with the capacity to build bombs, to operate M16 automatic rifles, to put together a bomb that could blow up a building, and they are looking for a second chance at

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life and that is where we need to treat and engage them before they go into organized crime and give some of their knowledge about mafia and organized crime that existed in first world countries.

**12.1.5 p.m.**

So, this work is important. Today I am proud to tell you that with the Street Dwelling Programme we are going to rebuild the CSDP into a setting that will be a reformative environment for people; where you will have gym; you will have computer equipment; sporting facilities; where you will have training rooms; conference rooms; where you will train, engage, motivate the mind of the street dweller to return to productive society as a productive member. Today that programme has seen the reformation and work towards it of 160 persons in Trinidad and Tobago.

Three families have been united and at least four persons have gone back to productive employment already. Fifteen remain in an intensive training programme where we are hoping to get them rehabilitated soon. These were persons lying outside the doors of the Ministries and businesses in Trinidad and Tobago.

While there may be issues that we are treating with—because it is new things we are doing, innovation—it will be met by resistance. The public service has its way of checks and balances that keep you on track but it will also raise questions and deal with issues. But we are treating and dealing with them.

As I say that, I want to pay tribute to the Permanent Secretaries of the Ministry of the People and Social Development who stood as icons of the public service to build a new Ministry that some say could have never existed. I want to pay tribute to Mrs. Antonia Popplewell who stood with us and gave food to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, through the Direct Impact Programme. I want to pay tribute to Mrs. Christine Hosein—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Khan:** Sookram.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** Mrs. Christine Sookram.

**Hon. Member:** and Hosein.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** Christine Hosein is someone else. Mrs. Christine Sookram, who built the Cabinet Note to fight the issue of street dwelling in Trinidad and Tobago. I want to pay tribute to her, among many other things that she did, including appreciating the staff of the Ministry for the great work that they had done.

**Mr. Sharma:** Very good, very good. [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Khan:** They want my PS.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** I now want to pay tribute to my present PS, Mr. Simeon Yearwood, a man who is a professional of the highest order— [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Sharma:** Very good.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—and will stand any level of scrutiny in his management of the affairs and conduct of persons at the Ministry of the People and Social Development. Hats off, because I just want to say I have also had other DPSs and I want to thank them as well. I presently have DPS Hunte.

**Mr. Sharma:** They should pay tribute to you.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** Yes. I have given one of my PSs to my brother from Moruga/Tableland, Mrs. Jacinta Bailey-Sobers. I would like to thank them all.

Mr. Speaker, we have 144,000 persons who are elderly in the society. This is an ageing population. In 10 years' time that figure is expected to double.

**Mr. Sharma:** Marlene looks young.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** We have to begin to prepare for geriatric medicine, care and well-being from now. Many are living longer because we now know that health, exercise and diet—I want to commend the Minister of Health for the “Fight the Fat Campaign” [*Desk thumping*] that has educated the people of Trinidad and Tobago that healthy eating and active lifestyles make the difference.

I came from the budget debate and I did not have lunch. I did not go to Diego Martin. I went there four o'clock in the afternoon, without media, for the benefit of the Member for Diego Martin Central, but I went to Signature Hall in the constituency of Chaguanas East, the hon. Stephen Cadiz, to a seminar: teaching the elderly about their rights under the law, their rights under the Constitution, their rights in the Ministry of Health, their rights not to be abused and what are the facilities available to them and what are the facilities for them as NGOs. I was so lifted when they appreciated—

Do you know, for the first time, we are no longer building buildings for senior activity centres? Why build buildings, when all the elderly persons are in the mandir, the temple and the church? We will continue to build the buildings, of course, because not everybody—as my friend, the MP for Mayaro said, people

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have a right not to belong to the temples, churches, and mosques. So we will facilitate them, but we can facilitate 95 per cent of our population. If the temple has a room, we will furnish it with computers. We will put the gym equipment. With this approach in Gasparillo, Siparia and Preysal in the pilots and with one in the East-West Corridor as a pilot, we are doing them. We have done three already. We are working towards three and we are going to do 15 before year's end. That is the pace we are moving at with the senior activity centres. So we are working. We have had public fora throughout Trinidad and in Tobago.

My Minister in the Ministry of the People and Social Development has the intellectual prowess of an academic giant in any luminary, academic institution in Trinidad and Tobago. Her brilliance is poured into the mix when we are brainstorming at the Ministry to come out with innovative programmes and she has the common touch of the people when she moves through—[*Desk thumping*]*—*the Member for Tobago East, the hon. Vernella Alleyne-Toppin, who is an instrumental part of the change axis at the Ministry of the People and Social Development.

Mr. Speaker, this Government—how much time do I have?

**Mr. De Coteau:** “Just close up yuh notes dey man. Talk nah, talk nah.”

**Mr. Cadiz:** “Gih dem, man.”

**Mr. De Coteau:** “Gih dem. Gih dem.”

**Mr. Cadiz:** “Dey doh like to hear.”

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. De Coteau:** Talk about your constituency.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** Yes, I think I will—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. De Coteau:** Talk about your constituency.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** It has been quite a riveting—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Cadiz:** Very much so.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—50 minutes there. We have launched the *People's Platform—Service in Action*. This book details three years of achievements of the Ministry of the People and Social Development and I will make a copy available to all Members of Parliament—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Rambachan:** Hold it up, hold it up.

[*Dr. Ramadharsingh holds up book*]

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—so that they will see—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Khan:** “Leh we see de front.”

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—the work that is taking place—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Rambachan:** Beautiful.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—at the Ministry of the People and Social Development.

**Mr. De Coteau:** Show the Speaker.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Nice, nice.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** Three years of achievements.

Caroni Central, for me, is the centre of the world. When I stand on the ridges of the Central Range in Flanagin Town—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Sharma:** Well said.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—and I look out to the flowing fields that touch the verges of the Point Lisas Estate—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. De Coteau:** You see the Trinity Hills.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—and waves its way into the refinery at Pointe-a-Pierre—

**Hon. Members:** Ohhhh!

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—on the shoreline, and I look out to my old home in Rousillac in the south-west peninsula, I am moved almost as if to be speechless with the beauty that enraptures me.

**Mr. Cadiz:** “Tell dem how tuh find Rousillac.”

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** But then, that silence does not last for long, because as I “waft” my head to the north of the ridges—[*Interruption*]

**Miss Hospedales:** “Waft”?

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** I see the swamp lands of Caroni leading its way into the mountains of the Northern Range, the blue mountains of the Northern Range that shelter the warm coastline of Maracas and Blanchisseuse and

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I say what a beautiful Trinidad and Tobago, but what a powerful place it is to be in Caroni Central, the centre of Trinidad and Tobago and indeed the centre of the world.

A place so beautiful can only be adorned with roads and drains because the rest of it—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. De Coteau:** That was neglected at one time.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—is so picturesque.

Mr. Speaker, I am not the MP, like many of us, to clamour for this and that, but I ask and I wait and I deliver. They talk, we deliver. As we speak, they are putting the final touches on what is the main artery in Caroni Central, the Mission Road in Freeport. It is called the Mission Road because it is that road where the missionaries used to go and search out the poor people and bring them into the civilization and the education process. Yesterday the missionaries gave us a track. Today we give access to the entire Caroni Central through the Mission Road, Freeport—\$8 million and beautiful paving and drains being done.

**Dr. Rambachan:** “Dey widen the road too.”

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** We are building homework centres throughout the constituency. We have just completed one at Carlsen Field—one of the poorest areas in Caroni Central—and we have 12 computers available for those young ones. They come out of their homes, board houses, just above water. We have built five houses there, just like the self-help, the URP Social Direct Construct houses. Those people are not wealthy persons.

**Dr. Rambachan:** They are poor.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** But education is the surest way out of poverty. Not everyone is an Anil Roberts, MP for D’Abadie/O’Meara—[*Interruption*]

**Miss Cox:** He did not get—

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—or a Brian Lara. Not everyone is a Machel Montano, but with the computer they can open up their minds and cerebrate and that can take them to any part of the world.

I make the point, Mr. Speaker, over the last two years, I have been a second-year and third-year student at the University of London and I received, very recently, my degree, second class honours in LLB, from the University of London. [*Desk thumping*]



**Hon. Member:** Very good.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** I say not for my own self, but to inspire and motivate the youths of Trinidad and Tobago that if—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. De Coteau:** Couva North.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—with a job with these long hours and heavy demand in schedules one can do it, you, the person whose father is a whacker man and you feel you can, yes you can; the girl whose father is a taxi driver and does not have money to buy the fancy outfits, if you think you can, yes you can. [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Member:** Yes you can.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** I say to the person who is the labourer, the father is a labourer and he is not earning enough money, save it, work yourself, get a little part-time job, you can do it, yes you can. Trinidad and Tobago, yes you can.

**Hon. Member:** Use what you have to do what you want.

**Miss Cox:** “You is Obama boy.”

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** Use what you have until you get what you want. Do you know what? I am going to be like some of my colleagues: Rambaran Trace, John Persad Road, Yaraba, Gail Trace, Ganga Bissoon, Arena Road, Chickland Village, Ucariri Road, Siewdas Road, Take Madoo, Tadeas, New Gunness, Bissessar—“road all over de place.”

**Mr. De Coteau:** Read it man, read it.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** Cashew Gardens, Polo Ground, Bartlett, Preysal, Crown Trace, Connector Road, Haniff Trace Extension, Temple Street, Ucariri Road, Nelson Road, Sankar Road, Maraj Lane, Robbie Lane, John Persad Street—“box drain all over de place.” There are many to be done but we will do it in time. We will do it in concert with the villagers. We will do them through the PURE. We will do them through the local government. We will do them through the RuDeCott. We will do them through the self-help. We will do them through the URP and if it cannot be done, we will do it together, you, me, the village and the community. We will buy cement. We will buy gravel. We will buy sand, together and we will fix the drains of Caroni Central, one by one, until we get the kind of constituency that we want it to be.

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Water mains have been laid on the Freeport Mission Road from Calcutta No. 1 to the tunnel, in Robbie Lane, Maraj Avenue, Arena to St. Mary's Junction. I recently did Tewarie Circular North, Lime Fruit Road, Seecharan Trace, Palmiste Road—[*Interruption*]

**Miss Cox:** Seecharan Trace?

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** Cuffie Street, Chickland, Commonwealth Ground. We built a greenhouse for agriculture. We have had tours.

I want to thank my ministerial colleagues. The Minister of Works came there, both Minister Emmanuel George and Minister Rambachan. I have had Minister Cadiz in my constituency. I have had Minister Griffith in my constituency. I have had Minister Khan in my constituency. I have had Minister Gopeesingh, who is going to build a library at Carlsen Field.

**Mr. De Coteau:** “Ah hope ah geh one in Moruga boy.”

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** Mr. Speaker, I have conducted—[*Interruption*]

**Miss Cox:** “We cyah geh one in Morvant.”

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** I have conducted a total—[*Interruption*]

**Miss Cox:** I want everything.

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:**—of 53 walkabouts in my constituency over the three years that we have been in office. We have built five bridges that were broken down. We have repaired six schools. It is a work in progress but certainly we are making great headway in that regard.

**Dr. Rambachan:** “Tell dem man, tell dem.”

**Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:** Mr. Speaker, we are not perfect. We are not infallible in any way and the human experience is one where we make mistakes. Mahatma Gandhi said that if the freedom came with the conditionality that he could not have made mistakes, he wished for that freedom not at all.

**12.30 p.m.**

We live and we learn. We appreciate the comments of the Opposition if they are constructive. When they are monotonous and when they are just destructive and irrational, we cannot treat with those, but we work with you and we work with you at your level. We work with you the way that you work with us. We will work with anybody because if you do not have equity, you will destroy your

society. You must treat all equitable and that is the mantra and philosophy of the Ministry of the People and Social Development. We will reach out to all communities. We will walk with you. We will talk with you. We will treat you and we will engage with you.

Our future, the future of Trinidad and Tobago lies with the youths between the ages of eight and 14. I want to commend the Minister of Sport with the LifeSport programme for saving some of the youths of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] We will have to find ways and means of funding those programmes to keep them sustainable for our communities. But our youths must be engaged, they must be felt to be part of the process, not alienated. We must reach a hand out to them and as they walk up the mountain of getting themselves into a productive society, I ask them when they reach the top of that mountain, to extend their hand downwards and lift another youth with them.

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

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, we have four speakers and we have to conclude our debate by 7.50 p.m. this evening. So in order to give all the speakers their full 75 minutes, I am asking you to return here at 1.20. So we will just have 50 minutes for lunch and not the normal hour. So this sitting is now suspended until 1.20 p.m.

**12.32 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**1.20 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

**Mr. Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training (Sen. The Hon. Fazal Karim):** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Members of this honourable House, let me thank the Leader of Government Business for inviting me to join in this debate. Although at short notice, I am very happy to be here among my colleagues.

**Mr. Sharma:** “We know yuh is a Boy Scout, and yuh always prepared.”

**Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:** As I am speaking, I am seeing the Member for Diego Martin North/East who I had the pleasure to work under, while I was at the National Training Agency.

**Mr. Sharma:** “How he treated yuh?”

**Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:** He was a good boss. Mr. Speaker, I want to say that it is my pleasure once again to join here, and let me also indicate, that I am

extremely pleased and delighted with the offer, and the kindness and the support of the hon. Prime Minister, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar and the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy, Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai, for once again emphasizing a very strong budget component for education and training.

Mr. Speaker, I think it might be useful for me to enumerate for the House and the national community, what have been the allocations over the past couple of years under the People's Partnership. In 2010/2011, education and training received a total allocation of \$8.3 billion out of the budget total of \$49 billion. In 2011/2012, this figure increased to \$8.7 billion out of a total of \$54.6 billion. In 2012/2013, it went up to \$9.1 billion out of a total of \$58.4 billion, and in 2013/2014, the most recent budget, it continues to be in this case, the highest that the education and training sector has ever gotten in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, \$9.8 billion out of a total of \$61.3 billion budget.

This continues to show the emphasis of the People's Partnership Government on human capital development. What does this mean? It means, as a matter of fact, that we are placing great emphasis on ensuring that our people skills, that the talent of Trinidad and Tobago, our men and women are engaged in the seeking of knowledge, education and training, as we move towards being that very competitive nation that we expect to be.

Mr. Speaker, you will recall that our first year as a Government, the budget was entitled: Facing the Issues, Turning the Economy Around. Our second budget was entitled: From Steady Foundation to Economic Transformation. The third entitlement was: Stimulating Growth, Generating Prosperity. And this fourth one, a progressive and developmental budget as well, is entitled and aptly theme: Sustaining Growth, Securing Prosperity.

My contribution is also going to be guided in terms of my contribution and the contribution of the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training by two publications, one of which I had the pleasure to read while I was visiting that country, written by a former President of India called His Excellency APJ Abdul Kalam in a book entitled: *Target 3 Billion*; knowledge is a prerequisite to prosperity.

There are many who would have spoken as well and you would have seen recently the importance of education, and that was emphasized by a young girl 16 years of age, when she was invited by the President General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon to address, on her 16th birthday, the UN. She was talking about the emphasis, the focus of education and by extension, training for young girls.

I refer here, Mr. Speaker, to Malala Yousafzai, a Pakistani, who in a sense was maltreated, who was shot by the Taliban in Pakistan but vowed that she would continue to stand up for education. It is people like these whose lives we look at and who, in terms of the context of Trinidad and Tobago, we continue to focus our people, our young boys and girls, our men and women, in terms of building this sustainable economy, in terms of building this prosperous nation.

Mr. Speaker, as I indicated to you about the amount of money that has been spent, I want to tell you that to the Ministry itself, the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, we have gotten, together with my colleague Minister in the Lower House, Minister Gopeesingh as I indicated, the largest portion of the budget. In terms of the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, the total capital budget we received was \$521.5 million, while that of my colleague would have received \$709.7 million. We totalled, in fact, in the recurrent expenditure for the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, \$2.2 billion with an allocation of \$650 million for the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses, while my colleague would have totalled \$4.1 billion in terms of the recurrent expenditure. That gave us a total of 24 per cent of the total budget or \$9.8 billion to education and training. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, as I am here and I want to put on the table some of the accomplishments and the work of the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training. Let me say that the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses continues to be secured and expanded.

One of the promises of the People's Partnership Government is that in our manifesto of 2010, item No. 2 of the 120-day action plan, we indicated there that we will secure and expand the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses.

Mr. Speaker, contrary to much of the propaganda at that time, that a new incoming Government—and we were well on the way to assuming office—would be a threat to the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses, I want to say that the People's Partnership Government, led by the hon. Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar has maintained that promise. We have secured the GATE Programme and for the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, expanded it to include technical and vocational training. [*Desk thumping*]

**1.30 p.m.**

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** That was their propaganda.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:** Mr. Speaker, it seems as though propaganda is making the rounds again and what is being said is that the GATE Programme is under threat. I want to tell you that the GATE Programme is under threat by my

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friends next door, on the other side, because I was here a few months ago and I was invited by the Leader to contribute to the debate here and the Motion that was placed before this House was the GATE Programme, the Government Assistance for Tertiary Education. I had to say immediately that we were debating the wrong item—this issue. The GATE Programme stands for Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses.

Let me say that it followed and predicated on its original platform of the UNC in its previous incarnation—the innovative programme of Dollar for Dollar. I want to make it abundantly clear again, Mr. Speaker, as I am here. I am listening to people and I am reading in the newspapers and two persons I will make mention of: one in particular, this lady, is saying that we should consider asking students to pay back 50 per cent of the cost of tuition when they graduate. Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you categorically that is no position and we have no intention of doing that from the People’s Partnership Government. [*Desk thumping*]

We will continue to support the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses at the undergraduate level, 100 per cent; at the postgraduate level, 50 per cent—the postgraduate here meaning the masters and doctoral levels.

Mr. Speaker, you will recall in the budget presentation of the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy last year, we said that what we wanted to do was rather to look at wastages—and I am using wastages here in the context of misalignment of programmes of education and training to the national development strategy of the country. We wanted to make sure that we “efficiency” the GATE programme.

When we talk about efficiency in the GATE Programme, I want to give you an example. What is happening is that you have some persons who I call programme hoppers—they go from one programme to the next programme whether it is in the vocational sector or in the academic sector. They simply go to a programme in the day and they join a next programme in the evening and they benefit from two stipends as it were. The Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago has approved a new initiative called the GATE e-services project and that is going to ensure that we have real time data for every student in the tertiary sector.

Mr. Speaker, as we engage in this discussion here today, the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy would have told you in his budget presentation that there are approximately 59,000 persons now in the tertiary sector. I am pleased to say that this Government, when we came into office in 2010, we made a commitment that, by 2015, we are going to move towards a target of 60 per cent

in the tertiary sector. I want to tell you, Mr. Speaker—I have great news to tell this country—that we are almost to that point and I am convinced that by 2015 we will meet that target, if not exceed it. That is a commitment we have.

I want to also indicate that what we are doing in terms of the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses is that we have asked the institutions to ensure that, both in terms of the supply side—and I talk here about the institutions who will be receiving our boys and girls, our students—to make sure that they are properly advised before they engage in tertiary studies.

What we are seeing here is that we have this phenomenon of the mismatch of skills that we have inherited—something that the world is seeing as a phenomenon that we need to correct. The mismatch of skills really relates to a situation where we are having persons pursuing education and training at the end of which there is little hope for jobs. Therefore, we want to make sure that we have the alignment of the economic development strategy with the education development strategy, and that is, we must be careful not to engage in further exacerbating the problem of what I call the “graduate glut” or the “discouraged graduate”.

I define the “graduate glut” as a phenomenon where persons are entering the tertiary sector; they are pursuing qualifications at the end of which they now recognize there are no jobs, so we are increasing the statistics of persons who are graduating and not employed. In fact, my colleague here, the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development—I was following his contribution in this House and he was making reference to the fact that we have a concern for the number of persons who are graduating but who are underemployed—that is, that they are doing jobs not concomitant or in consonance with the qualifications that they would have graduated with.

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you what we are doing in this regard. How can we correct a situation like this? One of the ways in which we attempt to correct this situation, this “discouraged graduate” as I call that individual—and I want to say that the “discouraged graduate” is also defined as someone who applies for jobs—many applications have been sent out, and sometimes do not have the courtesy of a reply because firms and conglomerates simply do not have these vacancies.

I give you the response now in terms of how we are going to deal with this situation. The question always is that you have identified a problem, so what is your solution? Well, one of the solutions that we have engaged in—and this started two years ago—is that we have launched for the first time in Trinidad and Tobago, two state-of-the-art mobile facilities called the jobs and career coaches.

On those buses, you can find any course you want to do in the tertiary sector, any skills training programme; whether they are accredited; institutions that are registered; what is the cost of these programmes; where they are available; and, Mr. Speaker, I want to tell that even if you do not know how to apply for a job, how to write letters, we have trained counsellors on these mobile facilities that will sit and guide you. Even when you write that letter of application and you are asked to attach your curriculum vitae, your résumé, we are also assisting you to prepare that résumé. Even when you send in that résumé and you are now asked to come to an interview, if you do not know how to be interviewed properly, we train you on that facility.

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you that this is an innovation that has been very responsive by the national community and, as a People's Partnership Government, that will be one of the legacies of this Government. Never before!

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you what is another legacy project in terms of education and training. I did indicate to you, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House, that very often we have persons who are graduating from the tertiary sector. On the average, we have approximately 5,000 students graduate every year. We have 59,000 students in the tertiary sector and we want to be able to tell our graduates, even before they graduate, where they can get these jobs.

Mr. Speaker, you will not believe I am facing, as Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, the situation where we have persons applying to do a second first degree and when you are asking why that is happening, they are saying, "Well, this is not the degree I wanted to do because I did not get my first choice to do my degree." Many of my colleagues are graduates of the University of the West Indies and other institutions and sometimes we apply for our first; we do not get our second choice or the third choice and, because we want to be in the tertiary sector, because we do not want to stay at home, because we want to make sure that our self-esteem for study is fulfilled and that we are not left behind with our friends, we pursue our first degree at an institution to be in academia, to be in that atmosphere, to be in that environment, to be in that ethos and we graduate and then realize that is not what we wanted to do.

Mr. Speaker, you have the other phenomenon where, now that you have graduated, the jobs that you are applying for, you recognize now that "I do not have the qualifications to fit that job and I may as well go and do a second first degree".

We want to cut that out. How will we? Again, the question is how will you address that situation? Well, we are attempting to address that situation, Mr.



Speaker, with another innovation out of this Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training. For the first time in the history of this country, we have produced what I call the jobs report. What is the jobs report? I came across that idea just like the weather report. You sit before prime time television and you look at the weather report nightly that tells you tomorrow is rain, the other day is sun, and the third day is a combination of rain and sun. I said to myself, why not the jobs report? Why can we not tell our boys, our girls, our citizens who are seated at home, what are the job vacancies that exist now, by sectors, and what are the job vacancies that will exist in the next few years?

Therefore, I am going to tell you what I am focusing on. I am focusing on the work force of the future. The work force of the future will make informed decisions on what I call the three Ds, and the three Ds are “data-driven decisions”. The jobs report is an example of data-driven decision. You will only be able to make those decisions if you know, for example, what is happening in our energy sector, what is happening in the maritime sector, what is happening in the tourism/hospitality sector, what is happening in the ICT sector.

I have always said—and I see one of my colleagues next door who has been foremost in the education system and we often, when we meet sometimes, chat about the GATE Programme. I know for a fact that her heart is also in education. I am sure that she will agree with some of the initiatives that we are taking because the graduates of the secondary schools, when they go into the tertiary sector, are the ones that are closest to our workforce. Therefore, we must give them information.

We will give them information, for example—my colleague on the other side will know—what we used to call career guidance seminars in secondary schools. We still have it and, in fact, for the first time again in the history of this country we had a joint initiative with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training where over 50,000 of our secondary school students were exposed, by regions, to career guidance seminars, to career counselling. [*Desk thumping*]

That is how we are going to address this phenomenon, this mismatch of skills and, therefore, Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you that I believe we are on the right track. This information must also be available. I see one of my colleagues, who was a former principal of the Palo Seco Secondary School, a person who worked in the former Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education and who would know what I am talking about as well.

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I want to tell him, as he sits, that we will make a commitment that one of the achievements of this Ministry and this Government is that in this fiscal year we will open the Palo Seco NESC facility. We have expanded the facility of the NESC in La Brea. [*Crosstalk*]

We are going to expand classes in the maritime sector down there as well. In fact, when I was the CEO in the National Training Agency, I remember doing a study of the north-west peninsula. We have that study, and I have come back as Minister now to look at that study which I had been a part of developing. This is not development in one part of the country. This is development across Trinidad and Tobago.

As I say Tobago, I know one of my colleagues yesterday—I was listening to the debate here—and he was saying that we made a commitment about the integrated campus in Tobago of UTT, COSTAATT and UWI. That is going to happen and my colleague, Minister Dr. Delmon Baker, we are about that position now where we are securing the land. I want to give the commitment that that promise will materialize. This will not be a promise that will never materialize and I am not going to tell you the acronym for that. Promises that we make will materialize.

Mr. Speaker, as I tell you about some of the accomplishments of the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training—and I see my colleague from Tobago—for the first time in the history of this country, again UTT is in Tobago with the teachers, the B.Ed programme. Previous to now, teachers had to travel to Trinidad. Why should that be happening in the 21st Century? We have airlines, yes; we have boat service and so on, yes, but there is a price that you pay when you leave your home to study somewhere else and we have corrected that situation. We have launched the Bachelors in Education programmes at the YTEPP/MIC Technology Centre and now we have the education campus located in Scarborough, Tobago, so that persons can stay there and benefit from those programmes.

Mr. Speaker, as I engage in the expansion of this sector, I want to tell you as well that I want to acknowledge the contributions of all of my colleagues, but also to congratulate the hon. Minister. At that time, he was Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs.

I think this country is going to be impressed and really blessed when we see how we have transformed a multimillion-dollar facility on over 20 acres of land that was simply sitting there idle and decaying. Mr. Speaker, you will not believe that that facility, which has a 200-bed capacity, was home to one class, a music class from the community, that had 10 persons in that music class.

When I asked my colleague to let me have that facility, immediately he said, “Done!” The Cabinet Note was brought forward and I received that. Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you that we have students now on the ground and we are awaiting a date from the hon. Prime Minister to open the El Dorado Nurses Training Academy and Allied Health Services. [*Desk thumping*] I also want to thank my colleague as well, Cabinet colleague, the Minister of Health, for the great support that he has given.

**1.45 p.m.**

We have over 3,000 vacancies for nurses in this country, and these are the opportunities we are going to use. This is the opportunity, as Minister Moonilal spoke about, in terms of the teaching hospital at San Fernando and UWI. This is going to be the expansion in terms of COSTAATT.

For the first time, again, in the history of Trinidad and Tobago—we talk about development all around but it was skewed development. It was not an equity system of development because if it were that, I want to ask you, what had happened to those persons who live in the north-east part of this country? Who live from Arima—and I see the Member of Parliament for Arima—to Toco, to Manzanilla, to Sangre Grande, to Rio Claro, to Guayaguayare, to Biche, to Plum Mitan to Kernahan. “What happen to them?” They are not people of this country too? And, therefore, we open for the first time in Trinidad and Tobago, in the history under the People’s Partnership Government, the COSTAATT Campus in Sangre Grande. That is an accomplishment. [*Desk thumping*] We have the Member of Parliament here for Toco/Sangre Grande; we have the Member of Parliament as well for Cumuto/Manzanilla. We are going to continue.

I want to tell you, as I am on the roll with COSTAATT, COSTAATT is expanding in Tobago as well, and we are going to have the polycam treatment in terms of teaching facility, where we can stay in Trinidad and share lectures with Tobago and vice versa. We have expanded the medical teaching facilities by utilizing, again, the technology, where we can sit in Mount Hope and train doctors in San Fernando. That is happening as we speak. You cannot continue to focus on the building of bricks and mortar and walls and building if you want to increase participation in the tertiary sector.

Mr. Speaker, as we speak, we have now a phenomenon in the world called M-O-O-C-S—MOOCS, a phenomenon in the world. [*Crosstalk*] I am not saying—I am saying it is a phenomenon in the world in terms of MOOCS, and the MOOCS is called, when you define it: M—Massive, O—Open, O—Online, C—Courses. That

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is the way in which the world is going now. These programmes are available and we talk here about Udacity, Coursera, edX, FutureLearn, all of these. That is how you are going to build the brains, which I have called in my Ministry now, “unleashing the human potential”. You cannot wait. This country cannot wait anymore.

You look at the Global and Innovation Index; read Prof. Soumitra Dutta in his publication of 2013, and he will tell you that the countries that come one, two and three in the world would be Switzerland—and in 2013 Switzerland again topped the world—Sweden and, guess who? Singapore. I often make reference to Singapore. Tobago is 116 square miles. My colleague texted me that “de other day” when I was confirming the square mileage of Tobago.

Singapore: we are seven times the size of Singapore, and you could look at the developmental path of Singapore. You may say other things about it. You could look at South Korea; you could look at Thailand; you could look at Vietnam; you could look at Japan. I know reference was made here yesterday about Barbados, but I will deal with the competitiveness index later on when I speak in the Senate. I have the response to that.

In fact, I want to tell you, for those of you who may know or may not know, when Barbados computes the tertiary participation rate it includes students who are at A levels. That is a major difference with Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados. When you are looking—as a matter of fact, you know sometimes, many of us who would have done UC 101 and would have done statistics in universities, there is a book actually written, you know—I cannot remember the author now—*How to Lie with Statistics*.

**Mr. Sharma:** PNM use it all the time.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:** But we will talk about those when I bring the figures in the Senate, in the other place. I will be able to justify and to validate the findings of the global index or indices.

Mr. Speaker, I was just on the point of talking about the expansion and the achievements of the tertiary sector. Mr. Speaker, when we look at the MYPART Programme, I want to say that when the MILAT, MYPART and CCC programmes were conceived, they were conceived in response to a particular niche market—our students—in some cases, those who are falling out the system and those who needed special attention. But the point I want to make to you, Mr. Speaker, and Members of this House is that only under this Government has the MYPART Programme been expanded from its original location. Let me tell you the

example. I wish I had the data here before me. I probably have it. I will tell you the amount of moneys that have been spent on the MYPART Programme at its one single and only location, at the former Mausica Teachers' College.

And, therefore, Mr. Speaker, we must be always very careful when we talk about how we have increase in access and equality of opportunity. I have always said that education makes one trainable; training makes one employable; and the right attitude keeps us in employment. Therefore, when we look at the MYPART Programme which is the Military-Led Youth Programme of Apprenticeship and Reorientation Training, that programme was this year—sorry last year—moved from the Ministry of National Security on the realignment of portfolios to the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training. For the first time, in the history of this country, the MYPART Programme has moved to central and south Trinidad. What was happening before? Where was this access?

I want to tell you how easy it was for us to move it, so that other boys—other students in other parts of the country—could have access to it, and we have not compromised the integrity of the programme. Let me tell you how easy it was to do it. I spoke with my colleague, Minister Coudray, at the time, who was in the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development, under whom the youth camps came. I asked her whether it was possible to expand the MYPART Programme because what was happening is that while the MYPART Programme was at one location at Mausica, the skills training part of it—which is a very important component of that programme—was being delivered through the NESC, the National Energy Skills Centre.

I was saying that if we have NESC's in other parts of the country, then we could conduct the practical training, the hands-on training, at those centres. As my friend from the education system will know, in terms of Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy of the cognitive, the affective and the psychomotor domains or the skills, we could deliver those at different venues, but I want to tell you what was missing. We did not have the dormitory facilities. And how did we attempt to get the dormitory facilities? Very simple.

We looked at where we had the youth camps or the YDACs or the youth apprenticeships centres. It is called YDACs, Y-D-A-C-S, the Youth Apprenticeship Development Centres, youth camps. We found that in central Trinidad we had the Presto Praesto Youth Camp in Freeport. In south Trinidad, we had the Chatham Youth Camp in Point Fortin, and when we visited those youth camps, Mr. Speaker, there was idle capacity in those youth camps.

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I am speaking here about dormitory facilities because—I am repeating that the only thing that was missing from the programme moving out would have been dormitory facilities, and we had the benefit of the dormitory facilities. So you had the dormitory facilities, the living facilities, where you can conduct your discipline activities of training, and we had—so that was the residentiary part—and then we had the actual hands-on training, which was at the NESC in Point Lisas and the NESC in Point Fortin.

I want to tell you that we had recently a display with the Minister in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy in the Couva South constituency, where the NESC is located. We had a wonderful excellent display from the cadets of the MYPART Programme in Couva for independence but, very importantly, we now have 48 persons. That would have been 48 boys of Trinidad and Tobago who may have never had access to that programme had it stayed only in the north. [*Desk thumping*]

And, therefore, as my colleague next door is nodding as well, in terms of his agreement with that expansionism theory of the Ministry, I want to tell you and I want to say to him—because he is a proud graduate of that and he is a proud protagonist. He continues to be in the vanguard for the reintroduction or the re-philosophization, if I may use that, of the trade school concept.

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you that many of the technocrats of Trinidad and Tobago today are the proud graduates of the trade schools—whether it be of Texaco, of T&TEC of Caroni (1975) Limited. Many of them would have contributed to building what we call today, and what we see as being proud in Trinidad and Tobago, the Point Lisas Industrial Estate. Those persons who worked in Texaco, who worked in Caroni, who worked in W.R. Grace, those were the people who contributed—T&TEC and so on—to that developmental strategy that we call Point Lisas today.

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you that I am hoping that by tomorrow—we have already had the approval of the note—we will have the confirmation of the note by minute—that, again, we are reintroducing a new initiative in Point Lisas called the Point Lisas Industrial Apprenticeship Programme. [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Technical education.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:** Technical education. Mr. Speaker, I want to also take this opportunity to congratulate and thank my Cabinet colleague, the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, for contributing \$6.2 million to that initiative. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I want to also give the Member of Parliament for Pointe-a-Pierre the assurance that we are revisiting the MIC Technology Centre, which used to be the trade school of Texaco on the very location—because I remember as a boy going to school at Presentation College, San Fernando, and we would pass and use the bus—I was not a wealthy fella, I had to take the PTSC bus and go down to San Fernando—and I remember seeing that trade school. I remember it was the green galvanize of that trade school. I want to give the Member of Parliament, my Cabinet colleague, the assurance that we are going to be revisiting the MIC Technology Centre to re-contextualize it in terms of the Petrotrin MIC Trade School in Pointe-a-Pierre. [*Desk thumping*]

I told my friend from La Brea, the Member of Parliament for La Brea too, that because of the proximity of the Santa Flora NESC facility to Petrotrin of Santa Flora—that too—we will be able to have that nexus and that network. We do not want to re-invent the wheel. Wherever we have facilities; wherever we have hospitals, for example, and we have institutions that are nearby, we can expand the medical services; we can expand training and teaching, utilizing the infrastructure, even in Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, as we move on, I also want to make mention of the PTSC Trade School, which I had the privilege to launch with Minister Sharma before as Minister of Transport, and that will continue with my colleague Minister here, Minister Cadiz. And, again, we want to also be expanding that facility to the VMCOTT PTSC facilities in San Fernando. We already did it in Tobago, and I am saying, why not?

Mr. Speaker, we know very clearly, we have seen it in the world—when you look at the newspaper today—as the Minister of Foreign Affairs is now entering I can tell you—I am sure he is very much aware—that as we speak, in terms of Greece, they are facing over 27 per cent unemployment. Fortunately for us in Trinidad and Tobago, we are in single digits and we are reducing and we will continue to reduce because we are going to be aligning the developmental strategy in the education system—the tertiary education system—with education and jobs. That is the emphasis.

The question has always been: why are you studying? Why do you want to pursue an education? Is it only for esoteric means? Is it only for another “E” in terms of esteem, or is it also for another “E” in terms of employment? And, therefore, Mr. Speaker, I want to tell my friends in the Lower House that what I have embarked upon is something called NEET—N-E-E-T. N-E-E-T means those who are “not in education, employment and training”. NEETs—those who are not in

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education, employment or training. We have to find those persons. No one shall be left behind because you cannot have a developed society if a lot of your persons are behind.

As I speak here, the Member of Parliament for Point Fortin as well, we continue to expand the services in terms of the education system, the tertiary sector. We visited, as well, the potential site, even under that administration of where UTT could be. And while we have a UTT presence in Point Fortin, we are going to be looking at expanding facilities all over this country. And, therefore, I have asked the Member of Parliament for Point Fortin as well to tell us what are some of the courses—although we will have a responsive labour-market information system that will be responsive to the people in the constituencies, and that is how I intend to do my work, my job.

It will not be by discrimination; it will not be by vexation; it will be by collaboration, cooperation and what Singapore calls “co-creation”. That is how we are going to move this society forward and, therefore, I want to say again, as I embark in terms of the expansion of the sector, as you look at YTEPP, for example, the Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme—let me just say for the record, and since the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs just walked into the Chamber, I want to pay tribute and congratulations to him. I will tell you why, Mr. Speaker.

Many who are sitting here and even listening, some may never recognize or even know that the Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme was started under Minister Dookeran through the NAR. It was also started on the very day that he was there at the JFK Auditorium, with at the time, Minister of Educations Clive Pantin, and at that time as well, Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, Mrs. Jennifer Johnson.

### **2.00 p.m.**

It was started—in its embryonic stage was not as YTEPP, it was through the University of the West Indies Extra-Mural Studies Unit department, of which Mr. Esmond Ramesar was the head, and it was called a six-week job and vocational oriented programme, and since that he was Minister of Planning and Development. And, Mr. Speaker, I am going to tell you, as Minister Dookeran sits here, we celebrate YTEPP’s 25th anniversary this year. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you and the national community that YTEPP is a success story. And I want to tell you that the Member of Parliament for La Brea was also associated with the University of the West Indies—it was not called at that time the Extra-Mural Studies Unit—but he was one of the centre coordinators



who also delivered well in terms of the School of Continuing Studies, and that is how you expanded the sector. That is how you are going to really improve the quality of education and training. I am taking from where Minister Gopeesingh leaves off in terms of that sector.

So you would have heard the hon. Prime Minister say, and Minister Gopeesingh repeated it as well, that we are moving towards universal preschool or ECC education. We have universal primary education, we have universal secondary education, and it is my hope and my dream and my desire, and I am moving in the direction that one day we are going to have universal tertiary education in Trinidad and Tobago. That is where we must go, and therefore as we expand the services, I want to tell you how we are also going to be building the brains.

Mr. Speaker, when you read what is happening around the world, you will see how young boys and young girls are engaging the world of technology. You would see how young boys and young girls—and only today, I do not know if some of you may have seen it, I was reading it just now before I came when I was called to come across here—a 13-year-old girl is doing her Masters in India—13 years—finished her first degree and pursuing a Masters, and could not become a doctor because she could not do the test for medical school. Now that might be one in a million or so, but the point is that there is that yearning and that desire for education.

But I want to tell you something that I came across and we have started it in Trinidad and Tobago in a modified way. Mr. Speaker, there is a researcher by the name of Sugata Mitra, and Sugata Mitra is famed for the HiWEL project, which is called the Hole-in-the-Wall project. And what is this project? The Hole-in-the-Wall project is where Dr. Mitra, who in his desire and his quest to build the brains of his people in India, took a computer, physically placed it in a hole in a wall near a dump where young boys and girls who were playing in that environment—as we say in Trinidad, is whether “we pitching marble or we rolling around with our roller”—you know long time we used to roll around with the bicycle rim?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yes!

**Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:** I “doh” know how many of you all may know that. Maybe some people “doh” even know or remember that.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** That was the vehicle that we used to go to the shop.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:** The vehicle that you used to go to the shop. *[Laughter]* “As a matter of fact, sometimes you might see some of the people

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who we call Mahal, driving and dey ent ha no vehicle in front of them, you know.” [Laughter]

So he took that concept, where you have these children in the yard playing—many of you may have seen “Slumdog Millionaire” so you understand what it looks like—and he left that computer there; he left that computer there, and you know what happened? The boys and girls in that vicinity went and started interfering with the computer. They started to learn how to click, how to drag, how to boot up, how to reboot, and by what we call in the education system—and my friend who was a former principal here will know—the whole concept of discovery learning; they discovered on their own.

The Member of Parliament for Tobago East will commiserate as well with that kind of concept in education, herself being a very distinguished educator. So they learnt on their own, and I have seen the benefit of that project; it has multiplied many times and in many places in India, and has gone to the Sub-Saharan continent. And I said to myself, why can we not also adopt that in Trinidad and Tobago? And one of the first places that we would have launched that in its new incarnation is in the constituency of Toco/Sangre Grande, Valencia—and we would call it under the YTEPP Programme PALS, P-A-L-S, Public Access Learning System. It is here, and we have many more—as soon as we are completed with the budget speech here, and the approval of the Appropriation Bill, I am going to launch about eight more in different parts of Trinidad and Tobago.

That is how you are going to build the brains, and, therefore as we speak about YTEPP, we now have mobile computer facilities of YTEPP, and we will have one that will be soon launched that would be dedicated to persons with disability, physical disability. Mr. Speaker, as I continue to tell you some of the accomplishments, let me just say that at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine campus, we propose to launch soon and to open two other buildings: number one, we are going to be opening the Student Activity Centre, which Dr. Gopeesingh and Dr. Khan I am sure would be familiar with that compound in Mount Hope. Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you, I was advised as Minister that the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine campus, medical faculty, was being threatened in its approval or its desire to have approval for accreditation status because it lacked basic student recreational facilities.

The People’s Partnership Government stepped in and we contributed handsomely to the construction, it is now completed and ready for opening; the

Student Activity Centre, the first one of its kind on the Mount Hope campus. [Desk thumping] Mr. Speaker, I said earlier that we must align the labour market with what is happening in the education system.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** That's right.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:** If you look at what is happening in the United States of America, if you look at what President Obama is doing, he is focusing substantially on jobs and the economy. Regardless of what you may say or you may think, the economy of the United States of America is one of the most formidable economies that affects the world and—by some people—is seen as tantamount to the world economy because of its impact. And, therefore, when you look on the—[Interruption]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training has expired.

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

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

**Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and let me thank my Cabinet colleague, Minister of Education, and all my colleagues on both sides of the House. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker, I was at the point of saying that we must ensure that our graduates find suitable and appropriate employment. Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to say to this House that with the support of my very distinguished colleague, the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development, and also the Member of Parliament for Point-a-Pierre, that for again the first time in the history of this country there will be a dedicated facility called a Centre for Workforce Research and Development.

Mr. Speaker, what is that? Why do we want to have that? We have disparate parts of the public service who are giving us information on trends, on demographics, unemployment rates, employment and unemployment—some from the CSO, some from the Ministry of Planning, some from the Ministry of Finance and the Economy—but there is no central repository in addition to my colleague here from the Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development. And therefore what we attempted to do was to utilize some of the EDF, the European

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Development Funding, to construct facility on the university campus, St. Augustine, which will be a central coordinating agency, as it were, for labour market information systems, for jobs report.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that I have the honour as well to indicate to this House that the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine campus, has signed an agreement to collaborate with the world-famous Georgetown University of Washington DC and its Center on Education and the Workforce, to twin that facility at St. Augustine with the Georgetown University in Washington DC. That is going to tell you about the confidence and the integrity in the quality of the reports, and the studies that are going to be done.

Mr. Speaker, as I am talking about the center for workforce and research, I want to say that countries like ours grow and compete on the basis of the development of new knowledge, based on existing knowledge or the creation of indigenous knowledge. And I speak here, Mr. Speaker, of the research agenda. I indicated earlier on that when you look at Prof. Soumitra Dutta's report, the Global Innovation Index, and when you look at what is happening in terms of the tertiary sector, you will see that we are talking about the fact that many of our students—and I am talking about our students abroad and here as well—may have great ideas that they want to foster and develop, and to start their own businesses but are given little opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, I want to commend as well my Cabinet colleagues, the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development and the Minister of Finance and the Economy, and the Minister of Trade and Industry, and all my Cabinet colleagues, but, particularly, in the context that for the first time again in the history of Trinidad and Tobago NEDCO has opened an office on the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine campus. [*Desk thumping*]

What does that tell you? That tells you that we are bringing the facilities to academia where the students are. You just need to look at Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Stanford, MIT, NUS; in fact the NUS—and Minister Dookeran had the pleasure of visiting Singapore and meeting with the NUS. The NUS is the National University of Singapore. They have an area dedicated, my friend, to business start-up; it is called the Venture Lab of NUS. I want to tell you as well, that in Singapore they have a university dedicated to technology; it is called the Nanyang Technological University. You can google it.

**Mrs. Mc Intosh:** I went there.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:** Beautiful, and would you not say it is wonderful?

**Mrs. Mc Intosh:** Yes.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:** And it is really aligned. As a matter of fact, I am sure when you went there you went to the ITE, the Institute for Technical Education. I am also sure you also went to Mustafa.

**Mr. De Coteau:** Say something that she did not go to. [*Laughter*]

**Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:** Mustafa's if you remember, Mustafa's is a store you could not escape.

**Mrs. Mc Intosh:** I did not go to shop; I did not go for pleasure.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:** Okay, well I did not say that, I am saying that you would have benefited tremendously, I hope, from your visit to Singapore, because Singapore is about building the brains. Singapore is about ensuring people are developed. People do not go to Singapore and come back here less than when they went to Singapore. If you did that you would have wasted the Government's and taxpayers' money.

But I want to tell you that Singapore is a place that we can emulate as well, but there is a word that also distinguishes Singapore; it is called "discipline". And as we speak about my friend who said that she went to Singapore, I want to tell you what Singapore is also doing. Singapore is also into aerospace engineering. Singapore is 6.5 million people and not a drop of oil, but has the Shell refinery that refines 500,000 barrels of oil a day, and if you would have gone there you would have seen it, and you may have visited Sentosa Island. I could tell you a lot about other things, but let me come back to what I am talking about here in terms of building the capacity in this country.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Nine research centres.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:** The research centres.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Nine research centres.

**2.15 p.m.**

**Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:** Mr. Speaker, as we talk about research, when you look at developed countries—generally, developed countries and developing countries would look at a 3 to 5 per cent of their GDP allocated to research and development. In some cases, like us, we are looking to make sure that we have at least one per cent of GDP. I want to tell you what we have done recently, and again I want to congratulate the hon. Prime Minister and Members of the Cabinet.

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Since 2005, under the previous administration, one single tertiary institution received, over a period of seven years, to the tune of \$50.388 million—one institution, for research. I have asked the Cabinet to bring that yearly allocation to the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training so that we could widen the net for research. Therefore, what we have now launched is called the “HERF”, the Higher Education Research Fund. What will that fund do? I know Minister Dookeran is very much in-depth in reading and research. That fund is going to fuel the HERA, Higher Education Research Agenda.

Mr. Speaker, the time has come for us, and I want to tell you as Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, I am not going to have any compromise on quality and dissemination of knowledge and information. All those who are receiving taxpayers’ money to utilize it for research purposes, must tell the country what research you have engaged in. We must move from policy to practice. The man in the street must be able to know what his money is being spent on, and that is how he is going to expand his knowledge base. That is how he is going to get ideas to start his own business. That is how he is going to get the desire to engage in further studies. That is how he is going to lift his confidence and self-esteem.

I want to put on notice here all the institutions that are receiving government funding, taxpayer dollars, in Trinidad and Tobago through the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, you are going to be telling the country the findings and the abstract of your research. You must do that because that is how you are going to progress. Otherwise, it will be like how one of the colleagues on the other side “does say: ‘how yuh go do dat? Yuh cyar do dat.’” [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Roberts:** Where is he?

**Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:** I am just saying that I heard that before.

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you, as I wind up, I believe that the People’s Partnership Government, of which I am proud to be a member, we are on the right track. I am sure that what we are doing is focusing the education dollar, the training dollar, in terms of building human capacity. I could have said a lot more in terms of how other people, the previous administrations, may have closed down centres where people could have access to education and training, but I have taken that same centre that they closed down and I have reopened it, and people are there learning day and night and on weekends. [*Desk thumping*] I am talking here about the NESC Debe Technology Centre. We are going to be expanding it.

I want to tell you that after this budget we have sums allocated, for the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. While we were paying in the previous

administration and we inherited a figure of almost \$1 million a month in rent for COSTAATT in Port of Spain, and you “cyar” expand by one foot, that will happen in Chaguanas, [*Desk thumping*] with 30 acres of land.

It is not about only things moving central. All of those who say “we moving things central”, I want to ask them: the YTEPP headquarters, where was it for the last couple of years, over the last decade or two, over the 25 years? It first started in Laventille, Eastern Main Road; it went to the Salvatori Building, it went to the Guardian building, it went opposite QRC. Where was that, in central Trinidad, in south Trinidad? I want to tell you that as Minister I am going to ensure that we have equity and equality of opportunity for all the students.

Thank you very much.

**Miss Marlene Mc Donald** (*Port of Spain South*): Thank you Mr. Speaker. [*Crosstalk*] Thank you for this opportunity to join in this debate. It is never ever easy to come in the last spot because most of the things that you would have wanted to say would have gone before you. But having heard from one of the Members this morning, I cannot remember which one, I am convinced that I have to make my intervention and, to be quite honest, this budget has left me very sad indeed. Not only me personally, but I would say for my constituents of Port of Spain South. I say so also on behalf of all those people out there: the poor, the needy and the vulnerable.

Mr. Speaker, before I start my contribution, there are certain things that I would want to make mention of. I look at the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara, and one of the things he made mention of in his contribution, was that his Government is not a government for Port of Spain only. I will comment on that as I go through my debate.

Then I looked at the Member for Caroni East, Minister of Education, when he said that his Government does not discriminate, that the development is everywhere and he listed schools being refurbished and the number of times they sent in contractors to fix. As a matter of fact, on one occasion they sent a contractor into one of the schools 20 times. I do not think that is something to be proud of at all.

Then, of course, my colleague from Oropouche East, where he talked about diversification by use of the growth poles—from south to Port of Spain, to east Port of Spain, he said development is taking place. I would want, as I speak—at the end, I would like the Minister of Finance and the Economy to explain to me, unless we are reading from different documents, to tell me so I

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could tell my constituents, that this east Port of Spain growth pole, what has happened to it since they have been in office for the past three years. Each year we get a two-liner in the budget document about east Port of Spain, but I will get to that.

Mr. Speaker, again, I heard the Minister, the hon. Senator, making reference to the fact that we on this side might be talking about things going central and things going south. I do not think that is an unreasonable observation to make, because when I stand here I come here well researched and I would put the evidence in this House to substantiate everything that I am saying. But during the course of debate, I am going to address all these outstanding issues.

This budget, what is the theme?—Sustaining Growth, Securing Prosperity. As far as I am concerned, it is just hollow rhetoric; it is totally misleading; it is deceptive in nature and, again, clearly crafted to garner friends, to garner support and try to influence the minds of the masses.

Mr. Speaker, I looked at last year's theme and it said: Stimulating Growth, Generating Prosperity, so there is a fine line that is running through the Minister's budgets. Unless I am not living in Trinidad and Tobago, I ask the question: Where has this growth in this economy taken place? Where is the prosperity? I am on the ground and every day I see the hardship and the poverty. So where is this growth, where is the prosperity? You see, this budget is an outright sham. This 2014 budget is deceptive and it is a sham. [*Desk thumping*]

You know, when I sat down to prepare for this, it reminds me of one of those shell games we played when I attended school bazaars many moons ago, where the perpetrator shuffled his hands oh so quickly and then he looks you in your face and he talks smooth and slow, and then you place your bet and then you lose. You see, you are guided by the smooth-talking person in the perpetrator and you place your trust and you place your confidence and you place your bet, and then you lose. That is exactly what has happened with this Government, that this country in 2010, they placed their bet, they placed their confidence, they placed their trust in this Government, and what has happened? Three years down the road, people “cyar” wait to see them out of office. They cannot wait.

I listened to the Member for Caroni Central this morning, and he is telling us that they are fed up of us; nobody wants to see the PNM. Really? The Member for Caroni Central has buried his head in the sand, because I tell you, let them continue patting their backs, their hands on their backs and pat each other and talk to each other, and they do not understand what is happening outside there. They



would not know what hit them come October 21 and months to come. [*Desk thumping*] It is just countdown time. It is countdown time.

But if one listens to this budget, you would understand that the bread-and-butter issues which touch the daily lives of our citizens, touch the lives of the poor, the needy and the vulnerable—[*Interruption*—those things have not been addressed. That is why, after spending some \$162 billion over the last three years, some of our citizens still feel marginalized, they feel left out. Why?

In fact, this budget is not about growth. It is not about prosperity at all. As far as I am concerned, it is the worst example of squandermania that I have ever seen. [*Interruption*] You had your say, allow me to have my say now, Member for Chaguanas East. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, it is shameless. To top it off, and this is the theme of my conversation here in this House today, the resources of this country have not been equitably distributed. [*Desk thumping*] Every time I will give you examples, I will show you, because I am going to be concentrating on my constituency which has been deemed a hotspot. I am concentrating on east Port of Spain, and I will show you in the distribution of resources under this budget, how east Port of Spain residents have been left out. They have been left out from play park, to community centres, to this new-found thing called “activity centres”. I will be talking about all of them this afternoon.

Again, this budget is deceptive, and I want to demonstrate. As I said, I put the evidence on the table and the first one I am looking at is this thing with Caribbean Airlines.

The Minister of Finance and the Economy said that:

“...Caribbean Airlines must move towards the adoption”—using his words—“of a financially-sound business model...”—to this end he said—“The new Board of Caribbean Airlines...has completed the first phase of a revised Business Plan for the airline to achieve financial viability. To this end, effective October 1 2013, I propose to discontinue the fuel subsidy which the airline currently enjoys.”

Mr. Speaker, the Minister then tried to assure citizens of this country that this removal of the fuel subsidy would not impact the ticket pricing policy of CAL. But whilst this was spoken aloud, why did the Minister at the same time not disclose to this honourable House, disclose to the national community, that \$400 million would be given to CAL for its restructuring programme? Why? Why did he not disclose that in this House?

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Why did he not disclose the fact that a sum of \$719 million would be given to Caribbean Airlines for debt servicing? Why did he not say that in here? Why do you have to go and search the documents? So that is one point, \$1 billion in this budget will be going to CAL. Why was it not disclosed here? He gave all of us the impression: “I am removing this fuel subsidy of \$300 million”, but at the same time, as you removed that fuel subsidy of \$300 million you are actually giving back Caribbean Airlines \$1.1 billion. I am showing you how you all are deceptive—all of you all. You should be ashamed of yourselves. You should be ashamed. [*Desk thumping*]

**2.30 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, we do not know with any degree of assurance how such pricing policy will be maintained. We do not, but I can assure you, knowing this Government it would be out in the public domain, it would be out there very much so, and I am saying that unless fundamental changes are made to CAL I am telling you this airline is in for some rough times. How will it impact jobs at CAL? All that is left unsaid. Nothing like that came out.

Mr. Speaker, another illustration of deceptiveness in this budget is the Minister’s explanation with respect to the reinstatement of land and building taxes. No more property tax, so we just change “de” name, land and building taxes.

He stated, and I am reading from his own budget statement, that it will be on a phase basis during 2014 to 2017. It would require the property rolls being brought up to date by undertaking the valuation of properties. First phase, the revaluation of industrial buildings. Second, and that would be implemented by July 01, 2014; that is for industrial properties.

With respect to commercial properties, that is phase two, that was left open. Phase three would be imposition of tax on agricultural lands and on residential. This is the important word—the “residential” properties. Mr. Speaker, vague, nothing. You do not know when would be the implementation dates for residential properties, for commercial properties, and for agricultural properties, except to say that full implementation would be by 2017, but the Minister and this Government would not be here in 2017. You all will be now leaving it to us, something as vague as this, leaving it to us. You do not have a clue as to what sort of interest, what is the percentage you would be paying.

Mr. Speaker, there is no indication of the rates of tax that would be applicable on the different classes of properties. You “doh” have a clue as to the basis of the calculation of the annual value. Nothing, Mr. Speaker! But under the former administration, I could tell you, there was transparency. You knew up front exactly how much you had to pay. It was a four-tiered system [*Crosstalk*] and it was based—Mr. Speaker, could you please protect me from the Member for Couva South?

**Mr. Speaker:** You have my full protection. [*Laughter*]

**Miss M. Mc Donald:** Thank you. It was based on the current market value of properties and residential was at 3 per cent, commercial at 5 per cent and agricultural at 1 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, nothing like this was said by the Minister. There is no way—you search those budget documents and there is no way. It is vague, it is deceptive and it was just placed there, and it is up to you now [*Crosstalk*] yes, and I would say it 10 times again; 10 times if it is worthy to do it, I will do it.

Mr. Speaker, another area of deception is the proposed increase in the police presence in the hot spots. I recall in 2011 when I started my mantra of the removal of these police posts from Mango Rose and from Plaisance Road out in John John, I asked for a meeting with the Commissioner of Police, Mr. Dwayne Gibbs, and Mr. Ewatski and we had a meeting at the Mango Rose Homework Centre; Mr. Sandy, I believe, came. One of the things they said to me was because of 21<sup>st</sup> policing, I believe—21<sup>st</sup> Century policing, it did not make allowance to have police posts in these areas. What they proffered to me was, 21<sup>st</sup> Century policing means that you will see more of police riding around either on bikes or around your communities.

As a matter of fact, they told me quite clearly that we are not going to reinstate that; instead we are going to have joint police and army patrols. All I tried to explain to Mr. Ewatski and Mr. Gibbs at the time is that the presence of the police posts in these areas acts as a mitigating factor with respect to crime. You did not have that level of crime as you see now. They would not listen, Mr. Speaker. Instead, they told me it would have more presence of police and army around. Mr. Speaker, East Port of Spain, we still waiting on that.

When I heard that the Minister came back to this Parliament, in his budget proposal, and talked about joint army and police patrol, I cannot take that. I cannot take that. I do not believe it one bit.

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Mr. Speaker, this Government says one thing and does something else, and I will show you how deceptive they are, and they mix themselves up from Minister to Minister. They mumble and they fumble and they tumble over each other.

I just want to give you another example, and this is something that Mr—sorry, Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara, it is a statement he made in his budget debate last week. And the Member—it concerns the Carenage fishing depot. This demonstrates how this Government operates its business.

The Member for, I think, La Horquetta/Talparo, and I am going to read it to you. This is what hon. Roberts said. He said: “...the PNM was building a fish depot, a fish market in Carenage which is in the constituency of Diego Martin West, and because he fell out with the Member for San Fernando East, Arnold Piggott stopped the project, and they come here to talk about vindictiveness.”

In the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo’s contribution he said.

“With respect to the Carenage fishing depot, Mr. Speaker, this Carenage fishing depot is a project raised by the Member for Diego Martin West on several occasions in this Parliament...”

I am happy to report today...with a visit with myself, the Minister of Food Production and the Member for Diego Martin West we visited the site and we came up with a plan of exactly what we will do to complete the project. Today, the project is 90 per cent completed.”

Mr. Speaker, that is not true. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, I could escort you, personally, escort you personally to where this is located, the fishing centre in Carenage. I can show you what you have there is just bare bones, just a frame because the building was totally, totally vandalized. That is not true.

I also want to show you—[*Crosstalk*—that is why I am telling you that they fumble and they bumble over each other.

**Mr. Roberts:** What!

**Miss M. Mc Donald:** On June 05, 2012, in the other place, the Minister of Trade and Industry—this is what he said at that time, hon. Vasant Bharath. He said:

“Last year we embarked on a project to upgrade all of the fish landing sites in Trinidad and Tobago. Last year we did 11. I will not go through, in the interest of time, what they were last year; but the new ones this year are in Blanchisseuse, Cumana, Fullerton, Otaheite, Carenage, Las Cuevas,...It is a

significant amount of work. All these works will cost \$52.9 million and, in fact, will all be completed by the time I stand here to read the budget in September...”

Mr. Speaker, this was last year.

A question was asked, a question was filed by the Member for Diego Martin West in this Parliament in October 2012, and what has happened? At the time the Minister, the Member for Chaguanas West, skirted the question. He did not answer as to when that fishing depot would be completed.

And I now look again to the PSIP for 2013, under the Ministry of Community Development and it says: The sum of \$70 million will be provided in 2013 to facilitate the completion of the construction of 23 centres, the Carenage fishing depot being one. To date, nothing. Nothing has been done on this centre. This is how this Government conducts its business. One Minister says one thing here, another one says something else elsewhere and that is why I say they fumble and they tumble over each other, and nothing has been done. [*Crosstalk*]

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER in the Chair]

Madam Deputy Speaker, I turn my attention now to revenues and expenditure. This Government has the audacity to return to this House—fourth year—with a massive budget deficit. This year they have broken all records with an expenditure of some \$61.3 billion.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I ask again, as I ask every year, it is my mantra: Where are the new revenue streams to support this expenditure? Where are the new revenue streams? The Minister did not say how he was going to fund this deficit neither did he state how he plans to achieve his balanced budget by 2016.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Finance and the Economy had projected a rate of growth of 2.5 per cent for fiscal 2013. But before we get there, let us look at a history of the economic growth over the years. Let us go back to 2009. I am using the GDP because GDP is the gauge of how your country is performing. It tells you the amount of goods and services that your country produced in a particular given year, a given period of time.

In the fourth quarter of 2009 GDP grew by some 0.08 per cent. In the first quarter of 2010, GDP grew by 1.9 per cent. In 2011, the Government, the then Minister—he is here, Member for Tunapuna—projected 2 per cent growth rate. At the end of it all it was a negative growth of 2.6 per cent. In 2012, they

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projected 1.7 per cent and they ended up with 0.2 per cent growth.

For 2013 they projected 2.5 per cent, and my understanding is the IMF looked at it, brought it down to 1.6 per cent, but so far I do not know with any sort of definitiveness whether that is the final figure, 1.6 per cent or less, that is still out. [Interruption] I am not taking your word for it. [Crosstalk] I am not taking your word for it.

Madam Deputy Speaker, they are now projecting 2.5 per cent economic growth for 2015. Can we achieve this? Can we really achieve this?

**Mr. Roberts:** Yes, we can.

**Miss M. Mc Donald:** “Well I doh expect a fisherman to say his fish rotten, yuh know.” I do not expect that. Mr. Speaker, in 2003—[Interruption]

**Mr. Roberts:** Madam Deputy Speaker.

**Miss M. Mc Donald:** Madam Deputy Speaker, the country’s expenditure was something like \$15.8 billion. By 2011 it was \$49.9 billion, by 2012 it was \$54.6 billion, by 2013, \$58.41 billion, now 2014, \$61.3 billion. And I did not even factor in all those supplementations that we would have come back here to this house for.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Ernst and Young normally put out a little report after the budget. This prompted them now to make this observation and they said that there was a worrying—that is, a worrisome—I should say, concern—a worrisome trend of higher and higher Government spending patterns, and they looked at it over the past three years, \$162.9 billion. If you add \$61.3 billion for 2014, you factor in that, you are up to \$224.2 billion.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we are almost four years into the administration of this Government, and after three years—because they have not spent that \$61.3 as yet—after three years of spending something like about \$162.9 billion in actual and planned expenditure, the critical question remains: Are we the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago receiving value, are we receiving value for these tax dollars? Are we better off, Madam Deputy Speaker?

**2.45 p.m.**

**Hon. Member:** The answer is no.

**Miss M. Mc Donald:** Are we better off, are we feeling the effects?

**Mr. Roberts:** Yes.

**Miss M. Mc Donald:** Go into those poor communities; come into east Port of Spain. Are we experiencing or are we better off having spent \$162.9 billion over the last three years?

**Mr. Roberts:** Yes.

**Miss M. Mc Donald:** Are we better off, Madam Deputy Speaker? [Crosstalk]

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara. [Crosstalk]

**Miss M. Mc Donald:** Madam Deputy Speaker, can you please protect me?

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** You have my protection Member.

**Hon. Member:** He answering because you are asking questions.

**Mr. Roberts:** Yeah.

**Miss M. Mc Donald:** I am not asking you all any question. I am speaking to the national community through the Deputy Speaker. [Desk thumping] "You all talk to all yuh selves there." I am talking to Madam Deputy Speaker, and I am talking to the national community, not "all yuh." [Desk thumping]

**Mr. Roberts:** "Doh bite up the mike."

**Mrs. Mc Intosh:** Especially Tabaquite.

**Miss M. Mc Donald:** Madam Deputy Speaker, I will continue. Permit me to do a global scan with the economic growth in other countries. We do not live in a void, we do not live by ourselves, but I am not as hopeful and excited as the Minister of Finance and the Economy and his colleagues on that side, I am certainly not.

Madam Deputy Speaker, United States—let us see what is happening. Growth is slow, but positive. Their real GDP growth is expected to decline from 2.2 per cent in 2012 to 1.9 per cent in 2013, with a projected rate of growth of 2.1 per cent for 2014. In the United Kingdom, they have increased from 0.2 per cent in 2012 to 0.7 per cent in 2013, a projection of 2.5 per cent for 2014. In the Euro area despite the easier financial pressures, growth in the Euro area is expected to continue to be negative with the real GDP projected to contract by 0.3 per cent in 2013.

In Japan 1.6 per cent growth in 2013, down from 2 per cent in 2012. So they went down, they decreased. Emerging Asia, GDP growth which is projected in the emerging and in developed Asia increased to 7.1 per cent in 2013 from 6.6 per

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cent in 2012. In China, 7.8 per cent in 2012, 8 per cent in 2013 with a projection of growth of 8.5 per cent. In India 2012, it was 4 per cent, 2013, 5.7 per cent with a projected growth in 2014 of 6.25 per cent. Latin America as a region is expected to grow in 2013 by 3.4 per cent, up from 3 per cent in 2012.

Coming closer to home, Barbados growth remained flat so there was absolutely no—zero growth. In Barbados a minimal of 0.6 per cent and in Jamaica the growth rate decreased from a rate of 1.5 per cent in 2011 to 0.1 per cent in 2012. I did not get the figures for 2013. Madam Deputy Speaker, we are still not—when you look globally, it is looking promising, but prices are still volatile. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Roberts:** I have to thank you.

**Miss M. Mc Donald:** Madam Deputy Speaker, let us bring it close to home. Let us look at Trinidad and Tobago; let us examine our energy sector and see what is happening there. There was a 4.3 per cent decline in oil production in 2013 over 2012. In 2012, we produced 81,700 barrels of oil per day. In 2013, we were down to 81,100 barrels per day. With respect to natural gas production it increased by 2.9 per cent in 2013 over 2012, from something like 27,923 million cubic metres to 28,733 million cubic metres of gas. So that resulted in that 2.9 per cent increase in 2013 over 2012. Let us look at the petrochemical sector. Production and export levels of ammonia and methanol declined in 2013 over 2012.

Madam Deputy Speaker, let us take ammonia. Production of ammonia fell by some 9.4 per cent, and exports also decreased by 3.5 per cent. That is with respect to ammonia. With respect to methanol, production was affected in both ammonia and methanol—affected by gas supply limitations and plant shutdowns, and we will talk about that in a little while. With methanol there was a decline in the production by 1.1 per cent and exports declined by 1.2 per cent.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we have to be concerned because—that is why I asked the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs yesterday, what was happening with respect to the maintenance activities at our major gas producers—that will be bpTT and BG. And we are expecting other rounds of maintenance activities in this last quarter, and therefore, production would not be as good as we will expect. But he assured this House that as soon as these maintenance activities are over we should be climbing out of it and starting to produce and export more. But you could see, Madam Deputy Speaker, as we have reduced that natural gas production it has affected both our ammonia and methanol production at the same



time and as a consequence it has affected our exports.

With respect to urea, the production of urea rose by 13.1 per cent and exports increased by 2.7 per cent. But even as we saw some increases in urea, the losses we suffered with ammonia and methanol could not have assisted the urea production—how well we have done there, so it was overshadowed. What has happened in urea was overshadowed, and what happened in methanol as well as ammonia.

Let us look at the non-energy sector. I am just picking out a few of them. Manufacturing—In manufacturing this is projected to grow by some 6.1 per cent. The iron and steel industry in 2013, it decreased, the production decreased by 7.6 per cent over 2012. Cement production registered a strong performance of some 38.3 per cent. Construction grew by some 3 per cent.

Tourism—because these are all different, little facets under the non-energy sector—and I want to say a little thing about tourism, Madam Deputy Speaker. The airline arrivals—under airline arrivals, Madam Deputy Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago received 454,683 air passengers in 2012, and this represents a 5.5 per cent over 2011. I did not get the 2013 figures. Cruise ship arrivals again registered a 16.9 per cent increase. In 2013 cruise ship arrivals decreased, a 46.8 per cent decline. Madam Deputy Speaker, with respect to the yachting arrivals, we again had a decline there by 6.8 per cent in 2013 over 2012.

Now, I listened to my colleague, the Member for St. Ann's East when she made her contribution, and of course we have to be concerned about those advisories. I would not stay too long on it because she has already covered that area and I think quite comprehensively she did so. We have to look at our advisories, we have to look at the crime because I think these different countries, I think it was Canada—help me—United Kingdom, United States they have all issued advisories to their travellers to this country and it could be hurting our tourism sector. So we have to be very careful there, Madam Deputy Speaker, because you see if we do not deal with crime, and we continue having these advisories, then all the lofty plans that the Minister of Finance and the Economy stood here and told us in this honourable House, all that will go to nil, Madam Deputy Speaker, because the Minister of Finance and the Economy stated that the Government is focusing on two main priorities:

1. Developing airlift.
2. Enhancing room stock in this country.

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The Minister said, the Government will be collaborating with the major airlines as well as the airport and cargo operators with a view to expanding the opportunities for increasing direct travel and air cargo to Trinidad and Tobago. And secondly, he said the country's room stock is being expanded to accommodate the growth in business travellers to Trinidad and Tobago. And they are also targeting—the Government—the cruise ship industry to grow the cruise ship industry.

*[Mr. Sharma enters Chamber]*

**Mr. Sharma:** Correct.

**Miss M. Mc Donald:** Madam Deputy Speaker—I am glad you are back—

**Mr. Sharma:** Thank you.

**Miss M. Mc Donald:**—I applaud these lofty plans of the Minister, but in the Prime Minister's realignment of her Ministers, this country has ended up with the Member of Parliament for Fyzabad as Minister of Tourism.

**Mr. Sharma:** Excellent choice.

**Miss M. Mc Donald:** And, Madam Deputy Speaker, I call a spade a spade. Just two nights ago I asked the Minister, what is his vision when the Minister spoke on the tourism. I asked this Minister, what is your vision for tourism in this country? *[Interruption]*

**Hon. Member:** Cable cars.

**Miss M. Mc Donald:** And you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, I thought he was making a joke, and today I asked him again—*[Interruption]*

**Mr. Sharma:** You did?

**Miss M. Mc Donald:** But he was very consistent. You know what was his response? I asked, "What is your policy", your Minister stated this in the budget, "what is your policy"—*[Interruption]*

**Mr. Sharma:** I spoke to you last night, you did not hear it?

**Miss M. Mc Donald:** His response was Trinidad and Tobago is known for sun, sea, sand and sex, four Ss. He said, now it would be known for five Ss: Sun, sand, sea, sex and Sharma. Now tell me, Madam Deputy Speaker, tell me—*[Interruption]*

**Mr. Sharma:** You are only wasting time. I think you are looking for

something. You only are wasting time.

**Miss M. Mc Donald:** Tell me, Madam Deputy Speaker—no, no, no, do not shout at me from across there.

**Mr. Sharma:** [*Inaudible*]

**Miss M. Mc Donald:** No, I am not.

**Mr. Sharma:** 36(5). I think you are looking for something.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Overruled. Member you may continue, please.

**Miss M. Mc Donald:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. You see, sometimes you have to get serious. Sometimes we have to get serious.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Member for Port of Spain South would you please address the Chair. Member for Fyzabad I am asking you to allow the Member to speak in silence. Thank you.

**Miss M. Mc Donald:** Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to answer “yuh eh”, but some things are just not worthy of answering back. Madam Deputy Speaker, we look at unemployment. The Minister of Finance and the Economy stated at page 18 of the budget statement and this is what he had to say. I quote:

“The economy continues to generate jobs as the unemployment rate has fallen and now hovers near full employment levels at 5.0 percent.”

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Minister makes a bold claim that this country is hovering near full employment level.

What a ridiculous statement. How is this Minister measuring unemployment? Is this Government counting inside of there CEPEP, URP, Colour me Orange and all these other makeshift work systems that they have about the place, Madam Deputy Speaker? Is he including the thousands of persons who have given up their jobs, the job search I would say, in frustration?

Madam Deputy Speaker, I cannot trust the Minister’s unemployment figures, and again I make an appeal that the CSO be given the necessary resources in order to produce these figures on a timely basis because we are only going on what the Government says. That is all we are doing here, and this has been going on for the past three years, and the Member for Tunapuna knows that, that I have been complaining since 2010: what are the figures we are supposed to use? When we left, it was 4.6 per cent. But then we can substantiate that. I cannot substantiate anything like this, so, I totally debunk the Minister’s full employment claims.

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They came into this governance here on a mantra of change. Tell the poor people of this country why their circumstances have not changed. Tell this nation that after \$162.9 billion in expenditure that their circumstances have not changed. Tell my constituents in Port of Spain South that we have reached full employment and therefore there is nothing else for them. Tell them that.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to raise an issue here, and I have to read it into *Hansard* because this budget has raised more questions than answers with respect to a particular agreement, and that is the agreement, Madam Deputy Speaker, between Venezuela and Trinidad and Tobago with respect to the Loran-Manatee unit area. So I am going to read it into *Hansard*, Madam Deputy Speaker.

**3.00 p.m.**

Former Minister—let me get it one second. Madam Deputy Speaker, I am going to read it at another point. Let me continue. So what do we have, Madam Deputy Speaker? We have an economy that has stalled. There is instability in the financial sector; significant excess liquidity and this shows a lack of confidence. Commercial banks' excess reserves reached \$6 billion by March of 2013, up from \$2.7 billion in October of 2012. Citizens are earning virtually nothing, Madam Deputy Speaker, on their deposits at commercial banks.

At page 2 in his budget statement, the Minister was busy beating his chest about how well the economy has been doing, and how well the non-energy sector has been doing, but Ernst & Young is concerned that the non-energy fiscal deficit continues to rise. For 2012—2013, the deficit was projected at \$35.5 billion. This demonstrates the dependence of this country on the petroleum sector. So with the non-energy fiscal deficit growing, our dependence on oil and gas is also growing at the same time, Madam Deputy Speaker.

So I do not believe the Minister of Finance and the Economy's statement. Further, prices of oil and gas remained very buoyant during the period under review. And so we as a country, we were lucky. We enjoyed high prices for oil and gas, but there is insufficient information or empirical evidence, Madam Deputy Speaker, of real growth in the non-energy sector, and so, therefore, I cannot substantiate this statement made by the Minister of Finance and the Economy.

There has been—little improvement has been recorded in Trinidad and Tobago with respect to the global competitive—

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members, the speaking time of the Member for Port of Spain South has expired.

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Miss M. Mc Donald:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Thank you, Members on both sides. Thank you, Member for Fyzabad. [*Desk thumping*]

Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker, I was saying there has been little improvement with respect to Trinidad and Tobago's global competitive ranking. Trinidad and Tobago has fallen from 73rd out of 134 countries in 2008, to 92nd out of 148 countries in 2013. What are the reasons? Why have we fallen in the ranking, Madam Deputy Speaker? Four reasons: crime; government bureaucracy; corruption; and poor work ethic in the national workforce.

I turn my attention to certain issues in my constituency, and I look at the construction of early childhood care and education centres. In the budget statement at page 5, the Minister of Finance and the Economy stated that 108 ECCE centres were equipped with resources and instructional materials. Madam Deputy Speaker, over 80 early childhood care centres were constructed in different parts of Trinidad and Tobago and another 20 would be done by the end of the year—the end of 2013, I suspect.

Madam Deputy Speaker, not one centre was placed in east Port of Spain. In April of 2010, I accompanied the then Minister of Education, Ms. Esther Le Gendre, and we turned the sod just opposite the Spree Simon soup centre in John John to put up a two-storey centre—early childhood care centre, and to date, nothing has happened. Absolutely nothing has happened.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in his budget presentation, the Minister of Education boasted that he needed to place on parliamentary record the locations of the ECCE centres: St. Augustine, Roystonia, Oropune, Caura Royal Road, Valencia, Bon Air, Carlsen Field, Harmony Hall, Golconda, Retrench, Wellington, Edinburgh South, Egypt, Raghunanan Trace, St. Mary's, Maharaj Hill, Aranguez, Union Hall, Phoenix Park. Madam Deputy Speaker, out of an allocation of \$9.8 billion for 2014, and out of this massive allocation, nothing for east Port of Spain. What do you call this? Is this not sufficient evidence for the inequitable distribution of resources? Is it not, Madam Deputy Speaker?

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I have been asking and pleading and begging the Minister of Education, and every time I would talk to him, he would agree. Madam Deputy Speaker, he also went on to say that this Government will be rolling out early childhood centres to accommodate 35,000 students between the ages of three to four years; by 2015, we would have achieved universal childhood education. Are we going to achieve this, Madam Deputy Speaker? And according to the Government, are we going to achieve this and a whole community of Laventille, east Port of Spain, has not been given one early childhood care centre?

**Mr. Imbert:** Nowhere in Diego Martin.

**Mrs. Mc Intosh:** Port of Spain North, Diego Martin.

**Miss M. Mc Donald:** There we go. Hear my colleagues.

**Mrs. Mc Intosh:** “Nowhere; and he bawling poor representation.” What a cop-out!

**Miss M. Mc Donald:** Madam Deputy Speaker, I also want to say—I also want to read into *Hansard* something here, and I have to read it because it is so important.

We have learned a lot about the latest agreement between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Government of Venezuela for the development of the Loran-Manatee gas field. This gas field straddles the border between Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela, with 73.75 per cent of the gas on the Venezuelan side, and 26.25 per cent of the gas on our side. You add them up that is 100 per cent.

Earlier in this debate, my colleague, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, revealed that it had been widely reported in the international press that a deal had been struck between our energy Minister and his counterpart in Venezuela that was very one-sided in favour of Venezuela, at the expense of Trinidad, and I would say at the expense of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Since then, the Minister of Energy has sought to deny that he has sold out the country, but in all his noise, he has not disclosed the terms of the agreement he signed last week in Caracas. We have the agreement here.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to—and I am going to make copies so this entire House, all those on the Government side who do not know about it, those on my side who do not know about it, they will get a copy of this agreement between Venezuela and Trinidad and Tobago. [*Crosstalk*] However, on this side,

we are privy to the agreement. It is indeed disgraceful and shameful. Trinidad and Tobago owns 26.25 of the gas in that field, which would naturally lead to the conclusion in terms of influence and rights, that we should have been able to exercise voting rights equal to at least the percentage of gas that belongs to us. So, if we have 26 per cent, we are supposed to have 26 per cent voting rights.

However, our energy Minister has agreed with Venezuela that our voting rights, with respect to the development and production of gas from the Loran-Manatee field, be reduced to 17 per cent.

**Mr. Imbert:** What?

**Hon. Member:** No, no.

**Miss M. Mc Donald:** So they reduced us from 26 per cent voting rights, chop off 9 per cent, and put us down at 17 per cent—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Imbert:** No.

**Miss M. Mc Donald:**—with 83 per cent of the voting rights given to Venezuela, Ped, um—“How you pronounce this one, Ped, what?”

**Mr. Imbert:** [*Pronounced*] Pedevesa.

**Miss M. Mc Donald:**—PDVSA, that is the Venezuelan state oil company, Chevron and British Gas, and for decision-making a majority vote of 75 per cent will be final. So our 17 per cent, Madam Deputy Speaker, is meaningless.

And in terms of decisions, investment decisions—and the agreement has all this, so you can see it—Trinidad and Tobago has been completely excluded from that process—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Imbert:** What!

**Miss M. Mc Donald:**—with investment decisions being left to the foreign oil companies—

**Mr. Imbert:** What!

**Miss M. Mc Donald:**—with the Venezuelans having the majority share.

**Mr. Imbert:** What!

**Miss M. Mc Donald:** And it is all in the agreement. We will circulate it. I will make this available to all. So what we have done, we have relinquished our

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control. We have voluntarily reduced our voting rights to 17 per cent. Now, is this not deceptive? Why did the Minister not—he came here and he spoke. Why did he not explain this? Why did he not tell the House that? [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to talk about the east Port of Spain growth pole. In the budget statement of 2011, at page 28—that is way back in 2011: “Opening of new economic space”—the then Minister of Finance and the Economy stated that Trinidad and Tobago needs to expand its economic space, both within and outside the economy, hence they will develop the five poles for expansion.

I want to point out to my colleague, the Member for Oropouche East, again, in 2011, the statement was made; again, in 2012, the statement was made and now he is stating in this budget, 2014 that the east Port of Spain growth pole is focussed on urban regeneration and the Government is currently establishing the necessary organizational arrangements and executing agencies, and during the course of this year, some 12 projects will be completed.

Madam Deputy Speaker, how do I explain to my constituents in east Port of Spain that from a budget of some \$61.3 billion, east Port of Spain has been deemed a hot spot; we get absolutely nothing in terms of these growth poles? And we have been saying the same thing over and over. Since this Government has taken up the mantle in this country, we have been hearing the same thing in east Port of Spain.

And the last thing we are hearing now is about some cable car. “Who swinging down the hill in which cable car? [*Laughter*] Who swinging down from Picton in a cable car, eh? Who swinging dong? [*Crosstalk*] Eh, eh? Who swinging down there in a cable car from up in de hills ah Picton?” What nonsense, huh? [*Crosstalk*] What nonsense? [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Members, please, please!

**Miss M. Mc Donald:** And that is all; that is all that the Minister of Planning could sit in his Ministry and talk about. “That is all he could talk about; putting in cable car in Laventille; eh, putting in cable car in Laventille; eh?”

Madam Deputy Speaker, I go to local government allocations. I would have thought that in a time when you have increased your budget to \$61.3 billion; in a time when you are talking about wanting to review your local government systems; at a time when you want to introduce PR system, that at least we would look at our communities and see that our communities, if the local government authorities work well, our lives would be so much better in our own communities.



What the Government has done was to reduce the allocations to all the corporations over the 14—I am sure you all would not have seen this. And, Madam Deputy Speaker, in the interest of time I cannot go through all, but I could tell you: San Fernando, Arima, Chaguanas, Tunapuna, Sangre Grande, Couva/Tabaquite, Mayaro/Rio Claro, Siparia—*[Interruption]*—Madam Deputy Speaker, I am hearing a drone. He is disturbing me.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Member for Port of Spain South, continue.

**Miss M. Mc Donald:**—Princes Town, Point Fortin. Madam Deputy Speaker, their decrease to their corporation is between 1 to 6 per cent. The percentage decrease for the Diego Martin corporation is 13 per cent; “\$13.7 million you went down by—\$13.7 million. “Port of Spain corporation went down by 11 per cent.” They reduced our expenditure, the city, Madam Deputy Speaker, by \$28 million; your capital city—\$28 million.

I look at the community centre construction programme, and I have to say it was under the former administration that we embarked on a very comprehensive and massive programme of the community construction programme, where we set out to construct 100 community centres across this country; across the length and breadth of Trinidad and, Madam Deputy Speaker, no constituency would have been left untouched. And they all know, because when I was Minister of Community Development, I went into their constituencies many times, opening one, two, three. *[Desk thumping]* That is right; three; Siparia, three community centres. *[Crosstalk]* You understand? Mayaro got three community centres.

**Hon. Member:** It was not four?

**Miss M. Mc Donald:** Three of them. Madam Deputy Speaker. We are seeing that in the Public Sector Investment Programme for 2014, at page 139, it states that a total of \$85 million has been allocated in the 2014 PSIP for the construction and upgrade of community facilities throughout Trinidad.

For fiscal 2014, 18 centres in the areas—and I will tell you the areas where they are going to put them down: Bamboo Settlement; Ben Lomond; Cantaro; Caratal; El Socorro; Enterprise; Frederick Settlement; Gran Couva; Harmony Hall; La Savanne; Las Lomas; Las Lomas No. 2; Mohess Road; San Fernando North; Surrey and Tabaquite; nothing for east Port of Spain; nothing for Laventille; nothing for La Brea. What sort—and this is why I keep saying, this is inequitable distribution of resources; inequitable. *[Desk thumping]*

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, they have allocated, in that PSIP, \$15 million to refurbish community centres. Let me tell you where they allocated: Bamboo;

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Chickland—Chickland Village; Dibe, Embacadere; Frederick Settlement; Indian Trail; La Fortune; Plum Mitan; South Oropouche; St. John's Road; St. Margaret's, Tabaquite; Todds Road, and Williamsville; nothing for Port of Spain; nothing for La Brea; nothing in Diego Martin.

Again, I want to tell—and the hon. Minister stood here and said they are about equity; and everybody gets; no one is left behind. We are being left behind. Our constituents are being marginalized. [*Desk thumping*] We are being marginalized. And it is sad that when I sit here, and Minister by Minister stood here and talked about all the roads.

Look, the other night I had to tell the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla—I had to say to him—“he stand up: ‘A, B, C, D’. Ah say, ‘Hello; just say de whole constituency geh paved; de whole constituency geh paved; road after road, after road, after road.” Last night I was at home, ill, in my bed, and I listened to the Member for Naparima; and road after road after road. Madam Deputy Speaker, in the three years; one road! Ah beg, ah beg, ah beg; one road: Concession Drive in Sea Lots West; “eh”, one road; one road. [*Crosstalk*]. Shame on you all; shame; shame. [*Crosstalk*] Shame!

**Hon. Member:** “All yuh shameful. It have a God.” [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Members of this honourable House, please, Members. I want to ask you to please allow the Member for Port of Spain South to speak in silence so I can hear the Member.

**Mr. Imbert:** “Dey too wicked.”

**Miss M. Mc Donald:** Wicked? Wicked is an understatement.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I have come here begging year after year to complete the Picton Dance Theatre on Picton Road in east Port of Spain. I said this would have been the first dance theatre in east Port of Spain. What it would have done, it would have honed the skills and the talents of the young people in east Port of Spain.

Madam Deputy Speaker, when I demitted office in 2010 it was at least 30 per cent completed. “When you walk up Picton Road now, is only bush; bush.” They have left it. They have abandoned it. I placed a question in this House, and what did the hon. Minister say, the Member for Mayaro? He said they have no money; it would be done when they get money. That was it.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Again, I am saying that you all are starving—you all are starving the city of resources. You are gutting your capital city. And I am telling you, one day the frustrations might just let loose, because we are feeling marginalized. We are being marginalized. We are being left behind, and I want to make that point. That is why I was not too interested in the figures, you know. I am interested—*[Interruption]*—“D’Abadie/O’Meara, I am speaking”.

Mr. Speaker, could you protect me?

**Mr. Speaker:** No, if you could address me.

**Miss M. Mc Donald:** Mr. Speaker, could you please, um—*[Interruption]*

**Mr. Speaker:** You have my full protection. Just address me.

**Miss M. Mc Donald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to draw your attention—“this House attention”—to something called activity centres. Mr. Speaker, I have been reliably informed that a programme of construction of activity centres was developed in the Ministry of Local Government by the Minister of Local Government, the Member for Tabaquite. It was only yesterday, I believe, we heard about these activity centres. They are all less than a million dollars to build. They are something like what you may call a cross between a homework centre and a community centre.

Mr. Speaker, from my knowledge, I have been advised that five such centres have been built to date, at a cost of \$800,000 for one, and let me tell you where these five centres are located: Carlsen Field, Waller Field, Penal, Mamoral and Fyzabad; not one, *[Crosstalk]* not one, *[Crosstalk]* not one *[Crosstalk]* in our constituencies; not one. *[Crosstalk]* Mr. Speaker, inequitable distribution of resources—we are being marginalized.

**Mr. Speaker:** Would you address the Chair, and not the—

**Miss M. Mc Donald:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. “But sometimes, you know, Mr. Speaker, I like to watch people in dey eye.”

**Mr. Speaker:** Yes; but watch me.

**Miss M. Mc Donald:** “Ah like to watch dem in de poke ah dey eye.” *[Desk thumping, laughter and crosstalk]* “Yes; I like to see de white ah dey eye.” And I want to address the housing issues in Port of Spain. And I have been speaking about this ad nauseam in this House. Madam Deputy Speaker—

**Mr. Speaker:** No; Mr. Speaker.

**Miss M. Mc Donald:** Mr. Speaker, [*Laughter*] I heard the Minister of Finance and the Economy—no disrespect, Sir—at page 48, stated that home construction will commence on three new sites to yield 2,575 housing units in three years at a cost of \$858 million. “And where these houses will be located?” Trestrail Lands, Eden Gardens and Pineapple Smith Lands; none in east Port of Spain; none in east Port of Spain.

Mr. Speaker, and I recall that on Wednesday, August 21, the Prime Minister met with the residents of east Port of Spain at the South East Government Secondary School, where the said residents highlighted their concerns and their needs and two things came out. One, they wanted homes, better homes, and they want sustainable jobs. Mr. Speaker, out of that meeting, my boss here, the Diego Martin West MP, requested a meeting with the Prime Minister to discuss and to make certain recommendations with respect to how we could deal with crime in east Port of Spain area, and we presented a 10-point plan to the Government.

One of the points, simple, was this: urban renewal. The Government accepted. In our meeting, the Government accepted it. Mr. Speaker, when I saw the realignment of Ministries when it took place two weeks ago, I noted with care that the Ministry of Housing, which also had Land and Marine Affairs, the Land and Marine Affairs was dropped, and went to the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo as a separate Ministry, but onto Housing I saw tagged on urban renewal, or urban development. I cannot remember which word they used in there. And I felt hopeful. I was excited. Why? Because I said, “Aha, the Government is listening. They are listening to the cries of the east Port of Spain, or they listened to the 10-point plan that the Leader of the Opposition presented.”

Lo and behold, we are here looking, and we are looking and examining the budget to see, well, what is in it for us? Absolutely nothing! Out of \$838 million allocated, Mr. Speaker, for housing to build 2,575 houses, absolutely nothing for east Port of Spain. And let me tell you something, I was inundated with calls and emails from my constituents. But you know what? I saw the Member for Oropouche East stood here, and he know that ah coming here to talk about this, so he start: “We are going to be doing this and that and the other next year.” Where is it in the budget?

**Hon. Member:** They get a variation.

**Miss M. Mc Donald:** “No, no, ah doh want no variation. Ah want to see it now. Doh tell mih dat. [*Desk thumping and laughter*] Doh tell meh dat. That is

not the way we do it at all. Doh write yuh—doh pass that truck around me at all.” When the Minister—when the Minister of Finance and the Economy stood here and presented his budget for 2014—I want to tell the Member for Oropouche East something. Leh mih put it on *Hansard*, eh.”

**Mr. Speaker:** Address me.

**Miss M. Mc Donald:** Mr. Speaker, I did not go to school in August. And I want to say that if the Minister of Finance and the Economy knew about these plans, would the Minister of Finance and the Economy, knowing that east Port of Spain is a hot spot area, not be happy to say what are the Government’s plans? Mr. Speaker, may I say that if we continue in this way—I do not begrudge any citizens whatsoever; those who getting the activity centres; those who getting the new houses; those who getting roads; those who getting water; those who getting box drains; I do not begrudge any. All I am saying is I ask, I beg, and I plead for my constituents in east Port of Spain [*Desk thumping*] and wider Laventille geographic area that they too share in the economic pie of this country.

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

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister of National Security. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of National Security (Sen. The Hon. Gary Griffith):** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and hon. Members, for the opportunity to address the Chamber, and add to the discussion, and the debate surrounding the fiscal 2014 budget, as it pertains to issues of national security and public safety. I pledge to you, hon. Members, and to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, my full commitment to fulfil my responsibility in my position as Minister of National Security, and to implement the necessary measures to deal effectively with the growing challenges to law and order.

Mr. Speaker, the unacceptable levels of crime and anti-social behaviour continue to be the most fundamental threat to the economic and social well-being of our people and, therefore, continue to be the highest priority of this Government. Mr. Speaker, I have no intention in my position as the Minister of National Security to politicize crime. I am here right now to try to find the right mechanisms and to implement the policies that are required.

What we are waging is a war against the criminal elements in our society. Too often I have seen people have the perception that the enemy are those on the other side of the political bench—the parliamentary bench. Where I stand, that is not going to be the case. I intend to look at all 41 Members of Parliament as being the

leaders; those individuals who I must speak to, who I must work with, to ensure that the fundamental rights of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago would be adhered to. Nothing is more important.

To the Member of Parliament for Port of Spain South, in fact, I heard you mention the fact of certain police posts were removed from an area. What we have to do is not to just come up with ideas, plans, hit and hope. If we can find proper tools, proper mechanisms, to ensure that the rights of citizens are adhered to, their fundamental right, which is that of safety and security, we have to look at those policies and implement them, not to remove them. I also have no intention to reinvent the wheel. If there are certain national security policies that have been effective, that have been successful, we need to look at them.

I am not going to regurgitate the brilliance or the failures of SAUTT. However, for too often we keep hearing this situation about SAUTT. Let me just clarify something here. Yes, there was good and there was bad in SAUTT. With the good of SAUTT; SAUTT had a K-9 Unit. The K-9 Unit, Mr. Speaker, is still there. The K-9 Unit was extracted from SAUTT and is now under the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. What we are doing now is ensuring that it is more effective; better training; better facilities, so that the K-9 Unit could even be implemented very soon to deal with the Ministry of Justice, to weed out all of the phones and other aspects that prisoners have in their cells; likewise in the airports.

SAUTT also had something called DATS, a Direct Action Task Force. That is a very powerful unit. That is a unit that was there specifically to ensure, any type of counterterrorist activity, they are there to prepare for it, to deal with hostage negotiation, to be there in case the national security alert state goes up, so that they can be the first line of defence. That DATS team is still in effect, Mr. Speaker. It is now under the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force; training and prepared for action, if and when required.

The CSI—crime—no, let me go first with the training. SAUTT had an excellent system for training. The problem with SAUTT and that training facility, it was earmarked, Mr. Speaker, specifically towards individuals. What we are doing now is that we have transformed SAUTT training into a national security training academy, so it would not [*Desk thumping*] be just for specific individuals, but for each and every police officer, soldier, sailor, immigration officer, so that they can have the training, the mechanism and tools to truly be considered Trinidad and Tobago's finest.

The air unit: the air unit is still there, Mr. Speaker. It was moved from SAUTT, and it is now under the National Security Operations Centre.

Crime scene investigation: the individuals you see that wear white in any major criminal act, the crime scene investigation has now moved under the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, and the Deputy Commissioner of Police, who was involved in SAUTT, he is still there to confirm this. So nothing has changed, Mr. Speaker. All of the powerful aspects of SAUTT, they are still there.

The bad: having 70-odd foreign-used British personnel who came here for sun, sea and sand alone—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** At \$100,000 a month.

**Sen. The Hon. G. Griffith:**—at \$150,000 a month—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** Each.

**Sen. The Hon. G. Griffith:**—they are not there. The purchase of a blimp without the knowledge of the Commissioner of Police, that is not there. What we have is to ensure—and again, going back to the foreign-used British personnel who were there; that same—the funds that were used there, over \$80 million, \$90 million per annum, have now been filtered into each and every law enforcement officer, of \$1,000 per month, which helps our own, because they need it; not them.

**Hon. Member:** Correct.

**Sen. The Hon. G. Griffith:** Dealing with the maritime security wall, Mr. Speaker; again, if we look at the concept of the offshore patrol vessel; people speak a lot of the offshore patrol vessel. Yes, it is a very important tool to ensure that we secure our exclusive economic zone, but the offshore patrol vessel had flaws, and we have to accept that. And looking at the problems of the offshore patrol vessel, what we have now, is we have set up a maritime security wall to lock down our shores.

That maritime security wall is not just having three OPVs, 90 metres long, that would have just secured our exclusive economic zone north and east of Trinidad and Tobago, from 12 miles to 200 miles, but, in fact, what we need is a proper lockdown; a security wall, especially to look and to secure the infiltration of where matters most, which is the low-lying water in the Gulf of Paria, in the west and the south coast. That could not have been done utilizing an offshore patrol vessel at the cost of \$2.2 billion.

We are utilizing these same funds, Mr. Speaker, to provide the mechanisms, and this is because we are working with the defence force. We must not, as

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politicians, continue to just come up with ideas and impose them on law enforcement officials but hear what they have to say, understand their needs; understand their concerns, and then we now, as the Members of Parliament, will then go forward and implement those policies as they see fit, because they are the experts; not us.

Granted, however, we have had meetings with the PNM, and they have had excellent points; I appreciate it. And those we have to look at, and we need to implement. The Member for Chaguanas West, he had—it is what, over 100—100 points. A lot of those points are very valid, and this is the point where I state that we must not politicize crime. We must look at the situation, analyze the threat, and through the threat assessment, through cost benefit analysis, we can then utilize our limited national security resources in an effective and efficient manner. And that is what we intend to do. It cannot, Mr. Speaker, just be coming up with ideas and then putting them forward, because, if we do that, what we are doing, we are wasting funds, and, at the end of the day, the results will not show.

As I go back into the importance of a maritime lockdown, Mr. Speaker, this fiscal year, what we will be doing is to acquire the mechanisms that the coast guard and the air guard need, to provide that lockdown of our borders. That lockdown would entail not three OPVs but to acquire one long-range patrol vessel, which is all that is really required to secure our exclusive economic zone from 12 to 200 miles. That is all that is required; one; not three.

The funds for that other \$800 million, roughly, that would have been utilized for two other offshore patrol vessels. The role and function for those vessels, by the way, would have been to secure an imaginary pipeline from Trinidad and Tobago to as far as Jamaica that was never even built. So what we are doing now, to utilize that \$800 million to acquire, (a), over eight interceptors, fast patrol vessels that can actually move around and lock down our shores from the border to two miles. That is the lockdown. That is what you need. You need speed and efficiency.

The second wall, the second tier, involves fast patrol vessels; fast patrol vessels being naval vessels from 40 to 50 metres, that can then patrol between two miles to 12 miles. That would then complement the interceptors. The unfortunate situation again; the previous administration again, they had it—they had the right idea, because through the acquisition of the Austal vessels, unfortunately, most of those vessels are now unserviceable because it was a bad buy. We have to now replace those vessels; we have to replace the interceptors.



But putting interceptors, then the fast patrol vessels, a long-range patrol vessel, that is the lockdown. But lockdown could only be effective if there is proper communication, Mr. Speaker. Proper communication must take place through an operations centre, when each and every arm of the law enforcement agencies can work together, communicate with each other and be able to have successful operations. Therein lies the difference between the Special Anti-Crime Unit and the National Security Operations Centre. And again, as I say, this is not—the Special Anti-Crime Unit had very important aspects, which we intend to keep, because we must never throw out the baby with the bath water when we intend to fight crime.

But looking at the National Security Operations Centre, whereas SAUTT was perceived, because of improper communication, as being one that would extract resources, take away manpower, take away the strength, take away—and it became more of being competitive to the law enforcement agencies, Mr. Speaker, than actually being there, and to be of the value that it really should have, the National Security Operation Centre, in this fiscal year, will be implemented to provide that communication; that operational link between the police and the army; between customs and immigration; between prisons and the air guard; they all work together, getting information in real time, because that is important to ensure you can have an effective operation. So the National Security Operations Centre becomes the catalyst; that area that can actually form and work to have the arms of the law enforcement agencies working together.

Mr. Speaker, I can stay here and idly boast about all of the achievements of the law enforcement agencies over the last year or so, but I do not need to do this. I think each and every citizen here, or in this country, must and should be aware that our law enforcement officers, they should be considered Trinidad and Tobago's finest. Yes, we have rogue elements; and, yes, we must do what is required to weed them out, but in the meantime, we must show that respect; give them that support; give them that confidence to know, "Listen, we are here for you." That can only happen if you provide them with the tools that they require. If they do not acquire the tools, then they cannot make gold from straw. They cannot go ahead and be successful in their policies.

Within the last year, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, they have seized 68 revolvers, 115 pistols; 19 shotguns; three sub-machine guns; nine rifles; 37 homemade shotguns; six trap guns—over 250 firearms seized in one year, over \$18 million in marijuana, street value, seized by the Organized Crime Narcotics and Firearms Bureau. We intend to have improved communication systems through the E-999.

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Mr. Speaker, we can all speak about a decrease in crime; we have even heard about the decrease in the increase in crime, but I am not here to play with statistics. I could speak to the fact that when the Special Anti-Crime Unit was in effect, the murder rate was over 500, and it has now gone to less than 350. So the murder rate has gone down by 150. That means nothing to the citizens of this country, because the perception of crime and the fear of crime are still there, and we need to put the mechanisms in place to give them that feeling and comfort to know that they can be truly protected because, as I keep saying, that is their fundamental right.

What we will be implementing—one of the many systems we will be implementing to provide the citizens of this country with that right to safety and security, involves a rapid response unit. I have heard that we have had a rapid response unit before. Mr. Speaker, I beg to differ. We have never had such a system. The rapid response unit would involve specific vehicles assigned in 15 regions, earmarked throughout the country. There will be three or four vehicles in each region, depending on the area of responsibility and the threat assessment. Those vehicles will be assigned and must remain in that area, Mr. Speaker. Basically, then, it is going to lock into it.

How it is we can be assured that these vehicles will remain in their area of responsibility? Because each of these vehicles will have GPS on them. Through the National Security Operations Centre, we can then look, pinpoint, and monitor the movement of these vehicles. So the talks that we have heard so many years, that when you call a police station, the police will say that they have no vehicles; there is no one to drive the vehicles; or we will see police vehicles going to Hi-Lo or whatever; these vehicles will be specifically assigned to their area of responsibility. What does that mean? It means that, based on the area, those vehicles patrolling, if at any time a citizen makes a distress call, we can be assured that you are getting immediate to a maximum 10 per cent response to any emergency call, and on most occasions.

What does that mean? It then means that what it is going to provide is a deterrent to criminal elements to be aware that no longer do they feel that they can commit a crime and not be apprehended. The concept of criminological theory involves that. It involves the perception that crime is a product of opportunity, and the criminals feel that they can commit a crime, because there is a great likelihood that they cannot be apprehended. That is the reason for the systems that we are putting in place; not cosmetic; not political, but to put scientifically proven and effective measures to provide that deterrent for the criminals to feel that if they commit crime, then they cannot be apprehended.

I can look at it as a four-walled approach, Mr. Speaker, where you can look at intelligence gathering, which is critical, and it is another avenue that we need to—that we would be improving. Intelligence is critical to ensure that we do that pre-emptive strike to prevent the criminal from committing the crime. If that fails, we are go into level two, which will then involve the deterrents. Deterrents will prevent the opportunities of the criminal; whether it involves roadblocks, cordon and search, visibility, the rapid response unit, and any mechanism that will make the criminal feel that he would be apprehended if he commits the crime.

We then move to wall three, which is the arrest. The arrest procedure is very critical, because if and when the criminal feels that we do not have the intelligence, he can commit the crime, we must ensure that we have a rapid response to apprehend and arrest him, which will then move us to level four; the fourth wall, which is the successful conviction. And this, obviously, is very flawed, because our detection rate speaks for itself. We need to put the mechanisms in place in this fiscal year, to ensure that that detection rate increases. But the detection rate only comes about when the persons commit the crime. So we have to go right back to the importance of crime prevention, and providing that deterrent, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, all of this has to go with four basic principles that we need to look at, which involve accountability, management, measurement of performance and good leadership. We intend to enforce these four principles. The accountability, again, for example, going into the situation with the police with the rapid response unit, where they must now be accountable, because they will be weighed and they will be measured based on their speed; their rate; how fast they can move to a crime scene; good management. We have to manage and control all our systems of national security. Just coming up with ideas—hit and hope mechanisms—would not be the answer.

Leadership—and it has to be leadership by example, and the leadership will involve not just myself as the Minister of National Security, not just the 41 Members of Parliament, but each and every law-abiding citizen, being a leader in their own right, understanding again that it is us versus them, it is good versus evil, and where it is we need to move away from this avenue of trying to politicize each and every single crime-fighting mechanism that comes from one side to the other, it is childish, it is immature, and we need to move forward, because we are here to serve. We are not here to lead.

As good leaders, you have to know that you need to serve. And for us to serve, we have to understand that the importance here is not the tit for tat and idle

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chatter and trying to discredit each and everything that happens. Where I sit, and while I remain as the Minister of National Security—that is why I will continue to work with each and every Member of Parliament, liaising with the crime plans that I have seen from the People’s National Movement; from ILP; and that each and every Member of Parliament, liaising with the crime plans that I have seen from the People’s National Movement; from ILP and from each and every law-abiding citizen who wants to be part of this. That is the only way we can succeed, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, there are many other policies that we intend to implement. Those policies will vary from looking at aerial surveillance and having proper intelligence gathering. Again, the concept of the blimp; it was in the right direction, but moving into the 21st Century, unmanned aerial vehicles, UAVs—I heard someone call the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara a drone; but drones; that is what we are speaking about; drones. The drones are very important, where it can provide that replacement for the blimp and can undoubtedly assist in improving the aerial surveillance, and that intelligence that is required to provide to the law enforcement officers on the ground.

And it again goes with the importance of the National Security Operations Centre, because, having the blimp, for example, or a drone or whatever, and not having immediate, real time video footage and information being passed to the law enforcement officers, it serves no purpose. So this is a jigsaw puzzle, all being locked together into having proper intelligence, immediate rapid response, law enforcement agencies all working together. The UAV will be part of this process, Mr. Speaker.

Looking at that air surveillance, as I continue; the National Security Operations Centre inherited the helicopters from the Special Anti-Crime Unit. Some of these helicopters, I think they flew during the Fred Flintstone era, and they need to be changed. And with that, that shows the importance—we need to keep moving with the times; keep moving to make sure that our law enforcement officers have the type of equipment, technology and assets that they require to ensure that they could perform successfully.

After all of this, we still have to look at the basic infrastructure of the police service, the army, the coast guard and other arms of our law enforcement agencies, Mr. Speaker, where, if you do not provide them with the tools, the maintenance of the buildings, their vehicles, they cannot perform. The coast guard, for example, is a typical example, where we have one or two main coast

guard installations. For an island of this size, it is not practical. You cannot have interceptors, you cannot have other mechanisms from the coast guard, and you do not have installations strategically placed around the island.

That we intend to do as well in this fiscal year, Mr. Speaker; where we intend to put coast guard installations strategically placed in specific areas to ensure that the interceptors now, they can be moored, and they can lock down that area of responsibility, 360 degrees throughout Trinidad and Tobago, and not just what the OPV might have done, being in one area, 12 to 200 miles offshore securing our exclusive economic zone but not securing the other arms and the other aspects of Trinidad and Tobago's shore.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is also very critical that we look at the importance of training. As with any business—as with anything that you do—training is important. The National Security Training Academy, again, an extract of what SAUTT was, where SAUTT, the training was specified to individuals, certain groups, or certain organizations in the law enforcement agencies, the National Security Training Academy will be there to train each and every police officer, customs officer, immigration officer, prison officer, soldier, sailor, air guard. Every person who is part and parcel of dealing with law enforcement, they will now have the opportunity to be trained in the National Security Training Academy.

That aspect of that National Security Training Academy—I could just give you a few examples of what we would be implementing this year. How can we have a police service without an indoor range? How? We have our police officers having to train to—their main weapon is their firearm—but they are training on an outdoor range, or they have to go to a private institution to train. We will be putting an indoor shooting range for the police officers. We also will be putting in a simulation theatre, so that the police officers and other law enforcement officers can analyze the situation, look at the threat assessment to ascertain what they need to do.

This also goes to the tools that are required for the law enforcement officers. If our police officers just have from verbal persuasion straight to the firearm, that is what they would do. We need to ensure that our police officers are properly tooled and equipped with the items that they require to move from verbal persuasion, and it goes up as the threat assessment goes up. So we move from verbal persuasion to the baton to pepper spray, taser, stun gun, to then the firearm. They do not have this, but we need to provide that.

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We could also have seen it in the recent riots in Beetham and other areas where, again, the soldiers, unfortunately, were forced to go into an area—it may have been perceived to be hostile, but you do not go in an area with unarmed citizens, all with firearms. And this is what we would be doing; providing the law enforcement officials with the tools for such a situation. [*Desk thumping*]

These tools in situations of riot and crowd control will involve water cannons, rubber bullets, tasers, and other aspects to ensure that you use minimum use of force. At all times we must do this. And this, again, could only happen going right back to proper training; having a training academy that the soldiers and the police officers can train and work together in preparation for any natural or man-made disaster.

And I will say natural or man-made disaster, even recently with the floods in Diego Martin, when the soldiers, who, again, people get the perception that the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force are only there in case of a war, but they are also there as an aid to civil power. They are also there in times of peace. They were also there in their numbers, through the engineer battalion, to move as quickly as possible to provide aid to those residents hardest hit in Diego Martin and the environs.

Mr. Speaker, in our capacity as well, with the Prime Minister as lead for security for Caricom, it is important that we be our brother's keeper. It is important that we put mechanisms to protect and secure our Caribbean neighbours in case of any natural or man-made disaster. This could only happen if we have a structured regional security headquarters, which is what we would be implementing again in this fiscal year, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that we adhere to our obligation to Caricom.

That regional security headquarters will ensure that at any time, if there is any natural or man-made disaster, we can provide immediate response; not necessarily Trinidad and Tobago providing the financial support, but you need to have an operational central mechanism to provide that communication and to liaise with the other islands, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that they can provide support in case there is a hurricane, an earthquake or an attempted coup, or what, you name it, but that could only happen if there is one central location that can analyze the information from the island that is hit, and you can then pass that information on to the other islands to say, "Listen, Jamaica, can you provide this? Barbados, provide this", and they all work together.

We have never had that sort of cohesive involvement, and that is the importance of our regional security headquarters. So it is to provide that relief and immediate response and support through proper collaboration and communication to ensure that we provide support for the other islands.

Mr. Speaker, if we look at the situation in this country, over the last two decades, governments come, and governments go; Ministers of National Security would come and go. What we need, however, is a proper national security framework policy. We can look at the benefits of the Joint Operational Command Centre under the UNC Government, where the murder rate was less than 100; and that was because of specific measures that we intend to pursue and implement.

Then we can look at the PNM Government, where they had SAUTT and other mechanisms that again were very effective. With this Government, we have NSOC. We have a number of different things. What we need, however, is a proper national security framework to ensure that if at any time there is a change in Ministers of National Security; change in Governments; change in whatever, the framework remains the same, because for two decades, the criminals, they keep moving forward. They have their status, they have their plan of action, but we keep changing, and all the time when we have to go back from day one with a new Minister or a new Government, that must not happen.

We must stick to a national security framework policy and that policy, Mr. Speaker, must come from the experts; not the politicians. Because we would be the ones that need to get the guidance of those people who have been there; who have been tested, and they know exactly what is required to secure our country.

Mr. Speaker, as I conclude, I want to state that the problem that we encounter right now involves, obviously, gangs. The hardest enemy to fight in a battle is the enemy that you cannot see, and the only way that we can actually win such a war, is to utilize the one million plus people in this country; the adults or anyone who wants to be part of this. That can only happen if we work together, we trust each other and we have the confidence and support with each other.

I intend to ensure that we continue to move in that line, Mr. Speaker. The citizens must get back that confidence and trust they had with the police service to work together. We must all work together as one, and forget about political affiliation and move forward to try to root out the true elements and the true enemy of the State. The enemies—and again, I will say it as I conclude—are not those that I look at across on the parliamentary bench, but those who deprive the Trinidad and Tobago people of their most fundamental right, which is that of safety and security. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, with that, I hope that we work together; we do not politicize the situation. If I fail—if this Government fails in national security, we all fail. This is one where it is us versus them and the “them” are not individuals with a different political party tie or badge but the enemies are the criminal elements who we need to destroy and put an end to their involvement in criminal activity once and for all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie):** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Greetings to all Members of the House of Representatives, and I thank the hon. Leader of the House and Members and you, hon. Speaker, for giving me an opportunity to say a few words by way of response and also by way of putting forward a few views on the budget of 2014.

The vision that we have for East Port of Spain is that it will be part of the creation of a modern urban city that is based on integrated services in which you have managed transportation networks; in which you have new businesses and investment, including the interconnection with new centres of development such as Chaguaramas; such as Invaders Bay; such as the rejuvenation of the city centre with housing and commercial activity: theatre, nightlife, restaurants, entertainment, creative activity, pan, drama, classical, with strong depiction of the post-colonial heritage; a post-emancipation vision, and an independent people at work.

The East Port of Spain area has been and has had the greatest potential for development as the gateway of our city. It is the area that heralds our economic, financial and governance centres, therefore creating an area that feeds these centres of development through training, housing, entertainment, culture and leisure and we must find a way, Mr. Speaker, hon. Members, of realizing that vision.

There are, indeed, challenges with the communities of East Port of Spain. The challenges with the communities of East Port of Spain did not emerge in the past two or three years. It is the result of sporadic and reactive development, and it is the result of unplanned developments and spontaneous development initiatives. It is also the result of political manipulation, which has made highly talented people



into very dependent communities, whose response to perceived inequities is aggression, both inward in their own communities and outward to those who might appear more privileged.

The challenges that often manifest themselves in gang warfare, in attacks against the status quo and in general withdrawal from social and economic activity and participation in criminal activity is, some might argue, a survival response. The demands from the community for housing, employment, training, social support, suggest that the response must be, as has been in the past—must not be, as has been in the past, superficial and unsustainable. The approach of this administration, therefore, is not reactive, but one of providing a comprehensive, coherent and integrated approach that would yield the impact of transformation, not only through social conditions but through economic, environmental and infrastructure regeneration.

This response has been through, first of all, the creation and strengthening of the east Port of Spain Development Company Limited. And I want to say that when that company was capitalized in 2005, it was capitalized with TT \$550,000. Secondly, embarking with the IDB on an emerging cities initiative, which is patterned for selected cities, of which Port of Spain is one, involving some of the cities of Latin America that require transformation for regeneration, creating peace through citizen security—and we have a \$20 million funded citizen security programme which shows major progress in the areas in which this programme is deployed and in which we have expanded eight additional areas in the city of Port of Spain—provision of support through operation and capital financing—and that is for the projects. I heard the hon. Member for Port of Spain South talking about the fact that there is nothing in the budget. The projects are not outlined in the budget but the funding is given to the east Port of Spain Development Company.

The east Port of Spain Development Company has been charged with the mandate to transform Port of Spain, through economic, social and physical regeneration in partnership with the community. Specifically, the community—the company, sorry, seeks to explore economic strategies and physical regeneration to stimulate economic regeneration in east Port of Spain, and essentially its approach is one of regeneration and revitalization. And this includes physical, social and economic transformation; creation of an attractive environment for investing; living and working in east Port of Spain—and it might surprise you when we get some investment in there—redevelop derelict sites, vacant land and buildings and rehabilitate affected communities; and to nurture business and entrepreneurship indigenous to the community.

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In 2013, some the key activities undertaken by the company include—and I say this, knowing that the hon. Member for Laventille West, and indeed the hon. Member for St. Ann’s West have both been involved in certainly some of those projects; both at the stage of discussion as well as the stage of fulfillment, that is to say at the end of execution. So I mention some of those from 2013: the Basilon Street Youth Facility, which is on Basilon Street in East Dry River; the Coconut Drive Pavilion—I could explain what these involve, but for want of time we will just mention the names—the Laventille Road infrastructure; the Beecham Coco infrastructure upgrade works in Beecham Coco, Belmont; the Beetham five drains in Beetham Gardens; the Desperlie Crescent garbage disposal point in Laventille; Beverly Hills garbage disposal point in Beverly Hills, John John; and in Jacobin Street, Morvant, the lighting of the hard courts.

There are several other outstanding projects, that is to say projects in process, but not yet completed: Beetham phase two, pavilion; Morvant pavilion upgrade; Murray Road garbage disposal point; Murray Road, steps and drains upgrade; Davis Street No. 1, steps and walkway upgrade near to the Desperadoes pan theatre; Sea Lots West children’s memorial play park; Sea Lots West homework centre; Sea Lots East play park; Jacobin Street play park.

Beetham gardens, phase four: Vierra Street roundabout; Manda Trace, curb wall and slipper drain in Manda Trace; sustainable community-based water management project; recycling waste management and clean-up in east Port of Spain—a campaign—revitalization of the Central Market, which is to begin; and this may surprise people who do not live and know east Port of Spain: latrine eradication programme.

And, Mr. Speaker, hon. Members, when I make this list of projects, I did not count them; I did not number them, but it is over 20 or 25 projects here; some completed; some in process. It does not seem reasonable for a Member of Parliament to come and say that nothing is being done in east Port of Spain. And I would ask that the Members who have an interest in the community there—and I know they do, all right; I have worked with some of them, and I know they have an interest at the community there, and I have worked with some of them before I came into Government.

I remember being on sessions in Beetham Gardens around Christmas time on several occasions with the hon. Member for Laventille West, when I was a member of the university community, as principal, and at that time I chose the opportunity to give, at Christmas time, the gift of books, because I thought that that was so important for the community there, and the children there. So the

work is going on in east Port of Spain. But I want to show that what we are doing is not one off, and it is not sporadic, and it is not unplanned. It is planned from the point of view of community interest and community demand and community involvement, but it is also planned from the point of view of how do you connect these things to other things that might be done in the community that would make a difference?

Now, social support: the East Port of Spain Development Company has recognized that for change to be realized, you also need social programmes. And they are going to try to step up both the involvement in social programmes, and the coordination of social programmes, to the extent that they can, in this coming fiscal year. And the methodology that they use in coming up with these programmes is the methodology of community ownership, community driven programmes. This is what they do. People are involved. It is not imposed upon them. It is by demand, not by supply and, more than that, there is a significant amount of participation in these programmes and communities.

And then we have the sustainable cities initiative. Now, it is important to understand that this is not an initiative about east Port of Spain alone, it is about the city of Port of Spain with east Port of Spain playing a critical role. The idea is, we have a situation in which the 2011 census tells you very clearly that people are moving out of Port of Spain and they are moving to other parts of the country. So that the community of Port of Spain, that is to say the number of citizens, is decreasing.

And we also know that there is an issue in Port of Spain in which the businesses in Port of Spain are under pressure, because you have mall development and new commercial infrastructure development in different parts of the country, so that there is a greater amount of decentralization and therefore a number of options for citizens.

In this situation, it is important to do something with Port of Spain that impacts on Port of Spain as the major city in the country that is Trinidad and Tobago, while at the same time developing other city centres throughout Trinidad and Tobago. So the east Port of Spain development is linked to that. Because if you have a crime-ridden area that is very, very depressed, and in which the citizens feel themselves to be under duress, it is very hard to develop a city in the centre of Port of Spain that is inviting to activities that require peace and security in order to be enjoyed, and that require a psychological sense that peace and security will prevail for citizens to come to it in the first place.

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So the emerging cities initiative is linked to the east Port of Spain development strategy, and it is important to understand that. And what is that emerging city initiative—what is it about? This we are doing in partnership with the Inter-American Development Bank. Now I want to explain something. They are not the only funders. They are the coordinators and organizers, and it is their initiative, because they have done this in other cities, but we sat with them to work out what we will do; so the programme is ours.

There are other multilateral institutions involved in it, and for this to work, the community has to participate, and the business community in Trinidad and Tobago has to participate and, indeed, other community organizations in the country—NGOs and so on—have to participate, and we are trying to build up that capacity to do it now, and there are many people who have volunteered. And when we did a lot of work in the cultural community, to bring them to the country with the spirit of independence on the 50th Anniversary, part of the arrangement with these cultural phenomena, really, beautiful artists in Trinidad and Tobago, gifted artists, and people who have excelled in their field, part of their commitment was that they would also work with us on a development strategy for east Port of Spain, and they are very much prepared to do that kind of work.

So what we are involved in, in this emerging city of Port of Spain initiative, is environment and infrastructure development, including protecting the watersheds in environmentally sensitive areas; wastewater management and flood mitigation—and the hon. Minister of the Environment and Water Resources would have spoken about his own initiative, which he is driving, funded by the IDB, which deals with the flooding in the Port of Spain area, and includes east Port of Spain on the Dry River side. And it is important to understand that sometimes the development has to follow the solutions of problems that have now become perennial. And, therefore, there is a sequencing that is required in order to make development happen in a meaningful way that impacts on the community.

The second thing is cultural heritage restoration; the restoration of Fort Picton and creation of the tourism potential around this and other sites. Now, Fort Picton is a very important fort, because Governor Picton fought against both the French and the Spanish in a single battle to stave them off. And it has a significance for the country, but it also has a significance for the people, because this is where it is located. And if we were to restore and rehabilitate that, not only would it be meaningful to the country, but it would be meaningful to the people, and if they took ownership of this heritage asset, it could make a difference in terms of their behaviour.

And this is the context in which the notion of the cable car is perceived. The cable car idea is not something that we dreamt one morning. It is not something that is isolated from other development. It is linked to successes in other countries, including places like Columbia, which are not too far from here, and which have been located as initiatives inside of communities that are much more ghettoized than east Port of Spain, where the quality of living is really, really below human imagination; and where things have been really rough, and where there have been gangsters and criminal activity.

But what has happened, as you put these cable cars and you have the movement of people in and out, and you develop the heritage elements of the community, and you create the condition for commercial, opportunity and enterprise and you create the opportunity also for cultural assertion and creation, what happens is that the dynamic of isolation gives way to the opportunity of integration and interculturalization. And what this does is that it creates an opening for development with a strong human development content. And most of the industries that have developed around that have been labour-intensive and imagination-intensive.

And this is this notion of the cable car. The cable car is not just something to ride up and down. It is something that is seen as an intervention that could make a psychological and transformational difference into the community and at the same time provide a mode of transport in a situation in which transportation from up the hill there to Port of Spain is no easy task because I have been there up and down a few times. So that is how you have to locate it. And it is not right to take something out of context and isolate it, and then take a gun and shoot it down.

Social and economic development—the metaphor was intentional—social and economic development, through skills development, training and business creation. I want to tell you what we have been able to do, through collaboration and cooperation. We have been able to work with the community, a group of community people in east Port of Spain; some of them from Belmont; some of them further inland in east Port of Spain, and we have been able to work with them, and we have been able also, by working with them, to work with the Catholic Church.

And, working with the Catholic Church, we got the Catholic Church to agree that if there was a plan that would make a difference to the community, they would give the land to the State. And the Catholic Church, through the Archdiocese, had just agreed to give 14 acres of land to the State for this collaborative venture between the community and the State, but also involving

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agencies of the State, so many of the agencies will be involved—The Ministry of Tertiary Education; the Ministry of Education; the Ministry of Community Development, et cetera; because what we are going to do there is that we are going to build a skills centre on that particular project, as a beginning. And there will also be an early childhood centre. I heard the Member for Port of Spain South talking about that.

And if you look [*Crosstalk*] at the PSIP under the Ministry of Education, you will also see funding allocated for a number of early childhood centres throughout the country. And I am absolutely sure that some—

**Miss Mc Donald:** You saw the centre by Spree Simon?

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. B. Tewarie:** No. I do not know what you are talking about.

**Miss M. Mc Donald:** That was the early childhood—

**Mr. Speaker:** Please, please [*Inaudible*].

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. B. Tewarie:** Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I was trying to respond to the hon. Member for Port of Spain South.

What I do know is in the PSIP there are significant sums allocated for early childhood centres and this is throughout the country, and I have no doubt that east Port of Spain will be part of what is done for the country as a whole.

In 2013—well this is 2014, really. In 2014, funding is indeed provided, and the Minister of Environment dealt with that—Environment and Water Resources—for the execution of the programme related to flood alleviation. And together with that, we have another programme that we want to do, which sort of bridges the gap between eastern side of East Dry River and the western side leading into Port of Spain.

There is also a citizen security programme in that east Port of Spain area. That citizen security programme is managed by the Ministry of National Security and it is meant to assist in reducing crime and violence in 22 pilot communities and this has now been expanded to include eight additional communities. The major initiative scheduled for the fiscal year 2014 include commencement of rapid impact projects in eight new CSP communities; strengthening of community action councils, members and other community residents to provide training in the areas of domestic violence prevention, child abuse prevention, crime prevention

and community safety planning; provision of assistance to the Police Youth Club; execution of public education activities to promote peace and lawfulness, including billboards, radio, television, print and electronic media ads; implementation of a ceasefire programme, something I have a great interest in, really; support for the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service through the provision of specialized training for victim support, unit officers and furniture equipment; provision of grants to schools to implement projects to address issues related to school safety.

In terms of integrated public financing, I think it is important to know that there are a number of programmes related to the Ministry of the People and Social Development—some of which you would have heard about today—from the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development; from the Ministry of Community Development; from the Ministry of Housing and Urban Develop; and from the Ministry of Sport there are in the pipeline refurbishment and upgrading of seven community recreation facilities in east Port of Spain—St. Paul Street recreation ground; John John hard court; Plaisance Terrace hard court; Beverly Hills recreation ground; Basilon Street hard court; Basilon Street hard court—one basketball and one netball—and Fort Picton hard court.

In the Ministry of Local Government there is work scheduled on Tamarind Square, Soogrim Trace, Old St. Joseph Road, HDC compound, Sea Lots, Pioneer Drive, Laventille Road, George Street and Nelson Street. Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism: performing space in Laventille for start-up, fencing and construction of facility. Ministry of Transport, VMCOTT: expansion of facilities at Beetham inclusive of constructing a CNG station; signage; fencing; repaving; re-roofing and replacement of water lines.

Ministry of Community Development: a range of community centres.

**Mr. Imbert:** Where?

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. B. Tewarie:** Ministry of Housing—this is 2014.

**Mr. Imbert:** Page 24?

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. B. Tewarie:** Ministry of Housing and Urban Development: park development and rehabilitation of drains in communities throughout Trinidad and Tobago through CEPEP; refurbishment of basketball courts in residential communities in Trinidad and Tobago; retrofitting of HDC high-rise apartment buildings, for health and safety compliance; installation of

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fire escapes, rehabilitation and maintenance of HDC rental apartments and housing units.

Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development, through the emerging cities; infrastructure work on the emerging cities and sustainable cities initiative. We have in mind a centre for women and the refurbishment of the City Gate hub, in collaboration with the Ministries of Gender, Youth and Child Development and Transport, Tourism and the Port of Spain Regional Corporation, and we are talking to e TecK about the possibility of a park and ride facility that would address the issue of traffic congestion in Port of Spain.

So these are some of the things that we are thinking about and talking about, and doing. And I want to emphasize that I preceded what I said we were going to do with outlining works in progress, about 14 or 15 of them, and identifying work already done, another 14 or 15, that had been achieved. And although some of these might be small projects, at the end of the day the cumulative impact is really quite significant.

So it is not true to say that we are not doing anything for childhood centres in east Port of Spain. It is not true to say that we are not building any play parks. It is not reasonable to isolate the cable car and not see how it is linked with other things. It is not reasonable to say, basically, that nothing has been done in east Port of Spain, and it is also not reasonable to say that we, by and large, have ignored east Port of Spain and the city of Port of Spain. [*Crosstalk*] And, in fact, the evidence that I have produced here this evening, tells you very clearly that work has been done, work is being done, and that more will be done.

I want to say too that when you talk about the city of Port of Spain, and the rehabilitation of east Port of Spain, you have to understand what a difficult challenge it is for coordination of Ministries. Some of you on the other side have been Ministers in your own administration, prior to the People's Partnership, and you know how difficult it is to manage the work in your Ministry. That is your responsibility, and it is difficult enough, because, at the end of the day, you want it to impact on people. But when you have to manage with a number of Ministries, the coordinating requirements of that, given the business of Ministers, and given their individual agendas, and given the responsibilities of people in their own Ministry to do things within their own core Ministry and budget, it becomes very, very difficult to coordinate.

Let me just outline for you the number of Ministries that are involved in the east Port of Spain initiative: Transport; Planning and Sustainable Development;



Works and Infrastructure; Tourism; Environment and Water Resources; Local Government; Housing and Urban Development; Land Settlement Agency; National Infrastructure Development Company; East Port of Spain Development Company; Port of Spain Corporation; Downtown Owners and Merchants Association; Maxi-Taxi Association; Public Transport Service Corporation; National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation—linked to the market—San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation; Environmental Management Authority and Ministry of National Security.

To coordinate and to have coordination of all of these things, and to have the volunteerism that is required to make all of these impact on work is a real challenge and that has, indeed, been one of our challenges.

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

**4.30 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**5.00 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

**Mr. Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. B. Tewarie:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During the period just before the House broke for tea, hon. Speaker, I was making the point that, first of all it took a long time for East Port of Spain to get to where it was; secondly, that since this administration came into office we have done a significant amount of work in terms of small, but needed projects, throughout the East Port of Spain area, most of it executed by the East Port of Spain Development Company.

We have also had a range of Ministries and government institutions involved in both physical construction and rehabilitation work, as well as soft social programmes in the community. And more than that, there are a number of projects now in process and there are a range of projects over the 2014 period of the fiscal year that we are going to execute as well.

I want to talk a bit, therefore, about the country, and I located what I said for East Port of Spain within the context of a vision for Port of Spain, and I want to say that our vision for Trinidad and Tobago is that by the end of the next two decades—2033, if we take 2013—Trinidad and Tobago will be a place where people enjoy a high quality of life within a safe and healthy environment, and that includes East Port of Spain.

**Hon. Member:** And some of Vision 2020.

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. B. Tewarie:** The country will be the hub of innovation-driven economic prosperity focused on sustainable development and environmentally sensitive design standards.

**Hon. Member:** “Ah” looking forward to it.

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. B. Tewarie:** Both urban and rural areas will provide good employment opportunities and city and town centres will cater equitably for residents’ and visitors’ needs through the provision of shopping, commercial recreation and cultural facilities, and education and health facilities, in peaceful, secure, accessible and healthy environments. That is what identifies the strategy—that is what links the strategy—for development across the country in different growth centres.

Food and energy security will be achieved through innovation, diversification and targeted investment in the agriculture and fisheries sector, and the hon. Member for Port of Spain South talked about the fact that we might have dropped in the competitiveness index, but what she did not say is that we have now been reclassified from being a transition economy to an innovation-led economy.

What that means is that the terms of competitiveness by which we are measured are much more stringent, and that makes a difference. So we have now got to earn the fact that we have been located in this new area with a number of countries that are the top countries in competitiveness in the world, and we now have to earn our way by making sure that we improve the quality of our competitiveness in the country, and therefore the level of our competitiveness ranking.

We also have a vision that an efficient, integrated and sustainable transport system will link homes, jobs and key services, while reducing dependence on private car use and make alternatives more viable and more attractive to use. These benefits of reduced congestion and pollution will be felt in improved productivity, better health and reduced stress, all supporting a stronger economy.

The benefits of an enhanced quality of life based on sustainable development will be shared across the nation, urban and rural areas alike, so that disadvantage, deprivation and poverty are eradicated. People will be actively involved in the planning of their national and local environments and management of change will be based on transparent and consultative decision-making processes.

Mr. Speaker, hon. Members of the House, according to the United Nations, the world will need between 40 per cent to 50 per cent more water, food and energy by 2030. Now that is not so far away; it is only 17 years away. And if you have a high demand of 40 to 50 per cent more for food, water and energy worldwide, I think that what you are dealing with is what has been identified by the United Nations as the food/water/energy/stress nexus. That stress nexus makes it imperative for countries such as Trinidad and Tobago to ensure that its development is coherent and focused and takes into account this energy, water and food stress nexus.

What does that mean for Trinidad and Tobago and the region? It means that we have got to focus on the energy needs, both the current energy needs and alternative; it means that we have got to focus on water, rehabilitation, et cetera, and food security, and it also means that we have got to be very aware of how we balance the development in these areas.

That is what has led us to the five priority areas of crime and law and order; agriculture and food security; health care services and hospitals; economic growth, job creation, competitiveness and innovation; and poverty eradication and human capital development. That is what has also led us to our business clusters of energy and energy industries, and the *Review of the Economy* shows us very well that while we have a challenge in the energy sector, the energy services are a major growth area, and a recent IDB study identifies that as a major area of growth.

Tourism, another area for growth; food sustainability; culture and creative industries; maritime industries; financial industries and ICT, and, of course, there are other geographical thrusts that support the diversification strategy.

Now, within this context, therefore, it is very difficult to appreciate the position taken by some Members on the other side that we have no framework or plan for this country and that we are not doing anything for the country. I do not wish to go into all the things that we are doing. What I did was that I chose the area of East Port of Spain to indicate, very clearly, that the charge that we were doing nothing, first of all, is not true; secondly, that the evidence gives clearly what we are doing; and thirdly, that the financial support in the budget and the PSIP indicates clearly that more will be done for east Port of Spain.

What I want to do now for a minute is to talk a bit about where we are going as a country and frame some of that so that Members on the other side can appreciate and understand what it is that we are trying to do. Now, I say this

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against the background in which, from the very beginning, the prediction of the Opposition leadership was that the People's Partnership Government would not last its full term. That was the prediction from day one of the Government.

Months passed, years passed—close to three and a half years have now passed—and that has not happened, and time and time again the Opposition would pretend that the People's Partnership Government was not even here, just as they say we did not do anything in East Port of Spain, and that our Government was just a rude interruption of the continuity of government of the Opposition. This is how, basically, they have painted the metaphor of governance and politics and change in this country.

Now, for years, in spite of the *Medium-Term Policy Framework, 2011–14*, with its five priority areas for development which I just outlined; in spite of the seven identified areas for diversification and its strategy for geographical distribution of the benefits of diversification through growth poles, and the alignment of the 2011–14 PSIP with each annual budget 2011, 2012, 2013, they have been misrepresenting to citizens of this country that there is no plan and that we do not know what we are doing.

We published the *Working for Sustainable Development* document, in addition to the medium-term framework, and this was distributed to all Members of Parliament, together with—well, later than the medium-term framework, which this Government presented to Rio+20, and which identified 10 major challenges for Trinidad and Tobago. But that did not make any difference to them.

The stakeholder consultation which led to the clear identification of seven clusters for diversification, involving 400 people, organized by the Economic Development Board, in which the EDB's proposals on diversification were discussed, at that time none of this was acknowledged. This is not acknowledged today. At that time Dax Driver, the CEO of the Energy Chamber, was the chair of the EDB. And though the Opposition denies reality, these are the seven areas that are for clustering, and we can see what is happening to them in terms of the *Review of the Economy 2012*, because we are seeing the growth in some of these sectors: energy and energy services; food security and sustainability; finance; ICT; maritime services; tourism and creative industries.

In the context of denial though, the attempt is now being made to rebrand the Opposition as the party—the sole party—of development. And they boldly and arrogantly ask the People's Partnership Government to step aside and to make room for them, and that they have come to us now with 2030, which is a 10-year update, I presume, of 2020.

They do not seem to be able to wait until 2015 when the general elections are due, to gain control of the public purse and usher in again an era of hegemonic governance. The Opposition Leader could hardly contain himself when he basically took the position: “Go. Get out of the way”, he shouts, “because we want to take your place.” He goes further to assert that nothing was achieved by the People’s Partnership Government in the last three years, ignoring every fact and every bit of statistical evidence to the contrary.

Moreover, the political leader of the PNM claims that they have been the architect of all development in the country. It is, indeed, true that the Opposition has dominated time control of the 56 years of self-government and independence. The fact is that they have had 44 of the 56 years and during that time we would have made gains, no doubt, as a country, but that is what governments are for. But the tenure of the Opposition in Government has been a checkered one, at best, and any claims to the contrary are mere words which ignore reality; spin, which no thinking person can reasonably countenance; false claims, which the facts of the historical record will not substantiate.

Let me therefore share with the thinking people in our country, the open minds in our country, supporters and friends of democracy, citizens sympathetic to the People’s Partnership, citizens who might be a little jaded by the politics of our time but who love their country anyway, and who continue to live in hope, and people of goodwill, generally, who continue, the vast majority of our citizens of all political affiliations—including no political affiliation at all—let me share with all of you citizens, friends and people of goodwill, some of the good that we have done for our country in the short space of three years.

I will mention just four things before I go on to some others. We have brought this country from decline to growth. I want to emphasize that. [*Desk thumping*] People seem to forget that. In 2009, this country had plunged to a steep decline of minus 4.4 per cent. Today we are projecting—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** What?

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. B. Tewarie:** Go and read the *Review of the Economy*. Today we are projecting 2.5 per cent—[*Interruption*]

**5.15 p.m.**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development has expired.

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

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

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. B. Tewarie:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much, hon. Members. It is true that we have moved from 2009 minus 4.4 per cent, to a projected today of 2.5 per cent, and I want to say in this context that last year's projection was 1.2 per cent and that has now been revised to 1.5 per cent. Some might argue that the 2.5 per cent projection is a little bit heroic, but it is also equally possible to say that it can be revised upwards as well as downwards, because when you do GDP figures, the figures move as you get more and more information. So, it is important to understand that we are making progress and we are growing as an economy.

With growth has come jobs: jobs in domestic and export agriculture I want to say. Growth in exports in the energy sector as well as the non-energy sector where growth is greater. We are seeing growth, therefore, in an increase in job opportunities in the following sectors: finance, insurance and real estate, education and cultural services, distribution trades and restaurants, construction and quarrying, printing and publishing, food, beverages, tobacco and asphalt. This is where the growth is in the economy.

It is important to note how employment/unemployment is spread. Those areas over the national 4.8 figure of unemployment include Port of Spain, Point Fortin, Chaguanas, St. George County, Nariva/Mayaro and Victoria, but those under 4.8—that is to say less than 4.8—include San Fernando, Arima, Caroni County, St. Andrews, St. David, St. Patrick and Tobago. As you can see, if these are growth sectors, then we are witnessing an incipient diversification that is taking place in the non-energy sectors and, by and large, in the services sectors. This includes diversification, with job creation in financial services, food production, food and beverage restaurants, but also in creative industries.

Let me give you some numbers about where people are employed and how many:

- 407,000 persons are employed in the services industries in this country;
- 100,000 persons are employed in construction;
- 46,000 are employed in manufacturing;
- 21,000 people are employed in the petroleum sector;
- 627,000 people of a population of just under 1.3 million people contribute to the workforce.

So I think that we should step back a little and understand that the politics is one thing but the governance is another, that the charges are one thing but the reality is another, that the projections of what you might like to see are very different from what is actually happening on the ground in Trinidad and Tobago, and the numbers tell it—the numbers for inflation, the numbers for employment.

It is true, we do have an underemployment problem in the country, but that is a challenge of three or four things. One, the throughput of graduates from the system which has been expanded under this Government; secondly, the under-skilled, which is a significant proportion of the country; thirdly, the slow pace of diversification, which is another; and finally, because of that, the inability of the economy, as it is, to absorb the flow of graduates from the system. But this is something that we are actively thinking about and working on and developing a strategy, and we are going to do what is right for the country because we want every person in this country to have a stake in Trinidad and Tobago and its future.

Mr. Speaker, I have said my piece and I would like at this point to close my contribution on the note that, not only is it not true that we are doing nothing in East Port of Spain, and not only is it true that we have done a great deal and will continue to do in East Port of Spain, but it is also not true that we have not done anything in the country. The evidence is there that we are doing every day a lot that is impacting on thousands and thousands of lives in the country, in every part of Trinidad and Tobago, and that we will continue to do this, and as the economy grows, people will prosper. We hope also to manage the equity, we hope also to manage the poverty, and certainly we are managing the improvement and expansion of the human development opportunities in Trinidad and Tobago, so that this could become a sustainably prosperous country.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Speaker:** The hon. Prime Minister. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Prime Minister (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC):** Thank you very much, hon. Speaker. First of all, before I get into the substance of my conversation this afternoon, I want to say thanks to all those who participated in the preparation of this budget: the public servants, not just in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, but in every Ministry and every department. So can we thank all those who have been working days and nights to prepare it? [*Desk thumping*] We want to give a special thanks to Minister Larry Howai, our Minister of Finance and the Economy. Once again, he has delivered a very positive budget. [*Desk thumping*] Dr. Bhoë Tewarie working on the PSIP, we thank him for that work. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, as we have done in the past, for the preparation of this budget, the Minister of Finance and the Economy and his team and the Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development and his team, they engaged in stakeholder consultations. And so, we want to thank the stakeholder groups who attended those consultations, and we also want to thank those good citizens who sent emails, regular texts, regular mail, BBM, Facebook, Twitter, ideas and comments and suggestions which were considered in preparing this budget. We thank them as well. And, of course, all Ministers and MPs on both sides of the House, we thank you for the work; Ministers in fine-tuning the documents, the policies, the programmes for budget 2014.

We have witnessed several days, Mr. Speaker, of a very intense debate on both sides of the House, and I want to thank all those who participated. I think almost every single Member of this House, including several from the Senate, contributed in this very important debate.

During this debate, what was the position of the Opposition? What we saw, Opposition team A and team B—those on the other side—they have stated that they do not support this budget, and so they will vote against it. Should the Opposition have its way, Mr. Speaker, and the budget is defeated, who will suffer? Who will suffer? It will be the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. The school child in Sangre Grande will have no school because teachers in schools will have no electricity, no water, no chalk, no security.

There will be anarchy because even the police will not be paid, teachers will not be paid, nurses will not be paid. And so, what will they vote against if they vote against this budget? They will vote against roads being paved, they will vote against hospitals and health centres being built, schools being built. They will be voting against the welfare and the well-being of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Not against the Government. It will be against the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. And so, what we are voting for in this debate when we do vote, we will be voting for an improvement in the quality of life of all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. That will be our position. [*Desk thumping*] And so, they have said—with the usual doom and gloom, which we have experienced from 2010 since we came into this House—“worst budget, most corrupt Government”.

Many on this side have dealt with the issues of corruption, and Mr. Roberts, particularly, was very, very firm on the first day after the Leader of Opposition—on the issue of corruption—that the PNM has no authority, moral, legally or otherwise, to speak about corruption [*Desk thumping*] in this country. Absolutely



none! None whatsoever! And whilst they will do what they think is their job, which is to cry doom and gloom and to naysay everything that comes out on this side, there are right-thinking citizens in our country who have different to say about this budget. So I will just briefly mention the names of persons. It is not just us here in this House or those in the other place.

We had positive feedback on the budget coming from Douglas Camacho, the Group Executive Director of Guardian Holdings Limited; positive comments from Norman Christie, Regional President, bp Trinidad and Tobago; Charles Pashley, CEO of Prestige Holdings; Norman A. Sabga, Chairman and Chief Executive, ANSA McAl Group of Companies; Gervase Warner, President and Group CEO, Neal & Massy Holdings Limited; The Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association; The Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce; The Energy Chamber of Trinidad and Tobago; PricewaterhouseCoppers; Mr. Hugh Howard, President of the Amcham; Mr. Gerry Brooks, Chief Operating Officer of ANSA McAL Limited; and the list goes on.

These are very distinguished citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, and they have all given very positive feedback on this budget presented by the hon. Minister Howai. So whom should we believe, Mr. Speaker? Whom should we believe? I would want to believe these right-thinking citizens who are involved in the business community, who have to work with this budget and the community which we facilitate in the governance of the country and they facilitate governance for us and for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, people in the business community. And if you would go down to my constituency—I see some people have an aversion for any constituency in this House.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I heard Members on this side speak on discrimination, marginalization, and I will come to that. I will put the lie to that through the evidence, because here it is for 50 years you have people who never got water getting water, and it is not just in the south. [*Desk thumping*] Minister Moonilal mentioned a road he opened recently, Siew Trace, and the old gentleman who said, “Look, this was never paved since colonial times.” Never paved after 60 years. That is the whole reign of the PNM, never paved, and everywhere you go.

But because something is happening not in Port of Spain—south—it is discrimination; not in Diego Martin, discrimination. In Diego Martin right now we are doing that Diego Martin highway. Let us not forget that. In the south, San Fernando to Point Fortin; up in the east we will begin work on the Valencia road.

*Appropriation Bill, 2013*  
[HON. K. PERSAD-BISSESSAR SC]

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It is everywhere. When I listened to the contributions or read those that I did not get to hear, I see it is a kind of cherry-picking that is happening. So you will go through everything and say, okay, this happened in Penal, this happened in Fyzabad, Point Fortin, wherever it may be; cherry-picking, and their concern is to just select areas and speak of them.

Their concern is with cherry-picking, but our concern is the whole of Trinidad and Tobago, throughout the country. [*Desk thumping*] And if it is that the water is going to certain areas, it is because of the rural neglect this country has suffered. Rural neglect they suffered that has never had—in my own constituency—I came here speaking about marginalization and discrimination on many occasions as the MP for Siparia, and talked about roads where petitions were sent in to this Parliament—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** Begging. Begging.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—begging, do one road at least. Not a road was paved in the constituency of Siparia during the last five years of the PNM, the last several years of reign of the PNM. Not one! What was CEPEP? CEPEP was something we just heard about. We did not even know what that was. All we were told is, people painting the stones white and so on. In the majority of the country there was nothing like CEPEP. Today, we can say there is CEPEP happening in every constituency in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Every one! URP, come down to our constituency—not one project. Today, in every constituency URP projects are going on. [*Desk thumping*] And that is the way they continue with the misinformation, Mr. Speaker. Misleading the population—misinformation. Let me come to what has happened only just recently, up to this afternoon from a Member on the other side.

Misinformation and/or misunderstanding, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the agreement signed with Venezuela, the Joint Ministerial Commission for Unitisation of Hydrocarbon Reservoirs That Extend Across The Delimitation Line Between the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela: Agreed Minutes Concerning the Functional Structure and Governance of the Unit Operator for the Loran-Manatee Unit Area.

Before I give the lie or the exposure to the misinformation coming from the other side about this very great project, let us first record our thanks to all those for 10 years who laboured to make this happen. [*Desk thumping*] We have cross-border gas, large amounts of reserves, and for 10 years we could not come to an agreement with Venezuela that we will be able to monetize that gas.

**5.30 p.m.**

And now that we have come to a point where we will be able to very shortly monetize that gas, it is doom and gloom and naysayers on the other side feeding and fooling people with misinformation. You know, the hon. Member spoke about the budget being deception and sham. Deception, sham! Deception, sham! What is more deception than what was said about this unitization agreement we have with Venezuela?

I want to thank the people of the Republic of Venezuela, the President of Venezuela who came to Trinidad and Tobago recently. We met with him in bilaterals and we insisted—they were interested in getting us to get together to monetize this gas field and we said to him, “Look, please the only person could get it done is you”. It was happening at the lower levels 10 years, and I said to President Maduro, “We must get this done. You are the person.” Within a couple of weeks of his departure, he sent officials from his Ministry of Energy to meet with Minister Kevin Ramnarine and officials of that Ministry.

Now, this agreement was not drafted by Minister Ramnarine alone. This was done by the technical staff—high level technical staff in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs; very, very high staff there, officials, and also out of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Minister Dookeran’s Ministry. So this is what has happened. The agreement was signed only recently and let us see now the misinformation that is being fed to the public by those on the other side. Yesterday, the Leader of the Opposition and the Member for Diego Martin North/East both held a press conference to say, “We give away the gas. We sell out the gas. We give it away. How come we have 27 per cent but we only have a 16 point something per cent of control?”

**Hon. Member:** Interest.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Interest. How come? Why? What? Where? And they claimed to have the document. They claimed to have a copy of this document. This is the second time. I think, the Minister when he was speaking the other night said that—someone said that they had the Minister’s speech—

**Mr. Cadiz:** Speaking notes!

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—the Minister’s speaking notes. They had a copy of this document, but nothing is wrong because we have nothing to hide. And it is either, as I say, it is a deliberate misleading of people or it is just sheer misunderstanding or incompetency on their part to read and know what is in this document.

**Hon. Member:** Mischief!

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Mischief as usual. Misleading people with misinformation!

Now, when we look at the document, the first thing we see is that an investment committee has been set up, and this is at page 5 of the document. But before we get there, we have on page 2: “Interests for the purpose of decision-making”. This is for something called the Directing Committee which is the overarching committee for all the other committees that will be set up. It reads:

“For the purpose of the decision-making, the percentage interests of the members of the Directing Committee shall be allocated as follows:

- (a) the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (16.97%);
- (b) the Government of the...Republic of Venezuela (14.61%);”

So first, misinformation, we give away everything to Venezuela. Notice there Venezuela has a lesser percentage in the purpose for decision-making than Trinidad and Tobago.

But where does the 27 per cent come from? So they say why we only got 16.97 per cent? Why is that? And where has the other part of it gone—the other almost 10 percent: nine point something per cent? Nine point—

**Hon. Howai:** Three.

**Hon. Member:** Nine point nine six.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Nine point nine six per cent. It will be 9.93 per cent because this is 16.97 per cent, yes. Where has it gone? So we sell it away, we gave it away, “bobol”, “tief”, corruption. Minister Moonilal coined a phrase: before you do anything—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Moonilal:** Corruption!

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—before a contract is even awarded, before anything is done—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** “Is corruption.”

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—is corruption. “You cry corruption on top.” You know why? They do not want this Government to implement—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Moonilal:** Nothing!

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—or complete any project. Any project! They want us to do nothing so that they can come back into Government and continue with the same old rehashed PNM policies rejected. In 2010, that 20/20 vision plan rejected in 2010 by the electorate. [*Desk thumping*] That was the plan that was put to the population by those on the other side. What happened? They gave us an overwhelming mandate, they rejected the PNM plan and they took the plan of the Partnership. That is the first point with that.

All these years we are in this Parliament and never once has the hon. Leader of the Opposition or Members on the other side come forward with a plan. They asked: where is our plan? Go through the books. We have 11 documents laid accounting for the last budget—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Moonilal:** And they still want plan.

**Hon. Dr. Tewarie:** For this budget alone.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** For this budget alone and every year, we have those, the Review of the Economy, the review of the PSIP—everything is in there, every single cent is accounted for but they do not read those documents, you see.

**Hon. Member:** No, they do not!

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Because if they read them, they would have known the questions they are asking and the concerns, it is all documented in the 11 books and various documents presented together with the budget. So all of these years, not a plan; not a plan. Then, lo and behold, in 2013, on September 13, the hon. Leader of the Opposition tells us the PNM plan. What is that PNM plan? Rehashed, rejected, failed PNM policies. [*Desk thumping*] Rehashed, rejected, failed PNM policies.

**Hon. Member:** Racket rail!

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Plan A: “Vision 2030”. Plan A: “Vision 2030”.

**Hon. Member:** Drafted by Sudama!

**Hon. Member:** Re-Vision!

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** And nothing out of that plan 2030 has the hon. Member for Diego Martin West told us what is different from 20/20 vision.

**Hon. Member:** Ten years. [*Laughter*]

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Ten years, it will take a further 10 years. [Laughter] Nothing is different and so their plan is to go back to what was rejected.

**Dr. Moonilal:** In 2010.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** No time at all have they spent to tell us what are the plans.

Plan B: “racket rail”—revisiting the “racket rail”.

**Hon. Member:** Shame!

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Well, I think Minister Roberts dealt with that as well.

**Hon. Member:** After \$529 million waste!

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Five hundred and twenty-nine million dollars wasted.

**Mr. Roberts:** Shame!

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** And then with that “racket rail”, that too was rejected. In 2010, that was their plan and that “racket rail” was rejected by the electorate in 2010. So what is the plan? Where is your plan? Alternative Prime Minister in waiting: where is the plan? There it is, three years and a half later, no plan.

I come back to Loran-Manatee misinformation. So I am saying we have here for the purpose of decision-making, the percentage of interests: 16.97 per cent to Trinidad and Tobago; 14.61 per cent to Venezuela. It can be found in the very document right there on page 2 at paragraph 2.3.1. What it does it takes the private companies operating in Trinidad and Tobago and allocates to them a share of decision-making. So that takes us to:

“(e) Chevron Trinidad Inc. (4.98%); and

(f) British Gas Trinidad Limited (4.98%).”

And that is where we get the additional [*Desk thumping*] to make up the 27 per cent.

**Dr. Moonilal:** That is production sharing.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** That is what production sharing is about. In Venezuela, in fact, Chevron Global and PDVSA GAS of Venezuela—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Howai:** PDVSA.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** PDVSA—they have got 35.65 per cent and Chevron Global Inc. 22.79 per cent. So it is not just Trinidad and Tobago that gave to the companies that we are doing production sharing with, that the percentage is allocated, this also happened in Venezuela.

Mr. Speaker, why is that so? Trinidad and Tobago has claim to 27 per cent of the natural gas in that Loran-Manatee field. This is the quantum of natural gas residing on the Trinidad side of the border. It is contained in the block known as Block 6(d). However, there are two companies that are the contractors in Block 6(d). These are BGTT and Chevron. This has been so for many years, before our time even.

The Block 6 Production Sharing Contract was signed on November 12, 1974 between the Government, Texaco and Tenneco Oil Company. On September 09, 1993, an amendment was effected to Block 6 PSC whereby it was divided into Blocks 6(b) and 6(d), and that was given to Texaco Trinidad Incorporated and BGTT. Thereafter, Chevron acquired the Texaco part of it. That is when these two companies have been there, long before we were in Government. They were already given these production sharing contracts in the particular block that we are speaking about.

Under that concept of production sharing, natural gas that is won must be shared by the parties that have title to the gas, so we have 27 per cent. According to the terms of the Production Sharing Contract, we will apportion the gas—share of the gas allocated was as we have just discussed. So for decision-making of the Directing Committee which is the overall committee, Trinidad and Tobago does in fact have, through its partners—the Government and its partners, the two companies—the 27 per cent [*Desk thumping*] so we did not give away anything. That is what we were entitled to and that is what we have kept. But it goes a little further. That was one issue—the issue of the Directing Committee.

Then you have the Investment Committee—because they also spoke about this—page 5 of the document. The Investment Committee will comprise the four companies: the Venezuelan two companies, the Trinidad and Tobago two companies. And then you go to “Voting Rights” for that investment committee at page 6 of the document:

“A three quarters (3/4) majority vote shall be required for final decisions of the Investment Committee.”

But, Mr. Speaker, there is also in the Directing Committee, a veto. In other words, there is a veto that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago holds overall about any decisions made and that veto at page 3 reads as follows:

“A two thirds (2/3) majority vote shall be required for final decisions of The Directing Committee, subject to a right of veto exercisable by the Governments of Trinidad and Tobago or...of Venezuela if it considers that its sovereign interest may be affected.”

So in other words, without the agreement of T&T, they cannot decide anything. [*Desk thumping*] There is an overall veto, and again, it overrides all the other provisions.

**Mr. Roberts:** They always mislead.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** And once it is in the interest—sovereign interest may be affected, that of Trinidad and Tobago, we have a veto power. So what have we given away? What have we given away?

It goes even further, Mr. Speaker, there is another veto and this is at page 6 of the document and this has to do with the Investment Committee.

“The duties and responsibilities of the Executing Entity shall”—be:

“(a) the submission of, within ninety (90) calendar days of its appointment, the Exploitation and Development Plan for The Loran-Manatee Unit Area for approval by the Joint Ministerial Commission;”

Who is the Joint Ministerial Commission? It is Venezuela and Trinidad and Tobago. Again, should Trinidad and Tobago decide this is not in our best interest, Trinidad and Tobago again, has in effect, a veto. So we have given away nothing, Mr. Speaker, in fact, we have gained a lot. We will now be able to monetize 27 per cent of that field of gas. I think it is—what is it?

**Hon. Member:** Ten Tcf.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Ten Tcf—10 trillion cubic feet of gas of which we can now monetize 27 per cent. [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Moonilal:** “What a shame!”

**Hon. Member:** “What a shame on all yuh!”

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** This is where we are shoring up the revenue that will come, the revenue stream that will come. We are shoring that up through



this agreement and thereafter in implementing this agreement. Shoring up for the future so that we are not just spending for today without a care of where the money will come from tomorrow. This is going to make us have revenue streams coming in. [*Desk thumping*] Ten trillion cubic feet of gas!

**Mr. Roberts:** Wow!

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** So for the naysayers and doomsayers and saying, “We do not have enough, we cannot make money, we will not have money”, Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs was in the Parliament, he told you all the good things that are happening in the energy sector where we continue to get revenue streams out of that energy sector, so put paid to this, Mr. Speaker.

A second issue, again, of misinformation and misleading people: property tax. Minister Ramadhar has spoken very comprehensively on it but I want to reinforce the position of the Government because again, they are using this to make mischief, to misinform.

**Hon. Member:** That is right!

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Mischief making! We campaigned, Mr. Speaker, against an oppressive and unjust property tax that the previous Government wanted to impose on the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We came into office on the slogan coined by Minister Ramadhar, to “Axe the tax” and we axed the tax as we promised. We axed it. [*Desk thumping*] Our lobbying also killed the proposed new revenue agency that would have thrown thousands of civil servants out of work. We said we did not want the property tax. So today I say: do not be fooled by the propaganda of the PNM, we are not bringing back the property tax. [*Desk thumping*] We are not bringing back the property tax.

I have said and I will repeat for the point of emphasis and clarity so it will be recorded on the *Hansard*: My Government will not introduce the property tax of the PNM. My Government will not introduce a property tax of the Partnership. There will be a tax regime as there must, but it will be based on the old lands and building taxes [*Desk thumping*] prior to 2010, prior to the intervention and the interference by those on the other side. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Seemungal:** That is land and building tax! [*Continuous crosstalk*]

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** This will take the land and building taxes as it was prior to 2010 before the law that the PNM passed.

**Hon. Member:** “It add value!”

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** So the deception, misinformation from the other side—as the Government of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, we will continue to keep citizens of Trinidad and Tobago informed to maintain the high standard of accountability to all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Misinformation! Mischief! [*Crosstalk*]

**5.45 p.m.**

I want us now—you know, they never want us to speak about the past—but I want to take a few moments, because those who forget the past—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** Doomed.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—are doomed, Mr. Speaker. You forget the mistakes of the past and you are doomed to repeat them, doomed. The failures of the past, we will be doomed to repeat them. And so I want to take a little time to speak of the background, what we inherited when we came, and to remind ourselves, remind ourselves what it was like. People are forgetting what it was like then. We must remind ourselves.

In 2010 we found a nation in distress. There was growing underemployment; there were unacceptable unemployment levels. Many were forced to accept jobs below their capability and earning potential. There was a high incidence of business closure due to crime and harsh economic climate. We found a country riddled with murders and business and average citizens cowering in fear from the unrestrained criminal. The PNM called them community leaders, if you recall—the highest crime rates ever; a vast number of contractors owed hundreds of millions of dollars by the former Government.

We found years’ old labour negotiations unresolved. We found a health sector with dilapidated infrastructure and poor service, beds—no beds, sleeping in the corridor and on the benches, you recall, Mr. Speaker. We found empty water taps, Mr. Speaker, roads and bridges in near collapse, an agricultural sector in the last throes of death from government neglect.

We found an economy in virtual recession, choked to its knees by the PNM’s economic hit men. Mr. Speaker, we also found large financial institutions which had collapsed while under the care of Ministers and those Ministers were, by magic, able to cash in their own deposits—[*Laughter*]—and the deposits of relatives before the financial collapse. They were Ministers whose taxpaying jobs

required them to monitor the performance of entities like CL Financial and HCU to make sure that the public's money was protected, but what happened? They took their money out first.

We found million-dollar debts of contractors who had no contracts or works undertaken by UDeCOTT, who ran by the Opposition Leaders—who were run by friends of the Opposition, Calder Hart, a man who fled Trinidad and Tobago and refused to testify before the Commission of Enquiry.

**Hon. Member:** And still their friend.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Mr. Speaker, we found all of that and more but we did not throw up our hands in despair. We said we will take on the responsibility, the mandate that was given to us and we will work to fix the problems. And so people voted for us, yes they did. They gave us an overwhelming mandate and we came and we rolled up our sleeves. Your Government, Mr. Speaker, we put our collective shoulders to the wheel and we began that process of change.

We charted a road map for our country based on our manifesto. Every budget of our Government was and is an integral component of that vision that we had outlined in our manifesto as we sought first to stem the economic contraction to stabilize the economy and thereafter build a stronger more resilient country. And all the while we were doing that, Mr. Speaker, in really difficult times, we ensured that there was an expansive and enhanced social safety network to buffer the most vulnerable, those most at risk.

You know, Mr. Speaker, many expected us to fail. Some opposite gave us collapse from six weeks to six months and thereafter. Here we are three and a half years later, I say, still going strong. [*Desk thumping*] And if you look at the plan of those on the other side, the Members on the other side would like us to believe that the people of Trinidad and Tobago cannot think for themselves. They would like us to believe that the people can be blinded by fancy names and tag lines. And this they did again, the Vision 20/20, now 20/30. They call it a plan.

Mr. Speaker, in reality, it was the epitome of transient development, giving people hope to aspire to but failing to do what was required to get us there. It was a road map to corruption and bid-rigging more than 10 times what they accused the previous UNC Government of. And so, those on the other side said that plan would lead to the worst corruption that Trinidad and Tobago had ever seen.

The PNM took the manifesto that led them into office, they threw it out the window, they turned around and they said now it is Vision 20/20. The manifesto was PNM style of trickery, Mr. Speaker. But the vision represented a deceptive and new approach and so the question is this: Which member of the population voted for that Vision 20/20 plan? Which interest group in our society said yes because they could see how progress would be achieved, Mr. Speaker? And so, we come again, in their campaign of misinformation, Members on the other side claim that we have mismanaged the economy—

**Hon. Member:** “Hmm.”

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—and that there is all manner of corruption within the Partnership. The records would show otherwise.

Mr. Speaker, it was the same hon. Member for Diego Martin West who called the previous administration the most corrupt ever—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** “Um-hmm.”

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—and he promised to break the mould, to recreate the party that Dr. Williams had built. Yet that hon. Member is now singing the praises of the former administration—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** Yes.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—which he wrongly criticized for all its policies and from promising court martials for his former leader, the untouchable Calder Hart, the Member for Diego Martin West is now embracing the same Calder Hart, one of the 25 eminent patriots who devised that 20/20 plan.

**Mr. Roberts:** He chased Manning out.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** And, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member who promised a reinvigorated PNM is now telling us, as a prime minister in waiting, he will adopt the very same plans that he condemned—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Roberts:** Shame.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—prior to 2010.

**Hon. Member:** “He go appoint Sudama.”

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** So after waiting for three years to come up with an idea to make Trinidad and Tobago a better place, all that they can tell us is that it is business as usual in the PNM, back to the old plan. The Member

promised renewal and he is giving you the same failed vision and new tag line from 20/20 to 20/30—[*Laughter and desk thumping*—]and the name Calder Hart remains, sanitized and acceptable, Mr. Speaker, because the hon. Member says so. You know, when I hear the hon. Member for Diego Martin West, prime minister in waiting, I am not surprised that he is talking about 2030 because indeed, Mr. Speaker, as we continue to deliver he will take a very long time if he wants to lead this country. He will have to wait a very long time. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Partap:** We deliver, they talk.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Mr. Speaker, this is the first political leader in Westminster history who, apart from failing to even fully lead his own party, has appointed himself prime minister in waiting without even a clue as to who his shadow cabinet will be. Mr. Speaker, there is another prime minister in waiting as well.

**Hon. Member:** “Aww!”

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Sometimes both of them join hands and this other prime minister in waiting, he sees himself in his dreams as one day leading our country but he too has no clue, has given no indication of a shadow cabinet, of any policy or any programme that will mandate the work that they do. The mission of that other prime minister in waiting is simply to criticize everything, Mr. Speaker, that was so willingly approved, so fulsomely approved in this honourable Chamber. And we all could recall those.

I have parts of the *Hansard* but I will not spend time on them, where every single budget, the other prime minister in waiting would come and say “the best budget ever in the world, best budget.” So, Mr. Speaker.—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Tewarie:** That was yesterday.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** —that is okay. That was yesterday, I guess. Yesterday was yesterday.

What is our plan, Mr. Speaker? I say again, our plan was published in May 2010. Thousands of copies were printed. We also put it out on the newspapers, television and so on. It was part of the national conversation. It was not cooked up in the back rooms or power rooms, Mr. Speaker, imposed by prime ministerial dictate. It was published for all and one to see and vote on.

More than that, Mr. Speaker, it was brought to this House and adopted in this Parliament as our policy framework for development. So that was not just a

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collection of campaign promises, Mr. Speaker. We put the pressure on ourselves by making it a painstaking commitment, validated right here because we brought it as a Government policy thereafter. It was adopted, that manifesto. And so, that is the plan by which we are guided.

Mr. Speaker, we have other plans too and as we go through some of the successes I would share with us this afternoon, I want us to remember, in addition to those plans, you know, we have worked really hard, there is another plan that we are looking and working on which would bring health care more easily affordable and accessible to the population. So we are looking at—instead of the rapid rail we are looking at a universal health care system, a system where persons could visit any doctor of their choice instead of continuing in a situation where there is an oversubscription of care from our health centres. That is a plan to help people today and tomorrow, Mr. Speaker.

We are also looking—we were able in our first incarnation in Government to bring universal secondary education and now we are working—the Minister of Education is working on getting universal preschool education. [*Desk thumping*] We are well on the way, so that every child between three and five will have free preschool education.

I remember when we were on the other side in Opposition, the Members who were then in Government under the former administration would come to this Parliament and every time they spoke in a budget debate they will tell us how many preschools they were building.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** “Yeah.”

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** They called them early childhood centres—how many they were building, how many they were going to build, and they had promised to build 600 by 2010 [*Laughter*] but the rest is history.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** By 2012.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** By 2012, 600. How many did they actually build? In the nine years they were there, 22 of those schools were built.

**Hon. Member:** Oh, shame.

**Mr. Roberts:** Two point five a year.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** So we will come to that in a moment. Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Roberts:** “Dey doh even like little children.”

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Port of Spain South talked about the people placing trust in us in 2010 and is now saying people are just waiting to move us out. Three years later—I gave you the background from which when we came into government what it was like, three and a half years later, Mr. Speaker, would you know that the United Nations Happiness Report has placed Trinidad and Tobago as the 31<sup>st</sup> happiest country on a rank of 146? [*Desk thumping*] Thirty-first happiest country of the 158 countries researched. We are ahead of countries like Kuwait, Saudi, Italy and many others—31<sup>st</sup> ranked.

Another report that was done, and this was in September 2013, a United Nations report, there was also an earlier study conducted by Dr. Margarita Corral on the *Economics of Happiness*, Trinidad and Tobago was ranked as the fifth happiest country in this hemisphere. [*Desk thumping*]

What this data is about, people are—you know, those in development and so on—they are looking to other indicators apart from the macro-indicators. At first, you know, development was measured only on the macro-fundamentals, macroeconomic fundamentals, but this is a new kind of research which is saying, okay, your macro-fundamentals may be great, your inflation rate, your employment rate, whatever it is, the GDP and all the other things that fall under the macro.

All that sounds good, heavy economics, but then people are not happy, they are not feeling well, they do not feel things are going well for them. And so they have created this new kind of measurement tool to measure happiness and what it says is that the data, and I quote here from one of the reports. Like the UN report, Gallup went straight to the source asking 1,000 people in each of the nations surveyed five questions about whether they experienced a lot of enjoyment the day before, felt well-respected, well-rested, laughed, smiled, learned something interesting. And they say:

“These data may surprise analysts and leaders who solely focus on traditional economic indicators.”

Gallup researcher Jon Clifton noted and I quote:

“Residents of Panama, which ranks 90<sup>th</sup> in the world with respect to GDP per capita...”

So sounds good, good GDP per capita. They:

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“...are among the most likely to report positive emotions. Residents of Singapore, which ranks fifth in the world in terms of GDP per capita, are...least likely to report positive emotions.”

So where you are fifth in the world—so the macro-indicator is great, your GDP per capita is very, very high, fifth in the world, they are more likely to say that they are—they report negative comments. The UN report, as I said, ranks us as 31 out of 154 countries and so, whilst we look at the hard economics, we need to also look at what they call the well-being of the people of our country.

Let us come to the economy and I look at some of the hard data from the macro fundamentals. After inheriting an economy in the throes of decline, barely sustained by complete misfiring and misalignment of policy, driven by persons incapable to achieve success, we have returned to a growth direction with the economy expanding while holding stable inflationary conditions at 5.6 per cent and continue to generate jobs, with an unemployment rate at around 5 per cent.

The fiscal deficit is being properly managed in accordance with its policy objectives—I am advised that we remain well on course to bringing the fiscal accounts into balance. On our balance of payments current account, this is very buoyant, we have consistent surpluses and FDI has increased foreign direct investment from US \$1.83 billion to US \$2.52 billion in 2012. [*Desk thumping*] Gross official reserves are estimated this year at US \$9.4 billion or 12 months of import cover. The HSF now amounts to US \$5 billion which gives us \$30 billion in the HSF. With that import cover we are quite secure, Mr. Speaker.

**6.00 p.m.**

And so, after going through a period of economic stress caused by the global situation and problems within our domestic energy sector, our economy has rebounded and is on the move again.

Mr. Speaker, you will recall the global financial crisis 2008/2009. We do not blame those on the other side for that. What we condemn them for is stretching and mismanaging our resources and finances in a manner that left us very vulnerable. The PNM did not cause the global crisis but their incompetence in our economic affairs could well have caused us to collapse. There have been, now, under this Government, four consecutive quarters of economic growth; four consecutive quarters of economic growth. [*Desk thumping*]

I have already spoken of the increase in foreign direct investment. There has been significant increase in drilling activity; Minister Ramnarine talked about it.



Eight rigs would be working offshore by the end of the year, compared to just one in mid-2010 when we came in; one, again shoring up revenue streams by having more production.

Minister Ramnarine also told us about the deep-water production sharing contracts. Six of these have been signed. Zero was signed under the PNM. In fact, in one deep-water bid round, they attracted one company and due to the heavy and burdensome bureaucracy, that company pulled out, so none entered into in the last PNM time.

We have increased agricultural output, which has led to a decrease in food inflation from 29 per cent in 2010. Food inflation was at 29 per cent when we came into office in 2010. That has now gone down to 9 per cent in 2013. [*Desk thumping*] We removed VAT from over 7,000 items.

Mr. Speaker, I have been advised that future strategies would be made to address the prices of basic food items. These are being looked at. I have asked the Minister of Trade, Industry and Investment, the Minister of Finance and the Economy and the Minister of Food Production to bring down the price of basic food items even further.

We have moved up in the index of improvement in the ease of doing business. We were at 76 in 2011, now we are at position 69. So we can see, a businessman can register a business online. He could get it done within a couple of days instead of the weeks and months it would take in previous times. These are some of the things that we have been experiencing under the last three years.

A lot has been spoken about the national debt. A lot has been said of the national debt as a percentage of GDP, which the Minister of Finance and the Economy stated is at 44.7 per cent at present, compared to 39.7 per cent previously.

Mr. Speaker, I would just like to share the following statistics for information, so that we can properly put into perspective the debt-to-GDP ratio. In the United States in 2013, the debt-to-GDP ratio is 101.6 per cent; 101.6 per cent—this is one of the largest democracies and economies in the world; 101.6 per cent—up from 8.7 per cent in 2010. In the United Kingdom, the debt-to-GDP ratio is 74.2 per cent—remember we are 44.7 per cent—up from 56.4 per cent. The ratio for Barbados stands at 82.7 per cent in 2013, and there are many other countries with similar ratings. So the 44.7 per cent that Trinidad and Tobago has—debt-to-GDP—is not scary as long as the economy remains buoyant and strong and continues to generate sufficient revenues to repay debt as it becomes due. As we

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have seen, there is growth and there are many other areas we will speak of. In this case, we can work with the debt-to-GDP ratio, 44.7 per cent. It will not bring our country down but it will be used to develop it.

You know, when I was doing—I did a course at the Arthur Lok Jack School of Business and Minister Dookeran was my teacher—[*Interruption*]

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

**Dr. Moonilal:** Well yes!

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—in a particular course, Economics—I do not recall the exact name; it was about economics—and I remember there that one of the areas that Minister Dookeran was sharing with us was about balancing the budget and to what extent should nations consider going into deficit budgeting, in order to create development and by therefore, by creating development, create jobs and create revenue. And so it is a balancing of having—what you say—a deficit or having zero deficit or having a surplus.

Of course, we all want to work towards a surplus, but there will be times that you use the tool of deficit budgeting, as we are doing, to create the growth that we need, to expand the economy, to create jobs, to give development with roads, highways, schools, whatever it may be; all of that giving jobs, all of that increasing the quality of life and as we do that, using the deficit position that we are in, then we would work towards balancing, as Minister Howai said, and eventually, we continue working and the Partnership stays in Government we could go into surplus budgeting. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Roberts:** No Calder Hart.

How much time do I have, please? I want to spend a little time on the—

**Dr. Moonilal:** Half an hour again.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Of normal time?

**Dr. Moonilal:** Oh, one minute of normal time.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Thank you. I have one minute of normal time and, therefore, we would have to deal with these matters. The HSF: in 2010, the net asset value of the HSF was US \$3.17 billion. Today, as the Minister has advised us, the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund currently has US \$5 billion. You know, when we created this fund initially, the whole thought was that as we are making money now out of the energy sector, that we put it into savings, which is the HSF—[*Interruption*]

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

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Thank you hon. Speaker and hon. Members. I thank you all very much. I am saying, Minister Howai, US \$5 billion for the HSF, TT \$30 billion. What is the importance of this? We had said that as we generate revenue from the energy sector, that we would put some away into savings.

You remember the last time when we went into the slump in the energy sector when the price of oil and so on fell, everything was lost. We took away the COLA. Government took away the COLA from the public servants. A lot of things had happened because there were no savings. So whilst in times of plenty, which every prudent person will do, every prudent citizen will do, is that yes, you get some money, but you must put some away for the rainy day and that was the whole purpose of the HSF. I am very pleased to say that we now have TT \$30 billion in the HSF.

So we come to some of the macro-economic indicators and these are really very positive for us. In 2010, the GDP at current prices was \$131.3 billion. Today, in 2013, three and a half years of the Partnership, it is \$165.2 billion. [*Desk thumping*] What does that tell us? It tells us that there has been \$33.9 billion of growth in just these three years—growth.

In 2010, per capita GDP was \$99,634. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Members, please. I am hearing you completely and you are disturbing the proceedings. If you want to discuss matters, I ask you to go behind the Chair. Continue, hon. Prime Minister.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Thank you, hon. Speaker. I am talking about per capita GDP. In 2010, when we came into Government, it was \$99,634. By 2013, three and a half years later under this Government, per capita GDP increased to \$123,224; an increase of 24 per cent in per capita GDP.

When we look at inflation as well, in 2010, the all-item rate of inflation was 10.6 per cent. Today, almost 50 per cent lower in 2013, it was 5.4 per cent. We brought inflation down. In 2010, core inflation was 4.3 per cent. In 2013, we have brought down core inflation to 0.4 per cent, so from 4.3 per cent to 0.4 per cent.

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Food inflation in 2010 was 22.1 per cent. In 2013, food inflation has come down to 11.8 per cent; almost half of what it was when we came into office. [*Desk thumping*] In 2010, inflation in transport was 11.3 per cent. Today, 2013, we have brought inflation in transport down to 0.2 per cent; [*Desk thumping*] from 11.3 to 0.2 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, for housing in 2010, the rate of inflation was 0.3 per cent. We even beat this. In 2013, housing inflation has been brought down to minus 0.5 per cent. In 2010, the total number of persons employed was 582,100. The last statistics was for last year and this showed that the number of persons employed had grown by 11,000 jobs to reach 593,200. [*Desk thumping*]

The unemployment rate, from 5.9 per cent in 2010, also fell to 5.1 per cent in 2012. Our net foreign reserves, 2010, US \$9.1 billion, today to US \$9.4 billion. This speaks of a very strong economy and one that is in fact performing and has continued to perform consistently over the last three and a half years.

And so today, with all of this happening, we are today one of the most respected small states within multinational organizations such as the UN. The recent visits: the official visit of the President of China; of the Vice-President of the United States; our own state visit, official visit to Canada, all of these have been contributing to the growing importance of Trinidad and Tobago and our influence within the Caribbean Community.

Later this year, I am very happy to say, at last we will open our first Embassy in Beijing [*Desk thumping*] where we would expand our partnership in China and the Far East.

Mr. Speaker, all this speaks of confidence but also, in terms of the FDI, foreign direct investment, there is confidence in the economy. The First Citizens initial public offering, oversubscribed. I am advised, the Minister said, it is 3.12 times, but if we put that into a dollar amount, it is as if \$3 million is chasing down \$1 billion; oversubscribed by three times. So again, that is confidence in the economy.

We launched the Clico Investment Fund. Over 6,000 people and organizations benefited from \$10 billion in pay out. We commenced payments to HCU depositors. Over 17,000 people benefited from that payout of \$113 million. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, those on the other side, when they spoke, they talked about “where the money gone?” They talk, we deliver. They talk, we deliver and I

would show some of the delivery items; where this money went, over \$200 billion since we came into office. Where has the money gone? Let us first look at the—when we look at the estimates of expenditure, we see where the money went and we see where the money is being appropriated to go to and you can pick up these books every year, including the other 12 documents. This is like the Bible and this is where you see where every cent of revenue that comes in, where it comes from, and every bit of expenditure, where that expenditure is.

And so you look at the recurrent expenditure. And what is recurrent expenditure, the draft estimates of recurrent expenditure? That includes wages and salaries. It includes what is called transfers and subsidies and it includes minor equipment purchases. That is what recurrent expenditure is. And it is recurrent because it recurs, it recurs. Every month you have to pay wages and salaries, and so on.

What is most interesting is if we look at the estimates for the last years from 2010 to the present, you would see that under “recurrent expenditure” over \$203 billion was spent on recurrent expenditure from 2010 to the present time. What does this mean? What I have done, I went through the estimates and I looked in the estimates to see what was the actual expenditure for 2010, 2011, for 2012, we looked at the revised estimates and for 2013 the estimates.

**Hon. Member:** And 2014.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** We would not look at 2014 because 2014 is what you are going to do. We are talking about what has gone. So we are looking—well you would look at 2014 because you would see it gives for the previous two years; so over \$203 billion spent on recurrent expenditure. What that leaves then is about—you do it now for the development programme; development programme will be bridges, roads, highways, schools, hospitals and so on; development programme—capital programme. When you total this, again, you will see just about \$28 billion for development work.

**6.15 p.m.**

Understand this “yuh” know. “Where de money gone?” Go to the books they will give you a detail of every item. It is put in there. This is where the accountability is, in the documents. [*Desk thumping*] This is where the accountability is for every cent received and every cent spent.

So let us go now to this “over \$203 billion”. What does it mean? Over 68,000 people are working for the Government in the public service, they get a share out

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of the wages and salaries, out of the recurrent expenditure; that is where the money went. Money went to pay people to work in the—[*Desk thumping*] 68,000 and that is only people working with Government Ministries and departments. There will be another several thousands receiving pay from the state enterprises—other state agencies—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** Statutory boards and so on.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—statutory boards and so on, people working there. So it has people working, for example, at the National Lotteries Control Board. We will have people working for—name some.

**Hon. Member:** WASA.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Sports Company, WASA.

**Hon. Member:** UDeCOTT.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** UDeCOTT, T&TEC; all those, they are not government workers simpliciter. So about 68,000 workers in the departments and Ministries, and then all these state enterprises, must be over 100 of them, statutory boards and other bodies. Not a set of—another 20,000 maybe. So we are looking at recurrent expenditure, every year paying almost 100,000 people, giving them an income. [*Interruptions*]

**Mr. Roberts:** “PNM doh like dat.”

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Mr. Speaker, and then they stand to ask, “where de money gone?” We are using the money to pay people for jobs that they do in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And where does the money go? Where does the other part of it go, under recurrent expenditure? It goes to something called transfers and subsidies; so salaries and wages, transfers and subsidies. What are transfers and subsidies? These are all the various grants that we give to people—Minister Howai? Grants under the Ministry of the People and Social Development, we give out house repair grants; we give disability grants; we give you pensions—

**Hon. Member:** Differently abled.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—differently abled, I mean there is a whole host of them; public assistance—

**Hon. Member:** School feeding.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—school feeding, maybe even pensions—

**Hon. Member:** Which we have increased.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—school feeding—yes, which we have increased.

**Mr. Roberts:** Elite athletes.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—elite athletes.

**Hon. Member:** Sporting bodies.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** There are so many of these. In fact, Minister Howai has advised us and we will see it in the *Review of the Economy 2014* at page 37:

“Actual Total Expenditure and Net Lending for the fiscal 2013”—last year—“amounted to \$59,470.2 million or 36.6 percent of GDP representing an increase of 12.6 percent over fiscal 2012. Recurrent Expenditure amounted to \$50,467.1 million or”—hear what it is—“84.8 percent of the Total Expenditure...”

Of the total expenditure in the budget, 84.8 per cent—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** Is recurrent.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—is recurrent: paying wages and salaries and all these grants that we give to help people.

**Hon. Member:** “Yeah, wher de money gone? Wher de money gone. To de people.”

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Where is the money going? It is going to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago; all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Member:** “And to pay dem too.”

**Hon. Member:** It is Manning’s question to him that reverberates in their mind. “Wher de money gone?”

**Hon. Member:** “Is true.” [*Laughter*]

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Well, yes, I recall the former Prime Minister asking the hon. Member for Diego Martin, “wher de money gone?” You will recall right here, well, not in this building, but in the Parliament Chamber. So they are asking, wher is it? That is why I am accounting. The purpose of this budget is to report and to account, and I am accounting for wher the money is going.

**Hon. Member:** Correct.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Mr. Speaker, if we look at Appendix 23 of this same book, the *Review of the Economy*, it lists the same kind of the structure for each of the years—fiscal 2010, fiscal 2011, fiscal 2012, fiscal 2013—where almost 80-plus per cent of moneys allocated is spent on recurrent expenditure i.e., salaries and—I want to repeat you see, because they do not understand that, salaries and wages, grants, the subsidies, the transfers that we give. And then what are we left with?

We go to the development programme. So you have the recurrent expenditure which I have just explained. The massive part of the budget goes into paying the salaries and so on, and giving out the grants to help people. Then you have the development programme, this is to build the highways, schools and infrastructure that I mentioned. Under that development programme over the past year since 2010, just about as I told you, \$28.4 billion spent on that. In this year's budget it is \$8 billion, whereas in the recurrent for this year's budget it is \$61 billion; recurrent is \$61 billion.

**Mr. Roberts:** Fifty-nine....

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** No, well, you have to add the other—in the estimates.

**Mr. Roberts:** Okay. Right.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** It is not the appropriation it is the—Minister Howai explained that to me, because I was saying how come we have a budget for that amount. There are certain amounts that are appropriately explained to me that are direct appropriations. So it is not in the estimates here, but when you take the total recurrent expenditure which is—it is here, total recurrent expenditure, the allocation for this year, is in fact, as I have said, about \$61 billion, and \$8 billion for development. The position is the same over the years—total recurrent expenditure on page of the Draft Estimates of Expenditure recurrent, and this is the development programme. So we have \$61 billion under recurrent, \$8 billion to spend, to build and construct and so on, it is okay.

When we look at the year 2010, it was \$6.3 billion for development work; 2011, \$6.8 billion; 2012, \$7 billion, about; 2013, \$8.2 billion and then now in this year, fiscal coming, \$8 billion. I share this information as I say for us to understand where the money is being spent, and if anyone took the time to read



the estimates, they would have seen an accounting for it, you would have seen an accounting for the moneys budgeted and allocated—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Roberts:** “PNM doh read.”

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—contrary to the view of others.

Mr. Speaker, I turn now to show where some of the money has been spent. Let us look at the Ministry of Education. We have—the laptop story is one of great—[*Desk thumping*]

**Hon Member:** Success.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—success. Over 70,000 laptops provided to students, supervisors and teachers. What did that cost us? Seventy thousand dollars, Mr. Speaker. Fourteen primary schools built between 2010—2013, about \$281 million; seven secondary schools built costing \$599 million; twenty-four ECCE centres built between 2010—2013, costing about—what is the thing?—\$96 million. School feeding: 158,000 meals we provide to our children through the school feeding programme—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** \$236 million per year.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—\$236 million per year; \$236 million in meals per year; that is where the money has gone. They talk, we deliver. [*Desk thumping*] They walk and we deliver.

In tertiary education, Mr. Speaker, here is where—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** “You talk, we tief”.

**Dr. Moonilal:** “We know dat. We know dat”.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—the money went—

**Hon. Member:** “We know PNM eh tief.” [*Laughter*]

**Dr. Moonilal:** “Yeah, we know dat”.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** I hope Hansard does not record your words, because I will pick it up and read.

**Dr. Moonilal:** “He say we does talk and dey tief.”

**Miss Cox:** “Da is what he want to be saying.”

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** I will read it out loud. He say we talk and “dey tief”.

COSTAATT—tertiary education, 28,480 students [*Desk thumping*] benefited

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from COSTAATT; MIC, 19,075 students benefited at a cost of \$522 million; NESC, \$156 million spent, 7,309 students benefitted; OJT, \$857 million, with 31,823 students benefited; TTHIT, Trinidad and Tobago Hospitality Institute, \$48 million spent, 2,912 students benefited; UTT, \$1.7 billion spent, 28,776 students benefited; UWI, \$3.2 billion, 77,424 students benefited; YTEPP, \$425 million spent, 28,957 students benefited. That is where the money is going, in education and training. In this budget about \$9 billion was allocated to education and training, because we believe that we can only improve the quality of life through education and training. [*Desk thumping*] It is the only way that you can improve capacity in the country; your human resource capacity. It is the way in which people will be able to get sustainable jobs; through education and training. That is why the largest slice of the budget has gone to education and training, almost \$9 billion.

COSTAATT again, Mr. Speaker, spent about \$30 million creating places in Sangre Grande for 2,000 students; the MIC technical centre in Tobago costing about \$55.5 million; the Work Force Assessment Centre offices, \$5.2 million spent, and we did a total of 10 of these offices; Expansion of the OJT to include technical/vocational, that brought us to \$7.2 million; the Waterloo training facility, \$14.2 million; the training facility at Woodford Lodge, \$67 million; the drilling, school NESC, \$11.5 million; skills and technology centre to be done at \$27 million. Do not forget the UWI south Debe campus, Mr. Speaker, which is under construction as we speak. And we have also spent money in refurbishing and, therefore, creating a nurses academy at El Dorado—[*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Member:** Ready to open.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—which is ready to open, to train our nurses.

The Children's Hospital in Couva is under construction. The Children's Life Fund you recall a promise we made, and we must never forget the good things that we promised and the good things we have done. That Children's Life Fund since we came into office has been assisted to the cost of \$22.6 million—guess what? Eighty-one children [*Desk thumping*] have received life-saving surgeries [*Desk thumping*] under this Children's Life Fund, 81 children. Prior to 2010, cake sale and bake sale or die. We have put this measure into place—car wash, yes, fudge and papaw balls and so on, sales, begging. Here it is under this life fund, 81 children have benefited, 81 children.

**Hon. Member:** Thank you, Ma'am.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** And when they say “where de money gone,” this is where some of the money has gone.

The Chancery Lane Teaching Hospital in San Fernando, that will service about 275 people in that catchment area in the south, that should be completed before the end of this year.

Mr. Speaker, I think Dr. Moonilal in his contribution talked about the National Oncology Centre and I am sure Dr. Khan—

**Hon. Member:** Yes.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—would have spoken of it. Every year the National Oncology Centre was a recurring decimal in the PNM budget, every single year. It took this Partnership Government—now if you just go along there, you will see the construction is finally underway. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, let us look at what we have done in the water sector. For fiscal year 2012/2013, WASA installed a total of 152.15 kilometres of pipelines at a cost of about TT \$216 million. This equates to about 236 pipeline projects completed throughout Trinidad and Tobago. The estimated number of persons affected through this project to benefit—750,000 people in the country. [*Desk thumping*]

Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, some of the projects there—we opened as we all now know very proudly and very happily, saving a lot of time to get to the south, the Golconda to Debe leg of the Point Fortin Highway. [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Member:** Which they talk about—[*Inaudible*]

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** I am advised it services about 500,000 persons back and forth; a total cost of \$123.6 million. The Tarouba Interchange and roundabout cost \$61.6 million—

**Hon. Member:** They said it could not be built.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—servicing over 200,000 persons. [*Desk thumping*] The Uriah Butler and Churchill-Roosevelt Highway package, 2011/2013, about \$231 million, estimated to bring relief to over 700 motorists. Mr. Speaker, the highway projects 2010/2013—Diego Martin, the creation of a north-bound, two-lane carriageway abutting the existing southbound Diego Martin Highway between Victoria Gardens and Acton Court; modifications of the existing southbound carriageway between Acton Court and Morne Coco; widening of the existing southbound carriageway from two to three lanes between Morne Coco and the Western Main Road. This project is on—all we are doing—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Moonilal:** “Dey saying we doing nothing there.”

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** I have said we will do in every part of the country: the north, the south, the east and the west and across the water in Tobago, and that is why we have the highway going on from south to San Fernando to Point Fortin. We have this Diego Martin Highway happening up in the north/west, and the cost of that project is estimated at over \$128 million; to date designs and construction, approximately \$17.2 million and this highway I am advised would service about 100,000 persons.

So, in the east as well, the Valencia bypass road which I mentioned earlier. So we are opening up the country; we need roads, roads will bring development, roads will get you faster to where you have to go. Opening up the highway and road network system in the country is very vital to development and increased productivity.

**6.30 p.m.**

And so, under PURE Programme, the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, for the past three and a half years, a total of 1,150 road projects were completed. The total length of roadway paved, 630 kilometres, inclusive of drainage works. [*Desk thumping*] The total length of concrete works completed, approximately 300 kilometres; [*Desk thumping*] several pedestrian bridges and others; total landslips repaired, 140; total number of contractors employed, 246 contractors; total number of workers employed, about 3,720 inclusive of tradesmen, artisans, equipment operators and supervisors.

Mr. Speaker, in the last five minutes I have, I will continue to show how we spent moneys over the last several years. Under the Self-Help Commission, a total number of 12,141 projects were completed, self-help projects. These include house repair grants. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Cadiz:** Twelve new houses in Chaguanas East—

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** They include 12 new houses in Chaguanas East—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Cadiz:**—from scratch.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—from scratch under the self-help programme. Total persons who benefited, I am advised, from these 12,000 projects, approximately 81,557. How much money was expended over the last three and a half years?—\$196 million.

Under Public Utilities, Mr. Speaker, 123 recreation grounds across the country.

**Hon. Member:** Whooo. [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** These have been lit at a cost of \$71 million. I am advised these would service about 900,000 persons. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, we have spent—[*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Please, please!

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Under the Ministry of Sport, Mr. Speaker, financial aid and assistance from sport given to over 1,675 community sport groups totalling \$177 million for the three-and-a-half-year period; scholarships for 53 elite athletes totalling \$8.1 million. [*Desk thumping*] Work has begun on construction of the National Aquatic Centre, construction of the National Tennis Centre, construction of three multipurpose sporting facilities and these megaprojects expended \$44 million up to 2013. I am advised by the Minister of Sport that under the PNM, seven recreation grounds were completed at a cost of \$400 million.

**Mr. Roberts:** Shame!

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Seven grounds, \$400 million!

**Mr. Roberts:** Shame on the PNM!

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Minister Roberts has advised that the Partnership Government has completed 32 recreation grounds at the cost of \$100 million—pavilions, jogging tracks and so on—32! And I asked the Minister of Sport, is it different from what they did with the \$400 million? He said no. The ones done under the Partnership are better. [*Desk thumping*]

Finance, as I close, I have three minutes left. HCU and Clico, Mr. Speaker. That is where the money went—a lot of money. Following upon the Clico bailout, we were saddled with that great millstone on the economy, in the Government which they left, after, as I said, some of them withdrew their money before the collapse.

I am advised that under the HCU, a total of 17,790 persons have benefited to the tune of \$152.4 million. Under Clico, 25,987 persons costing us—what is this Larry, \$1 billion?

**Hon. Howai:** Ten billion.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Ten point eight billion paid out, Mr. Speaker.

**Hon. Howai:** They are asking “where it has gone”.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Where it has gone. NIS payments we made, Mr. Speaker, over the last few years, the beneficiaries amounting in the last year to 167,995 persons benefiting, costing us about \$3.5 billion; in 2012, 155,000 persons, \$2.7 billion; 2011, 153,538 persons benefiting, \$2.3 billion, and so it goes on, Mr. Speaker.

These are just some of the achievements. It will take us all week. And in the one minute I have left, I say, we are on a path of unprecedented development in which we are going into some uncharted territory at this point. [*Desk thumping*] When we think of development, we do not just see towers reaching up to the sky, these high-rise buildings in overcrowded cities. We see beyond that and we see development as a child getting the best access to education, getting better access to health care, parents having homes and jobs, people living without fear, infrastructure which touches every single community in Trinidad and Tobago.

When we think of development, we think of people because nothing we do now or in the future has any benefit unless it benefits all of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. So, we have suffered enough in the 50 years backwards. I say today we have invited all in Trinidad and Tobago to join in this journey.

I repeat what I said before. Let the process of collaboration replace that of confrontation. Let us sit and eat at the same table even as we recognize divergent views, different views. Our country is too small and too diverse for any one group to dominate the other. I say we must discuss our differences in a constructive manner and focus on what is best for our beloved homeland.

Mr. Speaker, I repeat my oath to do without fear or favour, to carry out our duties in service to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy. [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Member:** A hard act to follow, Larry.

**The Minister of Finance and the Economy (Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai):** Yeah. There is nothing else left to say. [*Crosstalk and laughter*] Yeah, thank you. Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank this honourable House and all the Members for the contributions which have been made over the past few days. Their insight and, indeed, support will be instrumental in ensuring that we achieve the objectives which we have set out to achieve in this 2014 fiscal package.

Mr. Speaker, in developing this budget, the hon. Prime Minister sought to create a very significant departure from the politics of the past. There were many who thought that this budget was going to be an election budget filled with many election goodies for the population at large. The hon. Prime Minister, however, was very clear that there should not be such an instrument—

**Mr. Imbert:** That is next year.

**Sen. The Hon. L. Howai:**—but rather it should be the primary mechanism for delivery on our broader promises of more inclusive development, sustainable growth and social progress.

She saw the budget as a voice of the shared desires of the population which speaks to how we shall achieve our objectives, as one nation, one people. So, Mr. Speaker, this was not the budget that many expected.

Yes, before the year is out, there will be three elections.

**Sen. The Hon. L. Howai:** There will be a by-election—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Imbert:** “How yuh know dat?”

**Sen. The Hon. L. Howai:**—in a marginal seat.

**Mr. Imbert:** There is no guarantee of that.

**Sen. The Hon. L. Howai:** Yeah man, we are going to have one.

**Mr. Imbert:** All right!

**Sen. The Hon. L. Howai:** We are going to have local government elections and then, of course, we have the bigger one coming up, when the hon. Member expects to see a much larger budget. But we are guided significantly more by the need for discipline and focus and, as the Prime Minister has said, our determination to put country first.

Our policies and implementation programme have delivered very encouraging results and it is our firm conviction that staying the course, building on our success and ensuring that we deliver a robust economic platform for future development is a most important objective. I would even go so far as to say, Mr. Speaker, that our record of performance will do a lot more for us and for our nation than any election budget ever could.

So, we recognize that laudable growth rates are not enough. They are not enough if they are just built on the back of higher than usual energy prices and a construction boom that cannot be sustained. Activity might accelerate in the short

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term or in the short to medium term; revenues might boom for a time; there might be an elevation in consumer spending and possibly private sector credit expansion in order to fund the increased demand for products and services, but Mr. Speaker, when the energy prices deflate, when the construction boom slows and when consumer spending suddenly restricts, what are we left with?

We have to ask ourselves the question: Can we remain competitive on account of our superior business environment which facilitates the ease of doing business? We have to ask ourselves: Is our economy sufficiently diversified to absorb much of the shocks from global crises? We have to ask: Are our road and sea, land and air transport infrastructure sufficiently developed to make us attractive to investors in a time of more discriminate decision-making?

So, Mr. Speaker, we must ensure that the growth that we engender and the development record that we seek to engender, we must ensure that this is sustainable. We must take a view of development that compels us to ensure that the platform upon which our strategies are rolled out is strong, competitive, responsive and value driven. Therefore, we have sought in this budget to accelerate the reform of our economic space so that our investment dollars can create and attract greater value.

What we are seeking to do is to build an environment where our economic base is diversified enough to withstand any pressures from the global financial marketplace.

The hon. Prime Minister has outlined the basis from which our economy started when this Government took power in 2010, so I do not need to go into those, but again I reiterate the macroeconomic fundamentals continue to remain strong. We have just experienced four consecutive quarters of year-on-year growth. Foreign direct investment continues to increase and all of the other characteristics which our Prime Minister so eloquently outlined.

We have commenced a reform programme aimed at improving efficiency levels in the public service and the strengthening of the institutional framework for our financial system. The Clico Investment Fund has created significant value for persons who thought they would have lost a considerable sum of their life's savings as a result of the meltdown of the CL Financial. Of course, the First Citizens offer, I am advised—actually by the other side—that the share price has moved in a matter of three days from \$22 to \$33, a 50 per cent increase in three days. [*Desk thumping*]



**Mr. Imbert:** And 45 cents.

**Sen. The Hon. L. Howai:** And 45 cents. I am corrected. So we have put additional wealth into the hands of the small man and of investors in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Crosstalk*]

I also want to thank the international banks—as I am talking about the financial system. Some of the international banks, both Royal Bank and Scotia, which responded immediately—once we had signed the VAT order coming out of the last budget—to start the process of the shared services offerings and in those offerings we have seen investments of \$250 million in the last year and a thousand new jobs being created.

Mr. Speaker, I do not need to go into energy. Our hon. Prime Minister has explained all of the fallacies surrounding the Loran-Manatee matter and it has been a very detailed explanation, with reference to documentation, so I do not need to go into that. But what is heartening to see is that the turnaround in the production, oil production, which had sunk to 76,000 barrels of oil a day, is now up to 83,000 barrels of oil. So, we have started to move in the right direction and I am sure we will continue to move in that direction, particularly given the excellent results coming out of the exploration activity that is starting to take place right now.

Let me mention, because perhaps the hon. Members may have forgotten, some of the new activity that we are seeing and will see in the coming fiscal year will include bpTT's development of its Juniper field, expected to peak at 555 million scf. The estimated reserves in Juniper amount to just over one trillion cubic feet of natural gas, and that is happening in this current fiscal year.

#### **6.45 p.m.**

The EOG Resources commissioning of its Osprey development with drilling of four developmental wells, the first of which is producing at a rate of approximately 28 million standard cubic feet a day, and each one of these four wells in production is expected to have rates of 30 million standard cubic feet a day. EOG is also set to pursue its oil berth project in 2014.

BGTT will pursue development of their Starfish Field in 2014 also, with reserves of 640 billion cubic feet of natural gas which will produce at a rate of 260 million standard cubic feet of gas per day. BHP Billiton has commenced a plan for the Angostura Phase III development, which will deliver 100 million scf—that is standard cubic feet—a day.

**Mr. Imbert:** When?

**Sen. The Hon. L. Howai:** In addition to this busy schedule for our energy sector, Mr. Speaker, six deep-water PSCc have been executed, together with a new licence agreement with Petrotrin to refocus its strategy on the upstream sector. An onshore bid round as well as a deep-water bid round is under way. Drilling activity has increased in the past year with six rigs drilling offshore and, of course, we have Loran-Manatee [*Crosstalk*] which, as our Prime Minister advised—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Imbert:** You have nothing.

**Mr. Speaker:** All right. Order, please.

**Sen. The Hon. L. Howai:**—have actually the—I suppose the “butt” of some very incorrect statements being made by the other side.

**Mr. Imbert:** On your side.

**Sen. The Hon. L. Howai:** So, Mr. Speaker, we are very, very, encouraged by the activity that we are seeing, and we are sure that going forward into the new year we will see an acceleration of the growth momentum that we have seen over the past year.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I did say that during the course of this year, the non-energy sector is the one that pushed this economy along that showed growth in the economy [*Desk thumping*] because the energy sector was tied up with the maintenance work that was taking place. But next year, with most of this behind us, we expect to see significant impetus being brought to the economy from the energy sector, together with what we are seeing. We look forward to a very prosperous 2014. [*Desk thumping*] Buy more shares. Buy more shares. Right?—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Imbert:** “Ah miss that.”

**Sen. The Hon. L. Howai:** I said buy more shares. It is going to be a very, very, good 2014, Mr. Speaker.

So there were a few areas that, perhaps, I could focus on which relate to local government because that has been a significant part of the discussions, and we are going into a local government election. We have made a very significant thrust in the past year in this particular area, and not only have we had a very extensive level of consultation on local government reform—giving rise to a White Paper which would have been produced, we are also in the process—we have also laid

and had approved a change in the voting structure with proportional representation. But what I want to say, apart from the reform process that would be taking place in the local government sector, I want to say that there has been a significant thrust in the area of physical and infrastructure development using local government.

In the Port of Spain City Corporation, for example, we have had significant construction and rehabilitation of box drains, footpaths, roads being paved, the back filling and regressing of an area at Knowsley Place in preparation for a children's play park, installation of freezers at the central market and a number of other initiatives.

Similarly, for the San Fernando City Corporation which, in addition to the box drains and the pavement overlays and so on, saw the upgrade of 11 recreation grounds during the course of this year.

Similarly, for the Arima Borough Corporation, the Point Fortin Borough Corporation, we saw the construction and rehabilitation of box drains, establishment of a recreation ground at Warden Road, lighting of the Fanny Village Recreation Ground, the upgrade of the playfields and reconstruction of the turf wicket at James Park, the construction of the perimeter wall at the Point Fortin Cemetery, as well as the paving of roads and so on. So, Mr. Speaker, there has been a considerable amount of work being done in the regional corporations, and I would not bother to go into all of the details on those.

Mr. Speaker, I turn specifically though, to the recent flooding disaster in Diego Martin which had been referred to by one of the Members, and I wish to make it unequivocally clear, that the Government has a full appreciation of the plight of the residents of Diego Martin, and we stand shoulder-to-shoulder with them. We will do everything we must to ensure their lives are returned to normal. That is our assurance and that is our commitment, Mr. Speaker.

Having made that clear commitment, we must recall what happened last year. After the floods of 2012, an aggressive programme to clear all watercourses in the Diego Martin, Maraval and La Horquetta catchments was undertaken by the drainage division. In August of this year, under the directive of the hon. Minister of the Environment and Water Resources, WASA with and the Ministry inspected and cleared all channels in the north-west peninsula, but this was not sufficient. So, in the next year, we shall establish a 300-metre contour where no activities will be permitted at the confluence of the four major watercourses in the catchment area, namely, the Petit Valley ravine, the Covigne ravine, the Rich Plain ravine—*[Interruption]*

**Mr. Imbert:** Not true.

**Sen. The Hon. L. Howai:**—and the Diego Martin river.

**Mr. Imbert:** That is old talk.

**Sen. The Hon. L. Howai:** So we will establish this 300-metre contour where no activities will be permitted to deal with the issue of that confluence at these four major watercourses.

**Mr. Roberts:** Nice word.

**Sen. The Hon. L. Howai:** We will also initiate a reforestation programme to regenerate forest cover. So, Mr. Speaker, we will be moving with great alacrity to deal with the preventative measures that must be put in place to prevent a recurrence of what has happened there.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to works and infrastructure, I think all of the Ministers—the Minister of Works and Infrastructure has explained in detail what has been done. The Prime Minister made some reference to that, so I would not go into that.

Tourism—I am not seeing the Minister of Tourism here—[*Crosstalk*] Okay. Good. So, Mr. Speaker, we have placed a significant emphasis on economic diversification. In this budget, we have placed emphasis on two major areas of tourism—airlift and room stock. Some of you would have seen the jetBlue announcement of a flight from Fort Lauderdale to Port of Spain, which will start from July 2014. So that is already under way, Mr. Speaker, and I expect that the Apollo Airlines flight, which we had also mentioned should start sometime during the course of next year.

But let me just deal briefly to the issue of increasing our airlift, and to address the matter of the fuel subsidy and pricing policy for Caribbean Airlines. Mr. Speaker, yesterday I received the Caribbean Airlines Business Plan 2014, which was developed by the board of directors installed earlier this year. The plan is linked to the board's mandate to achieve viability in the shortest possible time, and it is focused on customer satisfaction, increased fleet utilization and business process improvements to enhance operational efficiency.

Mr. Speaker, in presenting the 2014 budget, I announced that the fuel subsidy, which was instituted in 2007, would be completely removed. The subsidy was originally intended to be a temporary measure to provide temporary financial support while working towards profitability, but by 2010 when this Government

came into power, Caribbean Airlines had grown significantly, and with the subsidy still in place—and it was intended first of all to have been a hedge, but somehow it became a subsidy—it incurred a much higher cost to the Government. Notwithstanding the intended outcomes of the subsidy, it was noted that the subsidy created a few adverse consequences, a major one being that Caribbean Airlines operations and pricing policies became increasingly out of sync with market conditions.

The airlines focus also became blurred, diverging from the creation of an efficient operation to one that was becoming more and more reliant on state support for survival. Decision making in the context of fuel cost no longer took market prices into account and, therefore, success became hinged on the subsidy mechanism.

Recognizing this, the new board began work on a new business plan which would drive CAL's mission to improve performance. These efforts brought encouraging results over the summer schedule with improved aircraft and crew utilization, enhanced loads factors and aircraft availability.

In fact, the financial results of the peak July to August period, 2013, demonstrate a significant improvement, and the decision to remove the subsidy as of October 01, 2013 is intended to further inspire the airline towards greater efficiency, enhanced business processes, more effective decision making and a more competitive pricing policy.

In this connection, it should be noted that airline prices fluctuate during the course of the year with seasonal cycles and, of course, with increases in the price of fuel. Abstracting from these phenomena, the prices offered by Caribbean Airlines are not expected to change. Caribbean Airlines also recognizes that it operates in a competitive industry, which circumscribes any attempts to offer unrealistic prices. [*Crosstalk*]

Having said this, the airline will proceed with a recapitalization programme to restore the strength of its balance sheet. This will in turn support CAL's mission for more competitive terms from the airline leasing companies and fuel and other suppliers. The recapitalization process will commence after detailed discussions with the Ministry of Finance and the Economy.

Staff engagement remains central to our strategies, and the board has expressed confidence that the airline will achieve customer loyalty and, consequently, much improved financial results going forward.

So I, again, emphasize our position as far as the airline is concerned, and we will recapitalize Caribbean Airlines, and we will inject some funding as far as the repayment of some of the debts incurred, and the airline will be required to restructure its operations in order to bring itself to a sustainable level without any further Government support over the next three years.

Mr. Speaker, the 2014 budget also focused significantly on water resources and the physical environment. The hon. Prime Minister, again, emphasized some of these things, so I do not want to go into all of the details as far as the Government's policies and progress with respect to the water situation is concerned, but suffice it to note that we have moved very significantly forward, in that now approximately 71 per cent of the population receives a 24 hours a day, five days a week supply of water. [*Desk thumping*]

But, Mr. Speaker, I would like to deal with a number of programmes that we have put in place in fiscal 2012 coming into this year aimed at reducing the frequency and severity of flooding, erosion, health hazards, saltwater intrusion on agricultural lands and coastal protection.

Under the Drainage Division, 15 rivers were dredged using dredgers and amphibious units to unclog river mouths and 30 rivers were extensively cleared and desilted. In addition, all the underground drains were cleaned in the City of Port of Spain, Woodbrook, the Borough of Chaguanas, Couva and parts of the Eastern Main Road. Detention ponds at Connector Road, Charlieville and Trincity were completed, and detention ponds at Debe and Freeport are well advanced. The Drainage Division also spearheaded and completed the clearing of mangrove and desilting of the Trinidad River from the sluice gate to the Godineau River. Major works were also undertaken on the North Oropouche River.

Under the comprehensive national drainage study which lays the basis for a drainage master plan, the Caroni River Basin Study is now 70 per cent complete and the Ortoire River Study is 100 per cent complete. And these are the successes we will be building upon in the 2013/2014 fiscal period with a continued drive to provide free and clear drainage, irrigation infrastructure, flood control and erosion control. In this period coming up, the desilting programme will incorporate a further 25 rivers and include the use of dredgers and amphibious units to clear river mouths.

The Port of Spain flood alleviation programme will be intensified in this fiscal period with the upgrade of a further 29 drainage channels. A US \$120 million loan is to be secured from the IDB to facilitate this programme. Work is also expected

to commence within the Caparo River Basin, the South Oropouche River Basin and the north-west peninsula in the upcoming fiscal year.

**7.00 p.m.**

So, Mr. Speaker, there is a significant overhaul that would be taking place as far as drainage is concerned, and as far as the flood alleviation programme is concerned. But, Mr. Speaker, in addition to which there are a number of things that we need to do as far as improving the efficiency and effectiveness of our public service, and in order to build capacity.

There have been numerous complaints over the years of the lack of service from our public service, and therefore during the course of this year the Ministry of Public Administration has focused on certain clear priority areas: one, they would be looking to review and operationalize the governance framework of the public service; two, redesign and build a human resource management architecture for a 21st Century public service; three, develop and implement the service delivery policy framework and architecture; four, build a human resources capability and capacity for national development; and five, build business continuity capacity management.

So, Mr. Speaker, these are important initiatives because—they are not as spectacular as big buildings, but they are more sustainable. This is where we get value being created for our citizens at the front line when our citizens come into the public service and interface with the public service for all of the services which the Government provides for our people. So it is extremely important for us to deal with that issue, Mr. Speaker.

I want to, in continuing that trend of reform, refer to some of the initiatives which have been put in place, and some of the results which we are getting as far as the ease of doing business. The Prime Minister referred to the World Bank's annual *Doing Business* report which ranked us at 69 in 2013, up from 76 in 2011, and we have done a number of things including speeding up the process of getting VAT, being registered for NIS and VAT, and obtaining work permits, and so on.

I want to speak a little bit about what is happening with our TTBizLink facility. Now, again, these are not the spectacular things, but these are the things that the business community when they interact with the Government they see the results of what we are doing in a very real way. I want to compliment the hon. Minister of Trade, Industry and Investment for these initiatives and the progress we are making. We have been able to reduce e-Company Registration processing time from seven days to three days; e-Work Permit processing time has been

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reduced from six weeks to two and a half weeks—and this is using the TTBizLink—the e-Import/Export Permits and Licences processing times have been reduced from four weeks to one day.

The e-Certificate of Origin processing—and listen to this one hon. Member—the e-Certificate of Origin processing time reduced from one day to 30 minutes—30 minutes.

**Hon. Member:** You believe that?

**Sen. The Hon. L. Howai:** E-fiscal Incentives processing reduced from six weeks to 11 days, and the import duty concession processing time reduced from six weeks to 12 days. These are very significant reductions and improvements in productivity that we are seeing, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] So I want to compliment my colleague, the hon. Minister of Trade, Industry and Investment.

Mr. Speaker, we have spoken about the tax reform so I would not go into that, but I want to say something about the gaming industry. In my budget presentation I indicated, and I will quote, that:

“...gambling is emerging as a substantial industry in Trinidad and Tobago...”

I also said that:

“...under the current legislative framework prevailing in Trinidad and Tobago, all casino operations conducted by self-styled, private members’ clubs and all gaming machine operations in recreation clubs, in pubs, in arcades and in shopping malls, are illegal activities.”

So, I want to clarify that position so that we understand what is happening. Under the Gambling and Betting Act, while premises kept or used for gambling is defined as a common gaming house, and such use is illegal, the Act provides at section 10 that private dwelling houses and members’ clubs were exempted. In other words, gambling may occur at members’ clubs as one of its common objects. And this was provided for in section 5(4) of the Registration of Clubs Act, as well.

Further, until 1997, it appeared that gambling by means of a gambling machine was prohibited. This however was changed by the Finance Act 1997 which amended the Registration of Clubs Act. This amendment provided some regulation for gambling in a members’ club by requiring the secretary of the club, which engages in gambling to, among other things, state the number of gambling tables and devices to be used on the premises in its application for a liquor



licence, and to obtain from the Board of Inland Revenue a certificate that the club was up to date in payment of its taxes.

In addition, the Finance Act 1997 established a gaming Act to be charged on all—tax, sorry—a gaming tax to be charged on all gambling tables and gambling devices at rates specified in the schedule. Taxes ranged from \$2,000 to \$15,000 per table, as well as \$500 for every gambling device used on an annual basis. In 2003, in the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2003, under a different Government, these taxes were increased to as much as \$75,000 per table and, specifically, for every slot machine, a tax of \$10,000.

It is clear therefore that gambling in members' clubs in respect of gambling tables and slot machines is already subject to taxation. The State does not tax an illegal activity. I have already indicated that there is clear need for comprehensive regulation of the industry which employs thousands of persons. The structure for this industry will entail the establishment of a regulatory commission with the power to license premises, operators, suppliers and others, and the new legislation will control the operations of what will be referred to as "registered casinos".

Until the comprehensive legislation is finalized, the Government will continue to monitor and regulate the industry. As such, in the Finance Act we will include some minor amendments to the Registration of Clubs Act, the Gambling and Betting Act and the Customs Act, to clarify the law and as well bring businesses that operate amusement machines under their fold. In that regard, we intend to require a deposit by all members' clubs that engage in gambling, in much the same way that the holder of a betting office licence must deposit \$100,000 to operate, pursuant to section 33 of the Gambling and Betting Act.

Bars and such businesses that operate amusement machines as an ancillary part of their business will also be required to pay taxes on these machines annually, and must report on the number of machines they have on their premises. Those numbers will of course be controlled. As I said previously, consultations with various stakeholder groups including interministerial working committees and civil society groups will continue, and it is anticipated that within a year we will have a Bill to bring before Parliament, thus also ensuring compliance with our FATF obligations. So, Mr. Speaker, we will include some minor amendments, as I said, in the Finance Act when we bring it forward.

So, Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, and in order to wind up this debate, again I want to thank all the hon. Members for participating in the debate. During the course of my own discourse here I raised the question of development. We need

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to be clear that growth and development are not necessarily synonymous, and we need therefore to take measures to ensure that we reform our economy, we diversify our economy and we establish the basis on which we can have sustained and prolonged growth and development over the long term, creating, in the meantime, jobs which are good quality jobs and which create good quality of living for our members.

Mr. Speaker, the 2014 budget was not written with the expectation of wide acclaim and praises all around. As I said early, discipline and focus are worth more than attempting political advantages through the control of state resources. The 2014 budget is therefore a statement of our progress, and a road map for how we must now build on those successes and take Trinidad and Tobago to an even higher level of sustainable growth, expansion, knowledge capacity development and economic endurance.

Mr. Speaker, I have no doubt that the 2014 fiscal package, when it is fully rolled out, will become one of the most innovative performance-driven fiscal plans in our nation's history. I say this because, despite the naysayers and the hand-wringing doubters, we have finally struck the balance that means, in Trinidad and Tobago, no one will ever be left behind. Mr. Speaker, I thank you and I beg to move. [*Continuous Desk thumping*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a second time.*

**Sen. The Hon. L. Howai:** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now resolve itself into Finance Committee to consider the Bill clause by clause, as well as the Estimates.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the House will now go into Finance Committee, but before the House goes into Finance Committee, we invite all visitors in the public gallery to allow the Finance Committee to meet in private, in camera, and that goes for the media as well, so only officials from the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, who are seated on my immediate left, are allowed to stay.

The gallery must be cleared and the media must also leave, and we will re-invite the media, as well as members of the public who are here as soon as the Finance Committee would have done its work. Hon. Members, could you all rise, and the Chairman of the Finance Committee will now take charge.

*Bill and Estimates committed to Finance Committee.*

**7.10 p.m.:** *House resolved itself into Finance Committee.*

**7.45 p.m.:** *House resumed after Finance Committee.*

*Bill reported, without amendment.*

*Question put:* That the Bill be now read a third time.

**Hon. Member:** Division.

**Mr. Speaker:** Division.

*The House divided:* Ayes 25 Noes 10

AYES

Moonilal, Hon. Dr. R.

Persad-Bissessar SC, Hon. K.

Mc Leod, Hon. E.

Dookeran, Hon. W.

Sharma, Hon. C.

Ramadhar, Hon. P

Gopeesingh, Hon. Dr. T.

Peters, Hon. W.

Rambachan, Hon. Dr. S.

Seepersad-Bachan, Hon. C.

Seemungal, Hon. J.

Khan, Mrs. N.

Roberts, Hon. A.

Cadiz, Hon. S.

Baksh, Hon. N.

Griffith, Hon. Dr. R.

Baker, Hon. Dr. D.

Ramadharsingh, Hon. Dr. G.

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De Coteau, Hon. C.  
Khan, Hon. Dr. F.  
Samuel, Hon. R.  
Indarsingh, Hon. R.  
Ramdial, Hon. R.  
Alleyne-Toppin, Hon. V.  
Partap, C.  
NOES  
Mc Donald, Miss M.  
Rowley, Dr. K.  
Cox, Miss D.  
Hypolite, N.  
Mc Intosh, Mrs. P.  
Imbert, C.  
Jeffrey, F.  
Thomas, Mrs. J.  
Hospedales, Miss A.  
Gopee-Scoon, Mrs. P.

*Question agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read the third time and passed. [Desk thumping]*

#### ADJOURNMENT

*Motion made and question proposed:* That the House do now adjourn to a date to be fixed. [*Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal*]

#### Expression of Appreciation to Staff

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, before putting the question, I take the distinct pleasure to say thank you at the conclusion of this budget debate in our House for this Fourth Session of the 10th Parliament. This budget debate which

*Adjournment*

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commenced on Monday, September 09, 2013, and continued with four sittings, with approximately 56 hours of debate, and 41 Members contributing, including the three Members from the Senate. Hon. Members, I can sincerely say, that over the last few days during the cut and thrust of our debate, you have endeavoured to observe the rules of this House and have shown regard for the authority of the Chair. I therefore thank Members for their discipline and for upholding the decorum of this House. I also take this opportunity to extend my gratitude—and I am certain, that of the House—to the staff of the Parliament—*[Interruption]*

**Mr. Roberts:** Yeah, yeah. *[Desk thumping]*

**Mr. Speaker:**—who have given their unwavering support to us throughout the debate. In particular, I mention the reporters and editors of the Hansard Unit, *[Desk thumping]* the food and beverage management and team, *[Desk thumping]* the Broadcasting Unit, *[Desk thumping]* the parliamentary Police Unit, *[Desk thumping]* and the Secretariat procedural staff. *[Desk thumping]*

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the work done by the staff of the Budgets Division of the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, *[Desk thumping]* and the staff of the Government Printery for the critical support provided to this debate. *[Desk thumping]* I thank you all, and wish to extend a very warm invitation to you, to join me in the Members' Dining Room for the usual post-budget debate gathering.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 7.56 p.m.*