



REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Debates of the House of Representatives

3rd Session – 10th Parliament (Rep.) – Volume 14 – Number 7

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)**

THE HONOURABLE WADE MARK
SPEAKER

THE HONOURABLE NELA KHAN
DEPUTY SPEAKER

Tuesday 9th October, 2012

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Republic Day Greetings

Tuesday, October 09, 2012

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 09, 2012

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

REPUBLIC DAY GREETINGS

(NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF KUWAIT)

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received greetings on your behalf from the Speaker of the National Assembly of Kuwait which I shall now place on the parliamentary record. It is addressed to Mr. Wade Mark, Speaker of the House:

“Dear Mr. Speaker.

On the occasion of the National Day of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago I would like to express, on behalf of my colleagues members of Kuwait National Assembly and myself, our sincere congratulations.

I have the pleasure to extend our best regards to Your Excellency, wishing the friendly people of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago more progress and prosperity.

Kindly accept Your Excellency the assurances of our highest consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Jassim Mohammed Al-Kharafi

Speaker of the National Assembly of Kuwait”

PAPER LAID

The Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2012 [*The Minister of Finance and the Economy (Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai)*]

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2013)

BILL, 2012

[Fourth Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [October 01, 2012]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the Minister of Tobago Development was speaking on the last occasion and has 36 more minutes of original speaking time remaining. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Last night we started in the wee hours—I think we were nearing the wee hours of the morning—and the debate was still waxing warm at that time. Let me—because the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy is in the House now, and he was not there when I began speaking—just for the record, indicate that he must be very comfortable in this space. Being new to the Parliament, let him not get carried away by the cut and thrust of the Westminster type of politics. Sometimes they say things on the other side that we know they do not mean. That is the hope that the love in this House is still going to be strong.

Mr. Sharma: Or do not know.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: That is also, too: or that they do not know.

Mr. Speaker, with that, let me also say that it took this Minister three months to settle in, in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy and to present one of the most sterling budget presentations that we have had in this honourable Chamber. With that, let me remind the House of the words used by the Leader of the Opposition at the time on October 05:

“Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I am not convinced that the Minister in his three months on the job has properly grasped the assignment of preparing and reporting on a national budget.”

Tongue-in-cheek. One has to ask the question, Mr. Minister, if you listened to the entire contribution by the hon. Member for Diego Martin West, you would note that he also made a comment later down in this budget contribution that said: “We need a plan.” You remember that?

“The PNM is working on a plan...”

While he chastises the Minister for having presented a budget after three months, for two-and-a-half years they have sat in the Opposition and cannot at this point enunciate a clear plan for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. No plan from the PNM! [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, there is no plan on that side; there is no vision on that side, and sure as day follows night, there is also no leader—or clear leader—on that side also. [*Desk thumping*] Just empty talk! [*Interruption*] Well, of course, this side—the Partnership is so big; we occupy some parts of the back benches there also.

Let me remind you where I started off last night, when we said, in response to the presentation that there was no—I should not say—there was no truth in the statement that neither the MPs for Tobago West nor Tobago East made any statement to the Tobago House of Assembly with regard to the north-east growth pole. As we said that night, nothing can be further from the truth.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Tobago West—and I do not want to beat my own drum, but I turned to the Minister of Finance at the time, the hon. Member for Tunapuna, and indicated—it was the Member for Tobago West and not the Chief Secretary—and indicated at that time that there was money approved by the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago in the sum of \$800,000 for the people of Castara, Palatuvier and Speyside to develop new business ideas under what we call the north-east growth pole, and because the money came from where it should—the Consolidated Fund—it was not the hon. Member for Tunapuna taking money out of his pocket and handing a gift to the THA; it was money approved by the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago for the development of the people of Tobago, Mr. Speaker. And with an air—which we are getting accustomed to—of arrogance from the PNM—I guess being in administration in Tobago for 12 years means that you become a little arrogant over time, and you put aside the needs of the people of Tobago and begin to look at your own postulations.

So that with the offer of \$800,000, this Tobago administration rejected the money because they would not have had the credit for the transfer—rejected and denied the people of Palatuvier, Castara and Speyside, the right to start their own business and to generate what are new businesses on a part of the island that is considered dark, with no more than just a few fishing communities; no recent development over the last 12 years in Castara or Palatuvier. My heart burdens for the people of Tobago East, as it does for the people of Tobago West.

We, in the Partnership, stand united behind all of the people of Tobago! [*Desk thumping*] And the fact that you may have a new Minister of Tobago Development means that there is a continuation of the policies of this Government towards the people of Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Tell them! Tell them!

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: The bond that is between sister and brother continues to be strong. The Partnership is stronger than ever! [*Desk thumping*] The hon. Member for Diego Martin West, if he wanted facts, he must not look to his counterparts in Tobago. If he wants to know the truth, ask me; I will tell him.

Mr. Sharma: He is not interested in the truth.

Dr. Griffith: “He doh know nutten bout Tobago.”

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Mr. Speaker, the time for change in Tobago is coming, you know. It is coming. [*Desk thumping*] The people of Castara and Parlatuvier will take their revenge. I am pleased to be a member of the Tobago Organization of the People. This is a strong partnership; this is a Government that cares for all the people, all the time, regardless to whatever political persuasion they may be of, and this is a people's budget.

So that when you look at all of the details in this year's fiscal package, what you will see coming through line after line, from each Minister who has delivered, who has served—and the hon. Member for Fyzabad has become one of our strongest supporters in Tobago. When I called on him one weekend, he brought the entire Airports Authority team, and we sat there and discussed how we can improve the airport to put a good dent in the tourism market in Tobago. The Member for Fyzabad is a strong partner of the people of Tobago. Why can those who stand in this House from time to time and boast that they are Tobago-bred and Tobago-born—why can they not partner, too, with the people of Tobago and remove that corrupt administration? [*Desk thumping*]

Tobago loves the TOP. Tobago supports the People's Partnership, and Tobago loves the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar. [*Desk thumping*] I would tell you three things that the PNM fears—let me say four—: one, forensic audit; [*Desk thumping*] two, although they may talk over here about election, in Tobago they are afraid to call an election! [*Desk thumping*] Two names: the hon. Ashworth Jack and the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar; I see the Chief Secretary's face turn pale whenever you mention those two names, Mr. Speaker.

In Tobago West, the Government, if it could—and it has over the last two-and-a-half years—they have delivered; this Government has delivered—and if I use the iconic words of the television presenter: “We have delivered; delivered, and we have delivered again.” For Tobago West, over the past two-and-a-half years, let me indicate—and this MP is not one of those who likes to boast, Mr. Speaker—quietly we have worked together as a team, developing the island as best as we could, wherever we are allowed.

Mr. Sharma: Blow your trumpet.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: The Member for Chaguanas West came to Tobago, sat with the Chief Secretary and offered—while he was the Minister of Works and Infrastructure—to assist the Assembly in building roads. You remember that?

Mr. Warner: “He say he eh want it.”

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: And he bluntly refused again, a major capital investment in Tobago for the building of roads! Refused roads! Refused carnival! Refused

\$800,000 worth of development financing for the people of Tobago! And they dare come and say, and argue about the allocation for Tobago? That is not correct! And we will clear the air today on how the allocation has been spent in Tobago over the past 12 years. When I stand up on the streets and call for a forensic audit, it is because we have seen fact after fact, report after report, calling on the Assembly to account for the moneys sent to it by this Parliament, approved, every year, over the last 12 years, in the fiscal measures presented in this House, and appropriated to Tobago on behalf of the people of Tobago and not spent well in their interest! We will get to the details, Mr. Speaker.

You see, in Tobago, it is a team effort. The Partnership is a strong team, Mr. Speaker. We work as brother and sister, hand-in-hand for all of the people. If you look at what has happened over the last two-and-a-half years, you can only see that. The people of Tobago can be proud of this Partnership. From the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, \$22 million spent on completing the integrated landing system at the airport—\$22 million within the first year. Damaged areas of the runway—the Ministry of Works alone—paved. You remember? The Minister came to Tobago. We walked on the runway and saw huge gaping cracks developing on the runway in the middle of the tourism crisis. Imagine if there was an untoward event with an international carrier.

10.15 a.m.

The Member for Toco/Sangre Grande was then Minister of Tourism. If there was one untoward incident at that time, how devastating that could have been for the already weakened Tobago tourism sector. It was the then Minister of Works and Infrastructure, the Member for Chaguanas West, who when he toured and saw how bad the conditions were at that runway, he again offered to immediately come with a crew and fix that runway, and repair the lights on the runway.

The person who you would have least expected to have opposed that position, the one who calls himself born and bred Tobagonian, was the first person to stand in this House and oppose the Minister of Works and Infrastructure who tried to secure Tobago's tourism sector. That is shame. Shameful!

Now we have the ANR International Airport in Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] That is a Tobagonian that we all can be proud of. That is a person who has Tobago's best interest at heart. We now have on the air bridge, two of our very own ATRs. The additional service time for flights between Trinidad and Tobago—making the so-called air bridge—has been increased from 10 o'clock in the night, when the last flight came across, to now 2 o'clock in the morning. So, students

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who would have finished a course at university that may have ended late in the night at eight o'clock, and tried to study up till 10 o'clock or midnight, can now go to the airport and access transportation to Tobago, so they can get back to their jobs in the morning time. That is the vision of the People's Partnership Government.

So, international carriers who are coming from Europe and America, landing in Trinidad, can now fly over or come straight to Tobago because the international airport is open. It was only in Trinidad and Tobago—in this world—that you had an international airport that did not open 24 hours. Guess who are the ones that opposed the idea? The Chief Secretary, at one point he opposed it. Then he said it was the idea of the Secretary of Finance afterwards, when we pointed out the error. Lies and deception. Sorry, let me take that back, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Please do.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker:—in an attempt to smooth over what they thought was a miscalculation in their statements. Is that better, Mr. Speaker? I thank you for your guidance.

Mr. Sharma: You are sounding very good.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Mr. Speaker, from the collaborative effort of the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Tobago Development, then headed by the Member for Tobago East, the beautiful, the gracious, the strong woman of substance from Tobago—[*Desk thumping*—my sister.

Mr. Sharma: “She blushing.”

Dr. Browne: “Tobago blush boy.”

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Seven hundred million dollars expended on this hospital. One hundred beds only. It took more than eight years to construct, Mr. Speaker, delivered to the people of Tobago by the People's Partnership Government. [*Desk thumping*]

We can boast that we now have a hospital of note in Tobago. I am advised that maybe if we had waited a little longer, we may have gotten a hospital in Signal Hill and one in Mason Hall, judging from what material were moved, and to where. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Landate, boy.

Mr. Warner: Wait, time will tell.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: In addition, for the process of commissioning in fiscal 2011/2012, the Ministry of Finance—and this was under the hon. Minister of

Finance—transferred \$75 million for the completion of the process of commissioning. Remember this House in the last fiscal year allocated \$100 million to the Tobago House of Assembly for that commissioning process, \$25 million of which remained in the Tobago House of Assembly fund and was used—I cannot say how, by whom and when.

So, when they were arguing over the entire year for \$100 million, they already had in their receipt \$25 million of that commissioning fund. Yet, two months ago, the additional \$75 million was transferred.

Mr. Speaker, one can only hope that the people of Tobago after receiving their \$75 million will get that money spent on the hospital. Unfortunately, we in this House have little power to direct the spending that occurs on the ground in Tobago by the Tobago House of Assembly. So, while we may hope that it is done, we can only allow the people to ensure that that is done.

In addition, and I have to continue, now all of this is Tobago West, “eh”. The airport is in Tobago West. The hospital is in Tobago West. The runway and those roads that we wanted to fix are also in Tobago West.

The Magdalena Grand—and I must thank the then Minister of Trade and Industry, who captured the vision after the stakeholders on the ground indicated—and the Minister of Tourism, who was also part of that planning team—when the stakeholders came to them and indicated that Tobago needed around 2,500 four star-and-above rooms to be able to capture those carriers flying to Tobago with the first-class passengers; the ones who spend money.

Part of the plan was to resurrect the Vanguard Hotel which over the last 12 years—by the previous administration—was left to decay, to deteriorate, to rust. The staff, Tobagonian staff, was sent home. The effect of that downturn—the downturn in the economy started around 2005. The effect of the closure of that hotel and the non-repair at that time meant that the crisis in Tobago worsened.

It is not just the hotel workers that were out of a job. It was the masons, the carpenters, the taxi-drivers—all of those—and the fishermen who were associated with the activities of the tourism sector and in that hotel in particular. All of their jobs were at risk because of PNM neglect, because of PNM blindness. They are quick to boast, during the time that they were in office, we were seeing record amounts of spending, but nothing—precious nothing—for the people of Tobago. That will not continue under this administration.

Hon. Member: Call the election.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Mr. Speaker, let me boast; if Tobago West could say a few good things, say a few good things. Member for Laventille East/Morvant: the hotel boasts of 200 ocean-front-view rooms—200 rooms. Five fine and casual dining options, 18-hole PGA-designed championship golf course, an expansive beach front, multiple swimming pools, generously sized and flexible meeting and event spaces and the newest spa on the island. The place nice. Thank you, Minister of Trade and Industry. Thank you for the investment in the people of Tobago.

So, that means now, Mr. Speaker, you can bring your entire staff again, to the hotel to enjoy some time at the beautiful Magdalena Grand. You could leave some of the MPs on the other side in Trinidad. [*Laughter*] We do not want to disturb the people of Tobago too much.

Further, Mr. Speaker, when you add to that, in Tobago West, the \$250 million Tobago Business Development Fund and the up to 70 per cent Government Loan Guarantee Programme. It means that you have invested significantly in the hotel and tourism plant in Tobago and because most of that is in Tobago West, my constituents would have benefited significantly from the great attempt by this administration to shore up the tourism sector. Of course, some of that can be accessed by those in Tobago East as well as they are building their new hotel plants on the island.

Mr. Speaker, delivery, after delivery, after delivery. With respect to the transformation taking place at the level of tertiary education, Tobago has gotten its fair share too. In this regard, I would like to put on the *Hansard* record, the opening of the Tobago Technology Centre in Canaan, Bon Accord on Friday, May 20, 2011. [*Desk thumping*]

The area capacity of the building is 46,000 square feet and approximately 300 trainees—young, bright Tobagonians—and staff are being accommodated at the facility on a full-time basis, with an additional 200 trainees being accommodated on the part-time. At the push of the then Minister of Tobago Development and Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education at that time, we started the Bachelors of Education for teachers in Tobago to be trained in Tobago. We are proud of the work of this administration in Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon Member: Good job.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: I could go on, you know.

Hon. Member: Go on, go on.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Can I say a few more, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Warner: Tell them, tell them.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: I shared with the Prime Minister some of the daunting statistics that young people in Tobago were facing. If you looked at the last report of the SEA exam and you measured the performance of the education district called Tobago, with regards to the full complement of Trinidad and Tobago—I think eight districts in total, seven in Trinidad and one in Tobago—Tobago schools, and you must note this, have the highest teacher to student ratio in the country. However, Tobago schools have been ranking second to last, or last, in terms of achievement when you look at the report.

In addition to which, the entrance to tertiary education in Tobago, the number of students getting into tertiary education activities, is significantly lower than the average, if you measure the achievement scale or metric in Trinidad as opposed to that in Tobago.

So that even though this Parliament is sending millions of dollars to Tobago for education, and even though you have so many teachers in the system, something is preventing our students from gaining higher levels of education, from accessing additional skills training.

Mr. Speaker, in masonry and carpentry terms, you can see all the elements required to build the house. You see the bricks, you see the sand, you see the cement but you are not seeing the progress to the houses. So, something has to be wrong in the education system in Tobago. That is why this Government is so much interested in human capacity development.

The Minister of Education has indicated that twice he went and offered himself and his Ministry's expertise to solve the problems in Tobago, but again, as is the arrogance of the PNM administration in Tobago, as is the arrogance you see displayed here from time to time in this House, they refused and they rejected help again to the detriment of the people of Tobago.

Hon. Member: "Why they so bad?"

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Change must come to Tobago too. [*Desk thumping*]

Let me turn our attention to Tobago's budgetary allocation. Mr. Speaker, let me quote first. Let me say this. Tobago gets significantly more than it is mandated

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by the THA Act, under this administration. If one is to take another quote from the Leader of the Opposition, in his response of October 5, in this House and he said this:

“Out of a total proposed national current and development programme expenditure of \$58.6 billion, according to the published estimates, the Tobago House of Assembly will get \$2.337 billion for its development programme in total, and I am advised it is not the \$2.356 billion the Minister said. So, I hope that we get some clarification there.”

I know the Ministry of Finance and the Economy would send out, before its presentation, the budget documents, so that the Members of the Opposition can take the time, peruse those documents, look at the figures, see what adds up to what and then they can come into this House and draw their conclusion based on a review of those figures.

But obviously, either the Member for Diego Martin West or the person that they elected to review the budget on his behalf—because I know he is a geologist and, therefore, may not be too au courant with the figures—[*Desk thumping*] therefore this error that he made in his contribution may be one that we as Members of Parliament can accept as he was not attempting to mislead this honourable House or the people of Tobago.

10.30 a.m.

If one were to examine the documents, one would note that an additional \$19 million under the heading of the Unemployment Relief Programme had to be included with the Tobago House of Assembly estimates of \$2.337 billion. If you add those two up, you will end up with \$2.356 billion, for the *Hansard* record, and that is exactly 4.03 per cent of the national budget, as required by the Dispute Resolution Commission’s recommendation.

The Leader of the Opposition continued:

“Lest we forget, this is the third consecutive year in which the PP has done to Tobago this reduction of its allocation as a percentage of the national budget and that has been done without a whimper”—and this is what I take offence to—“of protest from those who claim to represent the island.”

He is referring to me and he is referring to the Member for Tobago East, giving an inaccurate statement and attempting to reflect badly on the two Members that represent Tobago.

He continues:

“Not one of them, inside or outside of this House, speaks in defence of Tobago, except to repeat the tiresome rhetoric and other utterances of their UNC masters directed against the Tobago House of Assembly executive.”

An interesting observation, just for those farmers and would-be farmers in Tobago, and the Minister in the Ministry of Food Production, who is here, will bear me out on this.

Let me say, Mr. Speaker, foot-and-mouth disease tends to be mild in sheep and goats, but I will keep regard reading to see how foot-and-mouth disease affects some political farmers. [*Laughter and desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the matter of this Dispute Resolution Commission has to do with section 56 of the Tobago House of Assembly Act. For the benefit of the House and for the general public’s benefit, Part V, section 56 of the Act says:

“There is established a body to be known as the Dispute Resolution Commission which shall undertake to resolve disputes between the Assembly and the Government on budgetary allocations to the Assembly and matters in connection therewith.”

So, in the Tobago House of Assembly Act, the drafters at that time framed what we called the Dispute Resolution Commission; so should there be a disagreement in the allocations required by the Assembly to do its business, that there was a mechanism that can be triggered by the Assembly or by the central government to bring that dispute to a resolution.

The mechanism is there and that mechanism was invoked once by Hochoy Charles—he was Chief Secretary at the time. When the commission sat and reflected upon the population size in Tobago, the population size in Trinidad, the need for development in Tobago with respect to the pace of development in Trinidad, it decided that the minimum requirement for the Tobago House of Assembly, as distinct from Tobago, must be 4.03 per cent, and that too is what is given to Tobago in this year’s allocation. Further, Mr. Speaker, the Cabinet shall whenever it receives a report from the commission, after consideration of the dispute, convey its position in writing to the Tobago House of Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, for clarity, the percentage is arranged between 4.03 per cent to 6.9 per cent, considering the developmental needs of the island. Let me tell you, the Assembly—of course, because of the Fifth Schedule has a number of areas and I will go through them as we get to that area, that it has to cover for and on

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behalf of the people of Tobago—is the elected body by the people of the Tobago that seeks in the interest of those people to do a number of developmental works on land. It was the idea of the Tobago House of Assembly, which was created in this House, that we as People’s Partnership Government, will always respect in our deliberations and in our considerations when it comes to fiscal measures for Trinidad and Tobago.

Let me read for you an interesting note that I found while reviewing the contributions of some of the hon. Members in this House, and you will tell me, Mr. Speaker, if positions over the years would have changed, if Members over the years because of where they sit would have changed their position on how the Tobago House of Assembly should be treated. I will come back to that in a little bit as I try to quickly go through my notes to find one page that may have eluded me at the moment. Yes, here it is. Just found it. Sometimes you must talk yourself through and you will find things in the due course of time.

Mr. De Coteau: The Lord works in a mysterious way.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Very mysterious. This is the debate from the Dispute Resolution Commission as reported by the *Hansard* on October 23, 2000. A long time ago, and this is the response of the hon. Member for Diego Martin West. He begins:

“Suppose we adopt and accept this recommendation to give Tobago a certain percentage of the national budget, how does that solve the problem we have in Trinidad and Tobago? The real problem in Tobago is not only about not enough money, it is really about accountability for the moneys that it has been getting.”

These are the words of the Member for Diego Martin West in 2000, as recorded on the *Hansard*, when the discussion on the trigger mechanism to protect the Assembly and the people of Tobago in their budgetary allocation.

He did not stand up then to defend the people of Tobago, to ensure that that fixed percentage—in fact, he continues:

“That is the real problem in Tobago. The Tobago House of Assembly”—is the real problem—“has decided to interpret the laws of this country to suit the officers and officials who are in office today.”

Those are his words. “I am a Tobagonian”...—he repeats his boast. Sorry, Mr. Speaker,

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. [*Dr. R. Griffith*]

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, thank you hon. colleagues.

"I am a Tobagonian"—He repeated his boost—"...I have family and friends in Tobago. I grew up Tobago, I cannot but support the best for Tobago, but what I cannot support is people taking me to make a fool."

Mr. Sharma: He could do that by himself.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: I agree with you.

"Those who are in the Tobago House of Assembly today and who triggered this Dispute Resolution Commission arrangement would want us to believe that Tobago's problems are only about not enough money..."

So when it suited him then, he pulled away from the people of Tobago, fighting to get their fair share in the budgetary allocation of the country of Trinidad and Tobago. But because he is trying to regain political power and his ambitions are greater than his bald head can hold—[*Laughter*]

Hon. Member: Oh Lord!

Mr. Speaker: Please! Please! Withdraw that.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Withdrawn, Mr. Speaker, I may have offended too many people in this honourable House. Withdrawn. Let me drink some water and cool down a little bit. [*Crosstalk*] We will discuss that in another forum.

Mr. Warner: Saturday. Saturday.

Dr. Griffith: There is no Standing Order Saturday. Remember that.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Let me switch gears a bit. We have a few minutes. Again, so that all may know, this year's budgetary allocation to the Tobago House of Assembly is \$3.56 billion and it meets the statutory requirement of the Dispute Resolution Commission. Added to that, you have the \$150 million tourism guarantee incentive programme, you have the \$60 million investment from the Ministry of Environment and Water Resources, you have the initial \$11 million from the Ministry of National Security, \$21 million from the Ministry of Transport, plus \$41 million through the Ministry of Tobago Development.

This amounts to well over \$800 million, in addition to the allocation of the Tobago House of Assembly, and exactly 5.53 per cent of the national budget

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allocated to Tobago—well above the minimum requirement of the Dispute Resolution Commission of 4.03 per cent. So the people of Tobago can feel assured that the partnership administration in central government cares for them, but Members get uneasy when you talk about the percentage because they do not reflect upon it was worked out.

The population in Tobago is currently 56,810 individuals, the population in Trinidad is 1.267 million people, and if you were to work the ratio out, it works out to a percentage of 4.48 in the population. So that is where the numbers come from, and that is the rationale behind the Dispute Resolution Commission's figure of the 4.03 to 6.9 per cent. So there is no ghost, no attempt to smooth over a population. This is simply a Government doing what it was elected to do; a Government acting responsibly on behalf of all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, in the Partnership there is visionary leadership, this is a visionary team, and Tobago needs a visionary Chief Secretary.

Mr. Sharma: He is coming.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Let us look just for a few minutes because this is what we need to judge every administration on. This is the year, Mr. Speaker, 2012; these numbers are significant for the people of Tobago. Do you know that the PNM administration has been in office for 12 years in Tobago?

Mr. Sharma: "It's coming to an end."

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: And do you also know that over the past 12 years the allocation to Tobago is in the tune of \$20 billion? So 2012 must mark the end of the PNM administration as we move into 2013. [*Desk thumping*]

10.45 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, we are all colleagues in this honourable House, and I therefore want us to remove, for a moment, ourselves from the heat that is generated sometimes, from time to time, by debates like these. Let us look at the facts, look at the historical record. For some time, let us take off those partisan glasses and review the performance of the administration with regard to the allocation it has been given from this honourable House.

The Fifth Schedule of the Act gives the Assembly the right to manage a number of areas, which I said before, and I will just mention a few of them for posterity: state lands, land and marine parks, public buildings, telecommunications, infrastructure, highways and roads, libraries, marketing, valuations, housing. Every time an issue comes up in the MP's office from

Tobago, because of our geographical location and because of the area that we represent, as Members of Parliament, we have to go to our assemblymen and the Executive Council to assist our constituents when their need falls within the areas that the Assembly manages. So it is in our interest, as Tobagonians, Members of Parliament, members of the Assembly, to work together, to collaborate, to ensure that our constituents get the benefit out of the allocation that was passed on by this Parliament to the Assembly.

However, sadly, over the past two and a half years, there has been an increased resistance by the Assembly to even deliver to the people of Tobago on those services which are under its remit. So that as MPs, many a time, and I am sure my sister from Tobago East will tell you the same, we have been frustrated as we have made representation on behalf of our people to the Tobago House of Assembly. So when the Members for Port of Spain South, Laventille East, Laventille West and so on, come to this House and they raise their issues on behalf of their own constituencies, we have the same problem.

The difference is where you have an administration in Trinidad that would stretch out its hand—I heard all of them complimenting the Minister of Education and Member for Caroni East as to how he is a pleasant gentleman. They can compliment him because of that. Or they can compliment the Member for Chaguanas West as he delivers projects in their constituencies; as they can compliment the Member for Oropouche East as he gives housing to the people in Port of Spain South and so on. Unfortunately, we cannot give such comments to our assemblymen in Tobago as they have resisted us on each occasion as we fought for our people.

Let me read—[*Interruption*] There was one good one, the former secretary for health. When his budget was cut by \$90 million, he resigned, out of respect for the people of Tobago, from the Executive Council. That is a man of honour! [*Desk thumping*] I would pray that some other Members in this House would do the same thing in honour and to save their own constituencies.

This is the view in 2000 that the Leader of the Opposition had for the Tobago House of Assembly.

“The people in Tobago...”

I am quoting again from the *Hansard* record of 2000 on the debate on the Dispute Resolution Commission Report and he said this:

“The people in Tobago believe that somebody is afraid of them so you must not ask any questions. What they are asking us to do is give them a

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portion of the national pie and having handed it over, just turn your backs and get out.”

The hon. Member for Diego Martin West.

“Mr. Speaker, I cannot support that...I was elected by the people of this country in larger numbers than any person in the Tobago House of Assembly and I cannot claim that right to want to spend Government’s money and say do not ask me anything.”

The words of the Member for Diego Martin West! He is saying that because he sat here in this House as an MP, regardless of whether he sat as an MP for Tobago East, West, or Diego Martin, he reserves the right to question the allocation and the spending of that allocation by the Tobago House of Assembly. To that, we agree. To that, Mr. Speaker, we as Members who will defend the Tobago House of Assembly agree that once moneys are appropriated from this Parliament, then the THA should account for every cent of the moneys spent on the ground in Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And this—I wonder if I should read this now.

Hon. Members: Yes, read it. Read it!

Hon. Dr. D. Baker:

“No person or persons...”

He continued:

“must assume that because they happen to hold some little office somewhere in the country that they can thumb their nose at the rest of the”—people of the—“country...”

Tobagonians who led in the Assembly are called holders of “little office”. [*Laughter*] He completely, out of arrogance, diminished the role and the responsibility of the Tobago House of Assembly. But, because an election is looming, he stands in this honourable House and pretends to be the greatest defender of Tobago. That, by the record of his own words, is not the case. It is either, Mr. Speaker, that the gentleman continues to change his position or that one of them is not the truth.

Mr. Warner: Chameleon!

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: However, the TOP and the People’s Partnership will never consider those who serve in the Tobago House of Assembly as holders of some little office in the country. That is disrespect to the Assembly. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: True, true!

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Mr. Speaker, Tobagonians must never allow that kind of leadership to hold the reins of power ever again on the island. If a man does not consider your leaders are of worth or of substance, no matter where his navel string is buried, he must never be considered by those people. If you want to prove it, tell the leader of the PNM to call the election in Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] We, of the People's Partnership are ready. We, of the TOP are ready any day, any time. Tell Orville London to call the election! [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Warner: When he call it, we will attack with full force.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Mr. Speaker, the report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Tobago House of Assembly for the year ending 2004. Not my words! This—under the heading “Presentation of Financial Statements”:

“7.1 The Financial Statements did not include a Statement of Changes in Equity. This was not in keeping with International Accounting Standard.... The means by which assets were funded was also not disclosed.

7.2 The Notes to the Financial Statements did not include disclosure of the fact that opening balances were revised to reflect the accruals concept.”

These are not Baker's words. I am not attacking the Assembly; I am simply repeating the words of an independent agency in the Auditor General, Mr. Speaker. So that when I stand and ask for a forensic audit, it is because an independent body has indicated that something is wrong with the reporting system of the Tobago House of Assembly. [*Desk thumping*] The moneys are disbursed from this honourable House every year by the financial provisions.

I continue—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Warner: “Doh stop! Doh stop!”

Hon. Dr. D. Baker:

“8.1 The figure of \$545,035,705 [*sic*] shown as Fixed Assets was not verified for the following reasons:

- (i) A Fixed Assets Register for each Division of the Assembly was not produced for audit examination.”

They did not even wish to present the books to the auditor so that she could make a determination.

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“(ii) The figure brought forward was \$540,000.00 less than the closing balance at the end of the previous year.”

So the figure of \$545,035,725 was brought forward as \$540,000 in the books for the new year. So what happened to the \$35,725? That is the question that the Auditor General is asking.

“8.2 An amount of \$400,000 was expended for the purchase of ‘a parcel of land with buildings’. The title deed for this property was not produced neither was the status of the property determined.”

Dr. Moonilal: What!

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: I will read very quickly, Mr. Speaker, as time is running away. 2005, section 34(1) of the Tobago House of Assembly, Financial Rules 1990, makes provisions for the transfer of surplus funds where the expenditure of the Assembly for any financial year was less than the amount shown in the final estimates. So, at the end of the financial year, if the Assembly did not spend out all of its money, the amount that was left in the balance should have been returned to the Consolidated Fund under the rules. That happens with every Ministry in the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago but not the Tobago House of Assembly.

Mr. Sharma: Breach.

Hon. Members: “So where de money gone?”

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Mr. Speaker, in brief, what they have been doing is that at the beginning of the financial year, this restrained Secretary of Finance, would eke out a part of the transfer, and put in a Contingency Fund in the Assembly, so that at the end of the year, you can never record a surplus, and they have been building that fund up year after year. So that when an election is called, they have in their accounts a huge amount of money unexpended—an unexpended balance.

The Auditor General, and the Member for Diego Martin West who claims to be a man of integrity—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Warner: Where? In which country? [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. D. Baker:—must recognize that something is wrong in these financial arrangements. I return the call resolutely, without fear or favour, as I have taken my oath in this House to ensure that accountability returns to the governance structure in Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Members: We will do it. “Geh dem! geh dem!”

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: When your navel string is in a place, you must love the

place; you must build the place; you must work in the interest of the people of that place, and not in your own interest, Mr. Speaker. Time is running. Not Baker's words, again.

I am reading from Tobago—this is the news. This is the *Express*. The story is written by Elizabeth Williams of the Tobago bureau under the heading Tobago "...bids to complete mega-projects in 2012". This is not Baker; this is Elizabeth Williams of the *Express* and she writes:

"Millions of taxpayers' dollars have been spent on all projects, and while the Infrastructure Secretary could not provide updated monies spent on these projects, according to sources within the Tobago House of Assembly. As of 2008 the Shaw Park Cultural Complex's estimated cost was \$196 million to be completed in 2010..."

What year did I say, Mr. Speaker? 2010. We are on the verge of ending 2012, and all that they have done for that complex, because an election is drawing near, they have begun putting on glass at the front to give the people of Tobago the facade that they are completing the project. When you look at the back, all you see are the steel beams from one wall to the next—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Rusting.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker:—right next to the sea and rusting. So if you were concerned about the building, you would put the glass at the back where the sea blast comes in.

Hon. Member: "Yuh mamaguying dem."

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: But you are so much trying to deceive the people of Tobago that you are putting the glass at the front.

Mr. Warner: PNM style!

Hon. Member: "Shame on dem, boy."

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Deception! Deceit!

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: "Naah, wrong word."

Mr. Speaker: Wrong word.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Sorry, Mr. Speaker, again, withdrawn. Thank you for your guidance, Mr. Speaker.

Miss Cox: "Yuh getting out ah place like yuh colleagues."

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: This project started in 2005 and, to date, it is costing the taxpayer—it started at a price of 196, it is now costing some \$400 million and it is not yet completed.

The new Scarborough library on construction started in 2004, costing the Assembly then, approximately \$45 million. The project is now under a new contractor to be completed this year. The original cost was \$19 million and it is expected to be completed costing well over \$100 million.

11.00 a.m.

The financial complex came in at \$22 million—there is more—but it has now reportedly cost the administration \$106 million, from \$22 million to \$106 million project after project in Tobago not finishing on time and costing the taxpayers significantly more than they had planned to spend on those projects. So, when I call for a forensic audit, it is not because there is some attempt to diminish the Tobago House of Assembly. We are protecting the institutions that should serve the people of Tobago. It is in our interest. “My navel string bury there too.”

You have heard about BOLT. You heard the hon. Member for—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Cadiz: Usain.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker:—D’Abadie O’Meara. “He father a Tobagonian so he boy loves de island.” The BOLT where you take your friends and family of the PNM, purchase land in Tobago for over \$4 million an acre and you give that back to the person from whom you purchased it, for a peppercorn lease of \$10 a year and you pay \$1.2 million a month for 20 years to construct the agriculture administrative complex—\$1.2 million for 20 years. That project will cost, at the end of those years, \$300 million.

In addition to that, you give the person from whom you bought the land \$22 million in an account, so that they can secure the loan to do the project. In addition, you pay \$12 million for the purchase of the land and nobody on that side of the House gets up to defend the people of Tobago and they call themselves born and bred Tobagonians.

Dr. Griffith: “Like Calder Hart advise them boy.”

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Mr. Speaker, and this is the boast of the Chief Secretary: under the article, Tobago [sic] owns 40 per cent of all of the land in Tobago, 40 per cent.

He says this:

“The Tobago House of Assembly (THA) owns 34 estates comprising over 12,000 acres of land in Tobago. This excludes the 6,362 acres that make up the forest reserve.”

The THA owns 40 per cent of land in Tobago, 12,000 acres of land. There was no need—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Warner: To buy land.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker:—for them to buy three acres at the Shirvan and Milford junction, no need, when you have 12,000 acres of land. Tobago is not concerned so much with what is going on here. We are concerned about section 28 of the Tobago House of Assembly Act. That section that requires: “The Assembly, in pursuance of its functions, shall be subject to the Central Tenders Board Act until such time as there is in effect alternative provision...”

Section 28: they breached the section when they gave, through a BOLT arrangement, the land to their friends and family in the PNM in Trinidad. [*Desk thumping*] They have breached that section when, under the [*Inaudible*] arrangement to build the aquatic complex, they gave their friends again. Mr. Speaker, I would leave that part. Somebody greater than I will speak to that in this House. I would leave that out for the time being. My time is short.

Let me run quickly in the few minutes that I have.

Dr. Moonilal: Saturday in Tobago.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: We will finish this. You want to call an election? We are ready for you any day, any time on the streets of Tobago.

Dr. Moonilal: Market Square Saturday.

Mr. Warner: Market Square Saturday.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: The hospital will be opened. The tourism sector will be shored up over 2012/2013 in Tobago. We plan to put in two marinas, using private investors. They will come in. We will facilitate them in their purchase of the land and we will assist them in the development of mariners in Tobago. I have two investors now who are waiting and looking with great interest at property in south-west, Tobago East, to develop a facility that will allow for high-end arrivals

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into Tobago, people who would spend money and cause that money to redound to the masons and the carpenters and the fishermen on Tobago. That is the vision of this Government.

The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has employed two tourism attachés, one in the High Commission in London and the other one in New York. They will be there assisting our marketing in agencies, spreading the good news that Tobago is back in the tourism business again. Tobago is ready for development. What we need now is a reasonable Chief Secretary and a sensible Executive Council that will spend money on the people. [*Desk thumping*]

Quickly, whereas the consideration at that time was for duty-free shopping areas in a few small locations in Tobago, the Government has indicated that the duty-free shopping would be extended through the entire island. So, a visitor will come with his ticket or boarding pass and say to the store clerks: “I am from X, Y and Z and leaving today or tonight” and they can purchase whatever at the reduced tax rate all over Tobago. That is the vision.

Mr. Speaker: Three minutes more.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: The ANR Robinson International Airport—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Warner: Three US minutes.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker:—is about to do—we are about to see the largest upgrade of the facility. The roof has been leaking for years. The Minister has agreed that he would replace the roof in short cost and we will fix the arrival hall, the departure lounge, the baggage and conveyor belt system, the checking area and the hydrant and browser system. Change is coming to Tobago. We will upgrade the seaport facilities also, Mr. Speaker.

Energy—Friendship Estate, the lands will be used to create this energy bridge between Trinidad and Tobago and give Tobago a significant footprint in the oil and gas sector. Tobago is now coming into production, by 2017, as the wells of block 22—the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs reminded me to speak of the Roxborough Gas Station. If you see the building that is there now; it is a building with barely a roof with two old pumps. The people of Tobago have been suffering.

Mr. Warner: Tell them about the police station and the fire station. “What happen to you?”

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: There is so much going on. The police stations, the fire stations—change too will come to Tobago. Give us a Chief Secretary and an administration that will work with the people’s government and Tobago will enter

the 21st Century with the rest of this country. We will never turn back to the PNM. The time for change has come. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Paula Gopee-Scoon (*Point Fortin*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me start by saying: Member for Tobago West, I was very, very disappointed in your contribution today. [*Desk thumping*] I think all of the people of Tobago were tuned in today to hear, as the new Minister of Tobago Development, what are your plans for Tobago, and you spent all of two Minutes, and instead you used your time to practise for your campaign platform on Saturday coming. You used your parliamentary time to campaign for your Tobago election and all this was about attack, attack, attack—attack the Leader of Opposition, attack the Chief Secretary, attack the Tobago House of Assembly. You are even attacking your own country. You have such a beautiful country—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Peters: Island!

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon:—beautiful island and all you are doing is bashing the island as well, talking about the—[*Interruption*] yes, nonsense and very disappointing coming from you. Leave that for the platform on Saturday. All right? You gave me nothing to comment on, in terms of what you have said.

So, we move on, and let me say how pleased I am to join in this debate, a Bill to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending September 30, 2013. Mr. Speaker, permit me to congratulate the Minister of Finance and the Economy on the presentation of his maiden budget.

I have followed this debate in and outside of the Parliament and I know, certainly by the Minister's own admission, that he is finding this job difficult. He himself has said that. So, I start this debate by recognizing that the Minister has found himself in very challenging circumstances and I am hopeful that he will settle, but one never knows with that side.

This budget is a very serious matter. It is a serious matter for all of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and I have a duty, despite what has been discussed before, and I have taken an oath to ensure that the shortcomings of both the budget and this Government are in fact highlighted.

When I looked at last Thursday's *Express*—I think it was Thursday the 4th, the front page, and I wish to quote—you see a headline:

“Economists, businessmen, energy expert attack Finance Minister's budget”

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When you look further at page 3, issues of creditability cited as expert business people speak out. What was the heading?

A package without a plan

A package without a plan? I am concerned and, indeed, all of Trinidad and Tobago ought to be concerned with what was brought here as a budget.

There is a lot to tell this honourable House, but of course time will not permit, and then of course my colleagues have said a lot and I do not wish to regurgitate what has been said. But there are two little details that I would highlight, which would give the population an idea of where you are at and that is just the budget deficit. I just want to remind the population of what the deficit—and I would admit to one—was when we left office, and there it is, a budget of \$2.3 billion and that is after that which went to the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. In reality, the deficit which we left here in 2010, which was at the height of the economic depression worldwide, that deficit was in fact truly under \$2 billion. And what do we have here today after three years of being in office? We have a three-year cumulative budget of \$17 billion—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Browne: Deficit.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon:—Cumulative deficit, \$17 billion. [*Desk thumping*] Just compare. Then, when you look at the debt-to-GDP ratio, I only want to compare within their period, at the end of 2011, what exactly was the debt-to -DP ratio? Thirty-six per cent, and what is the expected one year later? It is 46.6 per cent. Where is the Minister of Finance and the Economy and where is this Government going with this spending spree that they are on? It is those things that bring us to the crucial question of whether we can trust this Government with the public purse.

Dr. Browne: No.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: That is the concern, whether we can trust them with the public purse. So, we find ourselves today in a seemingly difficult situation and this Government has no one else to blame but themselves for their irresponsible promises, their irresponsible actions, their irresponsible decisions and more than ever their irresponsible behaviour in office. A critical part of that budget as well was the question of reporting on the last year and this has not been done.

I can only say that the real budget is yet to come and what was presented, to my dismay, and of course to the dismay of my constituents as well, the people of

Point Fortin, was a very lighthearted anecdotal presentation. Really, it was an unscientific account of this Government's fiscal plans for this country, meaning that there was no basis. It is unacceptable. It seemed fleeting, passing, very transient and everything you have to wait for something else to come, very superficial.

But one reservation is that I do not point fingers solely at the Minister of Finance and the Economy who will soon realize that he is no longer in a corporate environment and, of course, he must realize by now that he is at the mercy of the public and he is at the mercy of those around him.

Dr. Browne: Toxic environment.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: It is, as my colleague has said, a toxic environment. The public is asking, and one of the questions that they are still asking today—pointing at whether this is the Minister of Finance and the Economy speaking, the one that we know who was formerly a CEO of a financial institution. The public is asking: why then, in less than a week you have shifted from an austerity budget? All of a sudden in one fell swoop you have gone from an austerity to a stimulus budget. Why the reason for that sudden shift? Is it the Minister who was speaking or was it politics talking and the rest of his colleagues talking? Is it a question of stimulus that this country really needs or you ask yourself is it a question of confidence? My feeling: this was all about confidence.

11.15 a.m.

Notwithstanding, we accept it from the point of view only that the economy does, in fact, need a shot in the arm to create the buoyancy that it has been lacking for the last few years and, therefore, the rationale of stimulus may be accepted but, of course, we know the direction did not come from the Minister.

So, Mr. Speaker, juxtaposed on three weeks of political slump, the section 34—and I refer to it only en passant, as you directed—and of course against a background of political subterfuge over time, it is my view that this budget should really have been more appropriately termed “political sustainability”. How do we remain in power? How do we survive? That is what it was about, political sustainability. [*Desk thumping*] So, it was very short on details. I do not think there is anything that could be immediately implemented except, of course, the hike on gas as we saw from the day after, and it reminded me of the style of a Member on that side who is always quick to drop bombshells and nothing is to come. Everything is to come later, to come later. I need not say who that is, but that seem—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Browne: Tsunami!

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon:—that is what it seemed to me this budget was about. So what did we really have in this budget document? The Minister of Finance and the Economy spoke about an attempt to balance the budget by 2016, an attempt to balance the budget but, of course, when will that attempt start?

Dr. Browne: When they are out of office.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Next year, not this year because they fully well know that this is a Government of one term, and one term only. [*Desk thumping*]

Miss Hospedales: That is right.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Then there was talk about increased revenues but we have no details about where these increased revenues are to come from. We were told about the land and building tax, but we do not know if that is to come or not to come, but all we know is that widespread consultation is needed—but no firm details.

Then there are the “deep reforms” which are necessary but are still yet to be carefully thought through—those were the words of the Minister of Finance and the Economy—but this reform is to be phased in over three years, by which time, of course, you will be no more.

Miss Hospedales: That is right.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: And it is that they are afraid to tackle reform. They are afraid to tackle reform of expenses; they are afraid to tackle taxation reform and they are afraid to tackle revenue reform; they are afraid. Then he spoke about the refocusing of government expenditure to create more value for money, but yet still there were no calls by the Minister to trim expenses in the Ministries and to be more efficient, you see. [*Desk thumping*] That was where we started: when we had to cut, we started with the Ministries, from the inside out, and the public was able to understand. This is why we could have boasted about a stable economy and this was, in fact, what we left when we left office—a very stable economy.

They spoke about a reduction in transfers, all plans again, a reduction in transfers to state enterprises, but when again, that will be gradual, because they are afraid of the political backlash; that is all it is about. Then he spoke about the 12-year programme of capital works, a 12-year trajectory in the process of developing we are told, and it is because this Government has no vision. This Government has no vision beyond 2014. [*Desk thumping*]

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

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Look at their medium-term framework, there is no vision beyond 2014, so what are they talking about a 12-year programme of capital works? Nothing. No vision at all. No long-term plan.

Then they talked about the reduction of the gas subsidy. That they introduced with great trepidation saying that it will only affect 6 per cent of the population, et cetera. That is what we are told, only to announce later that day or by the next morning when they were facing the Chamber meeting that, in fact, we will be hitting all fuels and it is all going to happen in the same fiscal year. Then somewhere along the line we were told that, as well, it will be phased out in time with the introduction of the CNG infrastructure, but in the budget we were told that the CNG infrastructure would not be rolled out for another five years.

Dr. Browne: “Ratchiffee.”

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon:—so, therefore, yes, the “ratchiffee” budget that it was. The end result is that the public will be faced with this increase in fuel prices, of course, which will trickle down right through the entire economy, Mr. Speaker. Where really is the gain? What would have been the benefit from this? And I am not sure that the Cabinet and the Government really consider the entire approach before speaking out. You see, the Government needs to realize that if you speak the truth, and if you take the country into your confidence, people will be able to understand, and they will be able to plan and they will have appreciation—this an educated public—of your intentions, of where you are going, and why you need to get where you are going, but you first have to start with speaking the truth and being open and therein lies the difficulty with this Government.

So, Mr. Speaker, they spoke also about the complete review of the tax system saying that it is far-ranging to encompass all sources of revenue. What are they saying to us there? And it is that we can expect taxation increases across the board, and that to me might be the only form of raising revenue under this Government. So the public has something to look out for; the backlash is going to be strong, and is not going to be in favour of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Then, of course, he went on to talk about the building of the financial institutions support-services industry; the adoption of the supporting legislation; a new Securities Act; a new Insurance Act; and the Credit Union Act. Well, you have been sitting on these Acts for the last two to three years. When we left office, we left a suitable framework in place, all of the pieces of the legislation for

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an already functioning IFC, and all you have to do is bring it on, and it has been three years now and I do not know what you are talking about legislation coming and so on. It has been left there for you.

So it is a lot of things you have announced but yet to come; the restructuring of CEPEP and URP. How? When? Why are you going to do that? First of all, you have to deal with the fact that you have a CEPEP and URP that are inequitable, largely they are unfair in their present formation and the Minister of Housing and the Environment did not speak to that at all.

But the biggest gap which concerns me, as the Member of Parliament for Point Fortin, and the people of Point Fortin, is that you have announced the Point Fortin Hospital, and I will speak to that later in greater detail. You have announced the Point Fortin Hospital and you have not announced any financing details, so it means absolutely nothing to me, saying that you are going to build the Point Fortin Hospital and you have not told us how. I have looked through the PSIP, looked through the entire budget statement and I have seen nothing. What I have seen is that the Arima Hospital is going to be built, and I know how it is going to be financed from the IDF funding, but you have not said anything about financing the Point Fortin Hospital. So that hospital, as well, I believe is to come, but I do not believe it will come under your jurisdiction.

To me that budget has amounted to nothing more than the actions of an irresponsible Government staying very clear of what is right for the economy, what is right for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, what is right for all of our citizens. As I said, all it is about, is you staying in power. It is about sustainability. It is about survival, and survival, Mr. Speaker, not of the fittest. Let me take the opportunity to let you know that the body and soul of Trinidad and Tobago is not with this Government.

Miss Hospedales: That is right.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: And if anything at all, that peaceful march of thousands of persons, which was held two or three weeks ago, will send the message home very clearly that the body and soul of this nation are not with the People's Partnership Government. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, many Ministers—there is something that I want to pull out and enlarge on. Many Ministers have spoken about this PPP modality, and this public/private partnership, and all of the proposed rolling out infrastructure, and they have listed the projects and so on. I certainly want to agree with you that I

think this is an excellent tool for private sector involvement, and I am sure they are all very happy about the many opportunities that can emanate from this kind of partnership arrangement. Indeed, the concept is not at all new to us, it is practised over the world and with great success. As I said, the private sector must be happy.

But the Government has actually rolled out the projects. I understand there is a foreigner who is in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, so that the list has been provided. There is a list in the budget, but that list has also alerted me as to how this PPP modality can go wrong, and that is what my concern is about. It is not about the PPP Unit in Ministry of Finance and the Economy, because I am very happy about the performance of the public servants in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, they are very dedicated and professional people, but what I am concerned about is you, the policy makers; you are the people who I am concerned about and your role in this entire public/private partnership arrangement.

As I said, this is not entirely new to us, and as an aside, Mr. Speaker, there is a question that I would want to put to the Member for Barataria/San Juan. We left on the table a PPP model, not perhaps detailed along the lines I would like to see, but definitely we left for you in the Ministry of Health, a PPP model for the provision of dialysis—haemodialysis services for Mount Hope and the San Fernando Hospitals. I really want to question you on whether or not that was followed up. We had laid it out—we were engaging with a company called Fresenius; that contract had, in fact, been signed. Fresenius is the world's best provider of dialysis services, and this would have been good for the population of Trinidad and Tobago, the hundreds of persons stricken with diabetes and with chronic kidney diseases; hundreds of persons.

I do not believe that Fresenius is here at all and I do not believe you have gone on with this project. My view is that it has been abandoned, and this was something that all of those persons stricken with CKD would have benefited from. I do not know how committed you people are, especially in the Ministry of Health, to strengthening the service delivery capacity, and providing superior health care in both renal and peritoneal dialysis to patients at absolutely no cost. As far as I know, the public still has—there are those who get some relief from the Ministry, but much of the public still has to go out there and pay for their dialysis treatment. So I really want to find out what are the current arrangements for the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and Fresenius, that project? Where is it? What is the status of it? [*Crosstalk*]

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But I go back to the PPP modality, and I am saying that I accept that inadequate infrastructure is a constraint on growth, especially for developing countries. I want to agree as well that the PPP system is better for managing construction rather than the traditional procurement. In other words, projects are able to come on time within a particular quality standard and within budget as well.

So, I would say that this is the way to go for sure, especially against the background of the world economic crisis where, in fact, countries are really pressed to accommodate such large projects although I would have to admit that Trinidad is very fortunate and not in that precarious situation; it is only because of the kind of economic framework we were able to put in place—that is, by the last two PNM administrations before you came into office. So I am saying, yes, that the traditional procurement may be a bit stifling in view of the type of infrastructural projects that need to be done and that, certainly, Governments do not have the capacity; they are quite inadequate in terms of the cost and of the nature of the projects as well; they may not have the necessary expertise.

It is the same reason I would put a question to Minister of Finance and the Economy, it is a little bit off the PPP, but let us say the construction of the Point Fortin Highway which is costing \$7 billion and onward. The Minister of Finance and the Economy who I suppose will always be a banker, he cannot be anything else, has said nothing about the restructuring of that project, the restructuring of the financing of the Point Fortin Highway—\$7 billion putting this on a proper financing arrangement instead of taking it from the Consolidated Fund. It is really absurd that it should be financed in this manner when you, in fact, have a banking system that is awash with money, and the local banking sector would be quite attracted to proper financing arrangements for that \$7 billion highway.

11.30 a.m.

As I was saying about the PPP, I agree that it is excellent for many projects in education, health, works and so on, but it can only be viable for commercially suitable projects and where effectiveness and efficiency can be assured by the private participant. For that private participant—and I want to be very careful about the persons who you engage with—there must be a proven track record and there must be quality assurances in the particular area. We would want to know about that company's debt profile; its history of sound financial management; its reputation must be intact and its success must be paramount, so that all the required deliverables which you have mentioned and which must be met—the design, the build, the maintain, the operate/finance; all of those components—the private participant must be able to handle all of those arrangements.

As imagined, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago will have its responsibilities as well. You did not go into the length and breadth of it because you feel that you just want to skirt this issue and let these projects be given out willy-nilly. I am saying, let us do it, but let us do it properly. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago, engaging in these kinds of projects, will have serious responsibilities and, usually, these contracts are in awards of let us say 10, 20, 30 years. In other words, when you engage in a contract now, it is for a 10-year period, a 20-year period, a 30-year period and, very likely, concomitant with that is a guarantee of payments by Governments to come so that the country is committed for extended periods and that, to me, is the area of concern.

Yes, we are happy that you have the unit in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, but the public has to know about this PPP policy. You have to be able to identify the processes and the institutional responsibilities; all of the proposed legal and regulatory framework and, of course, programme oversight.

As I said before, these projects are likely to be in the billion-dollar range and we need to have some kind of national guidelines on it. You cannot just institute things *carte blanche* as you are used to doing. There are World Bank guidelines on this. All of those countries—Australia, Chile—that are engaging in this type of project arrangement on a large-scale basis have guidelines so that you can look at what is being done. Also, examine closely the World Bank guidelines because this could seriously end up being a feeding frenzy for persons who truly do not qualify, who would come in there and offer their own proposals and then, of course, we would want to be concerned about all the payment mechanisms and all the other dispute resolution mechanisms.

We welcome this, but we want it with the necessary oversight. Oversight is very important in this process because we do not want to be accusing anybody of misbehaviour in public office at all. As I said before, we want the development of PPP legislation. If you want to bring this with all of the projects which you have identified, we want specific PPP legislation and proper procurement legislation. Parliament, I think, should be involved in some way. It is not that I want to hold back the process because we value these types of arrangements; but you have to admit that these projects are large scale and, therefore, there will be concerns.

You may think of having the involvement of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee and, of course, they are very large projects and you must have your public consultation, but what we want to ensure and what you would probably not like is that there is proper governance; there is accountability and transparency; there is the protection of the public's interest; there is value for

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money; there is best practice. These are the kinds of things we would want to see in place because, as I said before, the Government is going to incur debt liability; it is going to incur contingent liability and debt guarantees for years to come.

You will be anxious; bring on these projects and list all these projects, but it is another Government—when we return to power in two or three years, we are the ones who will be responsible for the payments and it is the public that will have to pay the price and that is the inherent danger. So we need rules that will limit the full aggregate exposure at this time. How much can you expose the people of Trinidad to at this time? There must be proper budgeting arrangements now and for the future and the Opposition and the population must be involved in this.

All this I am saying—I am taking the time to speak to the Parliament, to speak to the people about it—because we expect that now that you have announced it and about five Ministers have spoken of it, there will be a number of unsolicited proposals on the table, persons who are not even waiting on the Government to put out their request. A lot of parties will just be taking their own initiative and sending proposals. That is what we expect will happen and some of these proposals may not have been even part of the development plan for the sector and, in those cases, we are not sure that we will have full transparency; and then there will be complaints of fairness with legal disputes to follow and so on.

Just in closing on this particular section, I am saying 10 to 30 years is a very, very long time. Things are going to happen down the road that you just will not predict when you sign now, therefore it is very important that you get the process right. If you get it right; if we have large natural disasters, for instance, and you want to bring in foreign people to help immediately and so on, the system is in place. That is what I am saying.

Get it right; put it in place, be careful about the behaviour of your own people—I said about misbehaviour in public office. Be careful about the behaviour of the private persons who may be eager to invest as well. You very well know that your Government has credibility issues—that cannot be denied—and we would want to ensure that you get it right from day one.

I just want to speak a little about energy. Much has been said and I want to examine the energy initiatives which have been put forward in the budget and also the condition of the energy sector over the last fiscal year. I hope the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs will come to the Chamber to respond.

I would like to start by commending him. You would be surprised. I would like to commend the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs for his vigour and his

approach in dealing with energy matters; but that, perhaps, is where it stops; except I must, of course, in all honesty, congratulate him on the harmonization of the SPT rates and the introduction of the SPT rate at 25 per cent for those who will benefit from it with regard to new field developments and so on. Also, what is attractive is the 40 per cent uplift for those investors who can so benefit from that.

There appears to be a successful deep water bid round and I understand that there are expressions of interest from people like BHP Billiton and BG Centrica, Trinity, Repsol and some other interest as well. I think that is in order and, of course, there is continued and heightened exploration activity both offshore and onshore and I cannot hide from the fact that this is going on even just outside my own constituency in the south-west Soldado Field, that south-west Soldado development project, so I am quite happy about that.

The point remains that this very drilling programme, which is being done by Trinmar, was a project initiated under the last PNM administration. It was not started by this Government. [*Desk thumping*] It was initiated by us. We recognized that there was a lull in exploration and drilling activities and we were on the road to doing it.

In fact, it was a PNM policy, which is also very heavily predicated on the seismic data initiatives, which the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs will know started under us and was undertaken from as far back as 2009, so all the necessary seismic data initiatives were going on under the last PNM administration.

As I remain in this vein, Mr. Speaker, it is very pleasing to note the following which must be mentioned, and that is, that the very extensive gas optimization programme undertaken in our time under the PNM administration by Petrotrin—a very major upgrade in Petrotrin—is almost to completion. In fact, that programme will be commissioned this year.

Of course, there are the dull and ignorant who continue to speak only about the World GTL errors. I can understand that, but what they have failed to recognize is the significant benefits of the mega gas optimization programme, which was designed to put Petrotrin in a place of comfort among international competitors, producing higher quality and quantities of petroleum products and Petrotrin now becoming a premier supplier in the regional and international markets of high quality, environmentally-friendly gasoline. That was a PNM plan and it has been achieved.

Mr. Speaker, I speak as well—and they will not mention it; they will never mention these things—about the ultra low sulphur diesel programme and those

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works are also to be completed in this fiscal year and it will in fact be commissioned. That, too, was part of the clean fuels upgrade programme, which was done under the last PNM administration. This means that our diesel in Trinidad and Tobago will now satisfy—and I am sure the former Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs will attest to it—our diesel in Trinidad is now going to meet international specifications and it is only now that Petrotrin will become truly competitive and that is a total PNM initiative.

I think that the Members on the other side need to understand that had these projects not been undertaken by the PNM, the refinery itself might as well have been abandoned and the fortunes of Trinidad and Tobago diminished for years. That kind of vision is only under the PNM administration. [*Desk thumping*] So we take the credit for that, but I look at your energy initiatives announced under the 2012 budget and before; all of which are now in question. I go through them.

A Memorandum of Understanding was signed with Reliance, India's largest private sector, for a bitumen upgrade plant to convert extra heavy oil to synthetic crude for export. Where is that plant now? That plant is now in Colombia and that Reliance project was in fact a PNM initiative, which was on the table, which you could have benefited from. Reliance was coming to Trinidad and Tobago and, for some reason, they changed their minds on you and you ask yourself why.

The Carisal plant for the manufacturing of caustic soda and the production of calcium chloride was due to commence construction—you said it—in the second quarter 2012 in Point Lisas. Nothing has become of that Carisal project. The AUM 2 plant for the production of melamine for downstream industries including plastics, US \$1.9 billion; we have had no word on that—a lot of talk but very low on deliverables.

Then there was the request for proposals for two methanol plants—natural gas to methanol; methanol to petrochemicals and the natural gas to olefins. What is the status of those two MOUs which were signed by you and what about the replacement project for Alutrinit and the promised job creation—thousands and thousands of jobs? What about the SABIC proposal? What about the diversification initiatives surrounding alternative forms of renewable energy with great tax incentives? All of that bluff upon bluff by you all again. What about the construction of the iron and steel facility? You can say nothing about that. [*Interruption*]

You are talking about delusional? What about the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and Ghana, that Ghanaian energy initiative? *Je*

ne sais pas. What has become of that? Absolutely nothing, Mr. Speaker! And worst of all, the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs announced in the 2012 budget that his number one priority was to increase oil production. It has in fact worsened and there is a contraction of crude oil and condensate production in this country under him and over the last three years. It continues to decline. For the period October 2011 to June 2012, there were 27.3 million barrels. That is 28 per cent lower than where we left it; 28 per cent.

11.45a.m.

So, has the Minister been able to arrest the decline? Absolutely not! I think we are going nowhere under this Government with regard to energy except for what we spoke of in terms of the further exploration. But the results of that we are not going to see until the long term, Mr. Speaker.

I examined that, I looked realistically at where we are and the circumstances of this whole energy portfolio, and I examined the timelines, the expanded drilling programme. We are talking about the exploration drilling and the development drilling and so on. When can those finds be brought to market? Those finds cannot be brought to market. I would say the prognosis is probably five to seven years. So then we have an optimistic long-term outlook but what is going to happen in the short and medium term? We are in a crunch.

Then we look at the exploration of existing fields. Of course, a shorter gestation period is expected—two to three years or so—but given past performance, no great expectations exist for improved production levels at all which would in fact make any contribution to GDP or to the bottom line revenue. The question of downstream industry: can we depend on you at all with regard to the development of the downstream industry as well? Looking at your programme since coming into office, I certainly would place no bets on that. Then for any new investors choosing to come in at all the minimum gestation period is three years. So where does that put us with an energy programme? In any case no foreign direct investors have come in under you all at all.

Even the heavy investment pledged by the existing gas producers, you cannot expect any yields within the short to medium term at all. Then of course, what we will continue to have is the maintenance shutdowns by the gas producers, the existing ones, because of the aged plants which we have. Therefore, production levels will be contained if anything at all. Again, no increased revenues are expected to come from energy unless we have of course high energy prices.

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In short order, what we have is a crunch in the energy sector. We can see realistically no great fortune in the medium term, and therefore, no contributions to revenue from the energy sector, and this is a predicament we found ourselves in. Three years into the game this Government really, with its failed diversification efforts to date, we can expect nothing from them in terms of contribution to the bottom line from this sector.

There are other concerns to be addressed in that area as well. There have been no incentives offered to the existing gas producers as well and I think you need to do it because what is happening is that people are picking up themselves, picking up their businesses, picking up their plants and going elsewhere. Further, the bureaucracy which is in place for those persons that are here, those bureaucracies continue to endure. They have not been streamlined under you; therefore, it remains a disincentive to doing business as well.

The whole question of the skills shortage: if you are looking long-term at some boost into the future, you have to address the question: Do we have enough technically competent persons? Will we have them onboard in the next seven to 10 years? I do not believe you have thought about this at all.

Then, of course, there is the whole question of not attracting foreign direct investment. The question is why? The hypothesis can only be that here is a Government who has no regard for contracts, small or large. And then, of course, there are obvious governance issues. Just look at the clause 34 fiasco and the culpability of high ranking Government officials. Of course all of these messages being taken by our diplomatic community and taken back to their home countries. The question is: Is Trinidad and Tobago a place to do business, or do we take our business elsewhere? That is the question on the minds of potential investors.

Before I end all of these little questions on energy, Mr. Speaker, there is just one thing I want to speak to—and I want the Minister to answer me on this—about Petrotrin and its failed corporate social responsibilities to the south-western peninsula. I want Petrotrin to compare itself as a large producer; compare itself with BG and bpTT on the east coast with their inputs of health, education, fishing and so on where the corporate social responsibility initiatives are aligned with the national development agenda of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Member for Pointe-a-Pierre should have addressed that. Where is Petrotrin on corporate social responsibility? You compare them with Mid Atlantic. Atlantic whose commitment to Point Fortin, is deeply embedded and growing. Their ground-breaking LED project, economic development project, for

the area in promoting the south-western peninsula is to be admired, but we need some commitment from Petrotrin towards Point Fortin and environments, particularly in the area of education, in raising the level of readiness, let us say, by 2017/2018 for the expected boom in energy—if one is to come, but the effort has to be made now.

I would like to hear about a commitment from Petrotrin with regard to education. Creating technical capacity, and, of course, compensation for the fisher men of the south-western peninsula who have lost out as a result of the further exploration in the south-west, Soldado fields, and therefore are not able to carry out their fishing activities.

Virtually, their livelihood has been shut down, so not just monetary compensation, but I would like to think in fact that there should be some kind of sustainable projects put in place, as I said, to replace the fishing industry. A whole lot of other promises were made and my colleagues have identified these, but there is a major matter which I want to raise, I see of great importance, Mr. Speaker.

I must speak a bit about international affairs and this is about the whole question of international security cooperation. [*Crosstalk*] Yes, there is nothing to respond to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, he was the current Minister who was there simply to back up his position as the former Minister of Finance who has failed this country for three years, and failed the business community and failed the manufacturers in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Crosstalk*]

On the question of international security cooperation, Mr. Speaker, you of course recognize that Trinidad and Tobago is an open society and geography places us here in the Americas, and resource endowments, in fact, ensure that we are noticed in the world. When I see speak of resource endowments I speak of energy.

Of course, we would wish that kind of notice to be kind at least not malevolent but, of course, we cannot guarantee that it will always be so. So, the threat from criminal networks and terrorism is ever present and therefore it is incumbent on our security agencies to be very vigilant to able to combat and to eliminate threats to national security. Of course to ensure peace and stability through primarily the enhancement of the enforcement capability of our border control agencies. That is the first thing.

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. [*Mr. N. Hypolite*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and of course thank you to all of my colleagues. I was saying that the first thing that we always have to recognize is the importance of border control because especially of the trends in transnational criminality which challenge us in Trinidad and Tobago and, of course, which cause us to always be thinking of devising new modalities and new systems and structures in an international coordinated effort to confront existing and potential threats to peace and goodwill and security and so on.

Mr. Speaker, this is a changed world. Members of this House are very, very aware of what happened in 2001 which has raised everyone's level to the heightened concern about security and terrorism and so. So that, even if no specific threats are directed at us in Trinidad and Tobago there exists a general threat to safety and orderly conduct of normal business and so on. Eventually, the weak or the unprepared can become targets of opportunity and therefore, in looking after ourselves we also need the cooperation of other like-minded states to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago does not become a target of opportunity.

Two things we talked about, the importance of border control and the second thing is recognizing the importance of cooperation among like-minded states. It is because many criminal enterprises tend to be international in scope there are organizers and producers and distributors who may launder in a jurisdiction that is totally unconnected with the other facets of the illicit operation, Mr. Speaker, and therefore, international instruments are required to provide the necessary legal framework.

I am saying border control is necessary, cooperation among like-minded States, international agreements, and international framework required as well as for cooperation, so that we in Trinidad and Tobago have concluded treaties with mutual legal assistance in criminal matters and extradition with the US and so on. That is to provide the necessary international legal framework for cooperation and coordination to ensure that justice is done in this jurisdiction—not only in this jurisdiction, but also abroad—and to ensure that there is absolutely no impunity and there is no sanctuary for perpetrators of such crimes, for the types of crimes that we have detailed.

In order to make this cooperation and this coordination effective, Mr. Speaker, a fourth pillar is required and that is we must put in place the necessary domestic legislation, the necessary legislative, institutional and administrative framework within our jurisdiction as well, firstly to protect ourselves as well and also to be able to act in concert with other states.

In fact, new domestic arrangements have been put in place by the Anti-Terrorism Act, the International Criminal Court Act, the Mutual Legal Assistance Act, the conclusion of extradition treaties and so on so that the domestic legal framework is in place to enable Trinidad and Tobago to cooperate with like-minded states to combat these types of crimes.

I repeat that cooperation and coordination between Trinidad and Tobago and the United States under the mutual legal assistance extradition treaties enforced between these two states exist because there is a common interest in ensuring that impunity does not flourish, and that both states can bring to justice those perpetrators who violate both our laws. So that when this Government entered office, Mr. Speaker, they inherited all of the necessary inherited legislative and administrative structures and systems to facilitate international cooperation and coordination and so on.

Plans were well in place, so that is it. The legislative framework failed. And the second thing, plans were well advanced to acquire maritime assets for the coast guard to enable Trinidad and Tobago to assume its responsibility in the international effort to maintain security. But regrettably, Mr. Speaker, what has happened? Regrettably, the structure and the systems which we left for the Government to operate have been corrupted in recent times so that what we confront, the section 34 crisis—and I say so only en passant, Mr. Speaker.

Of course, the plans to acquire naval assets to protect our borders and to carry out surveillance on one of our exclusive economic zones have been jettisoned by this Government. [*Desk thumping*] Our coast line remains wide open to traffickers in drugs and also our taxpayers in Trinidad and Tobago are being called upon to pay damages for breach of contract to the British firm which built these offshore patrol vessels. That is where we have found ourselves.

I have said before that Trinidad and Tobago and the other member states of the Caribbean are not at all immune at all. Both the security of the State and the well-being of the citizens of all of Trinidad and Tobago are at risk under you.

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The hon. Prime Minister recognizes this and when she went to the general assembly in 2010, this is what she had to say:

Urgent international action must be taken with the issue of international drug traffickers, and the perpetrators of these crimes must not escape international justice leading to...

—and a long song and dance, Mr. Speaker—and in effect, giving some sort of call to the international community to say that we are acting decisively with this scourge and so on.

The question still remains: what has Trinidad and Tobago done to ensure that as a responsible member of the international community, that it is in fact dealing with this scourge. By its actions, by its priorities, by its decisions, by its postures, by its perspectives, it has done absolutely nothing. I am saying that this Government has not done anything as a responsible member of the international community to deal with all of these international crimes, Mr. Speaker.

12.00 noon

I am saying with regard to mutual legal assistance and extradition treaties which were signed by the hon. Basdeo Panday in, I think, 1996, that there is great doubt whether this Government has faithfully adhered to and carried out its obligations contained in those instruments and I leave it to the public to decide.

How else is one to interpret the release by the US Government? Not one release, but two releases by the US Government concerning extradition matters expressing their grave concern; the fact that the Attorney General chose not to appeal to Justice Boodoosingh's ruling which squashed the AG's order about the extradition of particular persons.

Mr. Speaker: Member, take your seat. Matters that are before the courts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, I want Members to recognize what is called a comity between the courts and the Parliament. So, do not get into matters that are currently before the courts of Trinidad and Tobago. I know the matter that you have referred to is a matter that is in the courts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. So, let us not get there. There is something called the sub judice rule which is 36(3) of the Standing Orders. I want to remind Members the court deals with the interpretation of the law, we pass laws, and we must maintain that separation of powers in that regard. So stay away from Justice Boodoosingh's delivery on extradition, please.

Mrs. Paula Gopee-Scoon: But, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Do not argue with me, stay away.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: I am not arguing with you, Mr. Speaker. I do not think my tone is one of arguing, Sir, but I just want to say that it is my view that the extradition matter is a closed matter. It is not before the court, and Justice Boodoosingh's ruling ended the matter of extradition. That matter is a closed issue, Sir. It is not before the court. [*Desk thumping*]

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

Dr. Browne: Do not try that.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Okay. So, I would try to skirt the issue, nonetheless, in view of your ruling, and I will just say that this runs counter to the fundamental principle that there should be no impunity for crimes committed under either state because this underpins the mutual legal assistance and extradition treaties which this Government of Trinidad and Tobago concluded with the United States in 1996. I am questioning whether the object and purpose of the treaties were, in fact, called into question; whether or not this particular party, this Government, has treated with it in good faith; whether or not there is strict adherence to international obligations; and whether or not there is the constructive dialogue that is expected.

I am saying that there are particular matters which remain unresolved. These are the reasons we have no foreign direct investment in Trinidad and Tobago. These are the very, very, reasons. It is all connected. It is the country that is paying for a Government's irresponsible behaviour. That says that the Government is certainly not to be trusted in terms of its obligations, not only internally, but also externally [*Desk thumping*] and this Government is certainly not to be taken seriously.

You see that matter of those two releases by the US, that is not a normal diplomatic occurrence. I am not going to be surprised—that is what happened in the public domain—if there are other such private interventions taking place at even higher levels that the public is not aware of. All they are aware of is what is in the public domain. In any event I, perhaps, would close on this issue by coming to the view that this Government has not treated with this extradition request in good faith, and it has not honoured its obligations under international law.

In any event, let me just speak about one matter concerning security as well. I think it is our responsibility to engage in the necessary self-help in order to protect our society and our people and so on. I want to say that I think this Government has demonstrated a disturbing lack of political will; a disturbing inconstancy of purpose in first deciding to reject the OPVs, and then turned around and ordered

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slightly smaller long-range vessels. There is a troubling absence of vision in terms of your performance and the conduct of the nation's affairs in the field of international security and international security cooperation. [*Desk thumping*] I am saying that with all of your shenanigans of section 34, which I only say on passing, this Government has undermined the country's national security. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, so I am saying that I think we are a sovereign state enjoying 50 years of independence, and we think we have the resources to contribute to the securing of our own borders. More than that, this status arose, I suppose, on account of us being a sovereign independent Republic. As I said, we have all of the resources that are necessary, and I think international states expect us to have the capacity to deal with this whole question of securing our borders, and even giving assistance to our Caricom members and so on. This is why it really bothers me, just the sight and the sound of the Minister of National Security actually begging the Americans to allow him to outsource the securing of our maritime borders.

To me, 50 years of independence, that is the meaning to us, and that diminishes our status as a Republic in this our 50th year of independence. I think it is an affront to all of the citizens who have worked over the years to build Trinidad and Tobago. I want to say that we reject this out of hand, this posture of prostration [*Desk thumping*] by the Minister of National Security on bended knee and this was, of course, brought about by nothing more than the wrong-headed decision by this Government to cancel the contract for the OPVs.

These vessels were derided as lemons by the hon. Prime Minister and the current Minister of National Security—no, the former one and the current one as well—and these were only to be snapped up by the Government of Brazil. What we consider rejected lemons are important to the Brazilians and their maritime assets.

So, I think really, this whole business of the OPVs has hurt the national security interest of Trinidad and Tobago; this whole question of the abnormal diplomatic occurrence is a concern to us between the US and ourselves. That has not helped our country in any way. I want to emphasize that we are the bilateral partner of the US. It really peeves me. We are not a colony, neither are we the 51st state of the US, but what you have done is, you have managed to damage our national interests by behaving in the manner which you have done—sovereignty diminished. So, I am equally convinced that this Government has managed to achieve—section 34 conspicuously included—all that it sought to achieve in the service of its own narrow and partisan interest.

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Mr. Speaker, I believe I have a lot of time to talk about my constituency. When I was at Point Fortin Intermediate RC School and I was doing my Common Entrance, as it was called then—my principal was Fitzroy Singh from Rushworth Street in San Fernando—and whenever we would see him arriving on the compound in his Opel, we knew that you had to get out your *Students' Companion* and you would be tested in a semicircle and so on for battle about Geography and so on.

What I knew and it still remains in my mind is, what is the definition of a peninsula? I remember it is a piece of land almost surrounded by water which jots out into the sea. That is the definition of a peninsula. The problem I have is that this Government sees the south-west peninsula as something other than that. They have their own version of what is the south-west peninsula.

We know it, the former administration knows it, all the people of Trinidad and Tobago know it and the students know the south-western peninsula to be Rousillac, La Brea, San Fernando, Granville, Icacos, Los Bajos all the coastal districts and so on, but according to your version—I mean, this is documentary proof—in the medium-term framework, when you speak of your south-western peninsula, you are speaking of Debe, Penal and Siparia.

I do not know about any beach in Debe. It is a landlocked area. I do not know about any beach in Penal. I think there is some Quinam beach—a little beech in Siparia—but there is no beach there, so that is not a peninsula. So when we speak of industrialization and we speak of development of the south-west peninsula, we speak of Rousillac, et cetera, coming all the way down and going around to Los Iros and so on, not Penal and Debe.

It is a fact—my colleague from La Brea said it yesterday and I am not going to list it—there are 25 projects for Penal, Debe and Siparia and hardly anything for the true peninsula of Trinidad and Tobago; the true south-western peninsula. It is shameful by your part. Shameful! Shameful! I want to say that the true peninsula has not been treated well under you. The peninsula has not been treated fairly, justly and equitably. I am in sympathy with every protester from La Brea to Icacos because you know they are not protesting about me the MP; they are, in fact, protesting about you. [*Desk thumping*]

They gave you their support and they have not seen you all since. In fact, the few Ministers that come down there fly down there. They do not know the terrain; they do not know how you live; and they do not know the conditions of the roads. One Minister, the Minister of Health, came by boat. Unbelievable! [*Laughter*]

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You have abandoned them, and you have not given them any attention. This is sheer negligence on your part, attitude of general indifference. Member for Tabaquite, you also came by helicopter.

It is the Minister of National Security who had said when they had lost the Point Fortin seat—they were targeting it then, and I could tell you that they might be targeting it again. That is one seat—I do not care if I have to walk and I need not be the candidate—I do not care if I have to walk from Icacos to Cochrane Village, you will not be getting the seat of Point Fortin and [*Desk thumping*] you will not be getting La Brea as well.

Mr. Peters: You should start to walk now, because they do not see you.

Mrs. Paula Gopee-Scoon: You could say what you want, Member for Mayaro, because you would not be back in power and you would not be sitting where you are sitting now as well. [*Desk thumping*] The whole question is the south-west peninsula that you have identified is not a true growth pole under you.

Minister, I am a little upset with you, Member for Tabaquite. The Chamber of Commerce for Point Fortin met you recently in Siparia, and they were outlining—I do not usually get vexed with you—for you all the things—they put on the table all the things that Point Fortin needs, and what did you tell them as a responsible senior member of the administration and member of the cabal? What did you say? “Ask Paula Gopee-Scoon!” [*Crosstalk*] Those were your words; those were your words, Minister.

Hon. Members: Shame on you!

Mrs. Paula Gopee-Scoon: And this is a Government who speaks about disability and concern for the disabled and concern for children and so on. I have a particular case which I wrote to the hon. Prime Minister about, and this is a special case of a child who is severely disabled, coming from a very thin family structure requiring a home and so on. I sent the letter with reports from a specialist doctor, Dr. Dick it was, from the therapist. I took the time to do an analysis of income and expenditure, a parent profile; a full, full profile on this particular child—a very dire case—and, of course, I would want to protect the identity of this particular child and the family.

Mr. Speaker, it took two and a half months for me to get a response from the Office of the Prime Minister. Two and a half months! Not only that, I did not get a letter even signed by her or signed on her behalf. It was the acting secretary to the Prime Minister who wrote me in response two and a half months later. All she

has done is listed the various Ministers who she had sent it to: Dr. Glenn Ramadharsingh, the hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal and the hon. Marlene Coudray. All these people she had sent the letter to. One month has gone and three and a half months have gone since I have written on this particular case, and we have no response from this caring Government.

Dr. Browne: Shame!

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: It is a shame, very much a shame. So, speaking about constituency matters, the Point Fortin Hospital remains to me the biggest sore point for the people of Point Fortin. I am saying that successive administrations are to be blamed. So, I do not want to hear that story, but the point is that you are the Government in power; you are the ones who are accountable; you are the ones who gave the people hope; and you are the ones who said you would change everything.

12.15 p.m.

I am saying that you have hoodwinked the people of Point Fortin into believing that we would in fact have a hospital, and I am saying this includes persons from Icacos, Erin, Buenos Ayres, Los Bajos, La Brea; all of those persons are affected; in fact, all of the persons of the St. Patrick county are affected by the fact that they do not have a hospital. And, of course, as I said, there are no budget details on it. We have no idea when the sod will be turned and it continues to be a severe burden on the San Fernando hospital, which services about 700,000 persons. So, I am saying that this hospital—the Minister visited—he did a visit with me at the hospital. How much time?

Miss Hospedales: Seven.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Only seven? How much time do I have, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: You have until 12.23 p.m.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Okay. Right. The hon. Minister visited and a temporary site was confirmed and so on, but we have heard nothing from him. No further word, and the situation as it is, is at its worst. The hospital is like a health post office, people only transiting through to go on their way to San Fernando. We are not even doing normal deliveries, only emergency deliveries. Somebody coming from Icacos has to drive two hours to San Fernando. There are no general surgeries, no X-ray services, no surgeon, one gynaecologist, one anaesthetist; so that if any of them are on leave nothing takes place, the whole place is shut down, except for normal clinics.

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Sometimes on a shift you have one midwife on duty and if we have an emergency case, she has to jump into the ambulance and go, and there is nobody there at all. So it is really bad and I really must congratulate the medical and non-medical staff of the hospital because they are working under some terrible, terrible conditions. As I said, successive Governments have to take responsibility, but you are the ones who promised differently, and I expect that you would do something about it. Even surgical instruments have to be taken to San Fernando. You believe that?

Miss Hospedales: Why?

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: To be sterilized. Unbelievable. So persons have really died on the way to San Fernando because, of course, no specialty services are available, and so on. Think about the people in Cedros to Icacos. They supported you. They have nothing. If you have an emergency, it is two hours. Think of it—two hours with a heart attack, what does that say for that patient? So it is very awful and depressing conditions under which the people have to work as well, so we need a decision on this.

I implore you to do something about it. Let us get some immediate improved service. If we are going to use another site, let us beef it up with some doctors, nurses, lab services and so on, get a general surgeon as well, take some of the load off of San Fernando, get the X-ray services—X-ray services are very basic, get this going.

I really do feel for the people of Cedros and Icacos, and they spoke to the Minister of Health and asked for extended hours for the health clinics and that they have not got. They do not even have a proper ambulance service. All the helicopter services which you all are using, you should extend that to the people of Cedros, Icacos and Point Fortin for emergencies and emergencies only.

I go to the water taxi. Minister Devant Maharaj said to me, in a question in the Parliament, that there was going to be a feasibility study on the water taxi, that it is temporarily shelved. I have heard nothing in this budget about the feasibility study. What is going on? What are the ensuing matters, and so on? I had a meeting with the current Minister of Transport—“We are looking at some other options.”

Mr. Sharma: You did?

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Of course I did. You want to lie about it?

Mr. Sharma: That was a meeting?

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: That was a meeting. That constituted a meeting. Why else would I spend more time with you?

Mr. Sharma: I thought you wanted coffee.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: What I am saying is we need to have a water taxi service to Point Fortin. We support the highway to Point Fortin. I have great concerns about the financing of it—Minister of Finance and the Economy, you have to address that \$7 billion financing that needs to be restructured. I do not see it coming during your time; you would be out of office in two to three years, and if that much. Therefore, all of the assurances you wish to give us, I do not see that highway finally reaching to Point Fortin, but we are cooperating with Nidco in terms of the land acquisition process. We need the final list and so on, you are sleeping on the job.

Mr. Speaker, e Teck Park, we have heard nothing. We have had a visit by the then Minister of Trade and Industry. I showed him all of the sites that we could possibly put the small and medium-sized businesses, but, of course, I do not think there is any interest. The e Teck Chairman, CEO, came down to meet with the Chamber and there have been no results at all, at all, so really there has been negligence on their part—there is nothing about industrialization.

Water continues to be a serious, serious problem. La Fortune water treatment plant needs to be commissioned immediately. The sewage system in Techier Village is old, antiquated—we need to deal with it as well. Your education system, Minister for Caroni East, Chatham Government Primary School is supposed to have their new school; it is a hundred years old. Cap-de-Ville Government Primary School: that school was supposed to be in place for the new August term, nothing has happened with it. All of eight schools got no work done over the summer holidays as well.

The 422 houses to be given out—they were built by us—what is happening two and a half years later? I am saying, I expect them to be filled by people from Point Fortin and Point Fortin only, no strangers at all. I am concerned about Cedros, as I said, their cries to alternatives to the coconut industry. I have had meetings with the Ministry of Agriculture. The Chatham dairy-producing farm—what is happening with that? So there is a lot. The fishing treaty that needs to be concluded with Venezuela as well, that needs to be done. The entire revival of the coconut industry—much needs to be done for Cedros. These are people who have supported you and to which you give no hope at all.

Generally, I expect to see some equity in terms of infrastructure. The Cap-de-Ville erosion project, you were supposed to start since August last year, was not

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done. The Guapo River: I spoke to you on two occasions—I want dredged to avoid any problems. I am saying that there is a lot to be done in Point Fortin. I think your treatment of Point Fortin has been disgraceful and needs to be dealt with. [*Desk thumping*]

So that in closing, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that it is very clear that politics has been a significant obstacle in the way of the Government exercising its Executive responsibility.

I want to say that the international security co-operation is compromised by the Government's dishonouring of the treaty obligations. The political decision to sever the agreements to purchase the OPVs to improve border control has cost us in more ways than one. Our relations with our major partners, including those close to us, are negatively impacted under you—the nation is affected, that is the upshot. Our economy, though stable, has been stagnant under your watch. There is no development agenda under you, and, therefore, there is no basis on which growth can be founded. Government Ministers have failed to implement and to execute projects. They do not know how. All of the energy initiatives, particularly in the downstream industries, have failed to show. There are serious questions of integrity of the Members of this Government in the public domain, and their own actions have—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, your time is up.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Just a minute.

Mr. Sharma: Not just a minute.

Hon. Member: What!

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Mr. Speaker, all I am saying is that good governance in Trinidad and Tobago is lacking under this administration, and it comes down to a question of leadership. It narrows to a question of leadership and it comes down to the leader choosing the right policies and creating the necessary political conditions to make it work, Mr. Speaker. It comes down to a question of poor leadership under this Government. Mr. Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Local Government (Hon. Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very happy as a proud Member of the People's Partnership Government to join in this debate. Let me take the opportunity to congratulate the Minister of Finance and the Economy on his maiden presentation. It was an extremely good presentation, and in yesterday's newspaper, there was an advertisement in which several leading business figures in the country commented on the presentation and content of the budget.

I note, also, that the Member for Point Fortin this morning has taken the leadership away from the Opposition Leader, and I think Mr. Manning, the Member of Parliament for San Fernando East, would have been very proud of her this morning, seeing that there is this divided, fractured Opposition—the side that he has mentored so well, he would have been very proud now that she has overtaken and shadowed—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: No! No! No! No!

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:—the Opposition Leader.

Hon. Member: McIntosh prepared her.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Point Fortin really has to clarify her understanding of what is a budget.

Mr. Sharma: She does not know.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: She wants to see all the plans and details in the budget, but she probably will do well to read all of these documents that come with the budget.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Every bit of it.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Every one, about 10 documents, and there you will see the details that are mapped out for you and what is going to happen. A budget, Member for Point Fortin, is a statement of intent of the Government and it signals the policies and programmes which are then translated into plans at the level of the Ministries.

The second point that the Member for Point Fortin made is that she said she wanted to know where the Government was going with all the spending. And she made that point by indicating that the debt-to-GDP had gone from 38 to 46 per cent, but that was disingenuous, because what you failed to point out is that the rise in the debt-to-GDP was due to the inclusion of the debt issued for Clico, and that is on page 14 of the budget speech, where the Minister of Finance and the Economy, said:

“the public sector debt relative to GDP has been relatively stable over the period 2009—2011 averaging 38.0 per cent”—but rose—“in 2012...to 46.6 per cent, as I have included the debt issued in respect of the Clico Settlement Offer;”

But you should have quoted the next line:

“but at the level of 46.6 per cent it remains well within acceptable international benchmark levels,”

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The other point that you made, you said that we are afraid to tackle reform, whether it is taxes and revenue. I wonder whether the rise in the price of premium gas was not a very brave attempt to begin to tackle taxes and reform, but what you want on the other side is for this Government to impose strong austerity measures onto the population, but what you do not realize is that we have not done that because we have found alternative ways to raise the revenues and to manage the affairs of this country without imposing austerity measures upon the population, [*Desk thumping*] and we will not do that. We will not make the poor poorer. In fact, this budget is intended to lift the poor to a different level where they can enjoy a better quality of life.

What you should have also said is that the Minister of Finance and the Economy has indicated and has put in the public domain that he intends to bring down the deficit by 1 per cent per year. And when you talk about reform of the system, you will recall that there was an amnesty with respect to the collection of income taxes, and I think that has borne fruit. So, there are alternative ways in which the Government can raise revenue that would be for the benefit of the population, so your attempt to be disingenuous is being unmasked here today.

I was happy to hear you support the PPP arrangements in the country. I was very happy to hear you say that and you made a good point, that it is better for managing construction projects and it is something that I am sure that we will take into consideration, but you contradicted yourself, very much—

Mr. Sharma: As usual.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:—when you indicated that there is a lack of confidence in the economy, but then you spoke in glowing terms about the exciting developments that are to take place in the energy sector. You talked about the interest of large companies like BHP Billiton in the energy sector, and you went on to congratulate the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs and the Government for the initiatives taken to attract investment in the energy sector.

You went on further to talk about the fact that we happen to have the best deep water round bid ever in the country.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: I did not say best.

Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: So you have contradicted yourself. You were so much looking for something to say, that there is a lack of confidence in the Government, but you gave the Government as you did—and thank you for it—a vote of confidence in what the Government is doing in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Then you went on to say, we have no foreign direct investment. Member for Point Fortin, you should really go back and read the budget documents, page 14 again.

“foreign direct investment continues to be buoyant, averaging US\$879.0 million in the period 2010—2012;”

And if I multiply that by an average of 6.5, that amounts to \$5,720,000,000 in foreign direct investment during this period. So you cannot say that there is no foreign direct investment. The whole world is suffering from the matter of investments, but as you indicated, as you showed, the indications that people are coming and showing a high interest in investing in Trinidad and Tobago. I wanted to raise those couple of points with you because it speaks to what is happening in Trinidad, and you have tried to distort it.

Mr. Speaker, I noted something of great interest that is taking place over the last few days in this debate, both in the newspaper and in this august assembly, and it is a carefully orchestrated attack upon the people of central and south Trinidad—a very carefully orchestrated attack on the people of south and central Trinidad. Everything is a criticism of what is happening in central or what is happening in south, or what is intended for central and south.

Mr. Speaker, it happened in the newspaper—I believe the Member for Diego Martin North/East alluded to that in a meeting—it was in the Saturday newspaper. It happened in the case of the Member for La Brea, when he was speaking, he made an issue of the development programme for central and south Trinidad and listed all the projects and so on, but he refused to acknowledge the fact that the development of those regions was stifled under the previous administration. Let us be open about this—it was stifled.

12.30 p.m.

What happened? South and central people are not part of Trinidad and Tobago? Do they not deserve a better quality of life? What does the PNM have against the people of Chaguanas? The Member for La Brea named them. He said Chaguanas, Charlieville, Chase Village and Couva, and he went on to talk about Penal, Debe and Siparia. What do you have against the rest of the people of this country? If you want to be a government for all, be a government for all. Do not attack the people because they deserve to also have equal opportunities in the country.

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Mr. Speaker, it is a kind of convoluted thinking on the part of the Member for La Brea, a kind of convoluted rationale to suggest that by developing these areas, Port of Spain would degenerate. How could you say that? You want business expansion all over the country. You want to make sure that the quality of life in every region is of the highest standard ever, and you do that by placing business activities and making investments in all parts of the region. It is your Leader of the Opposition who said that he had to have a Ministry of rural reconstruction or rural redevelopment. So you argue for it on the one hand, and then you argue against it on the next hand, by criticizing the approaches of the Government.

I will not fall into your trap, because your trap is to draw us into a deeper argument. It is part of a plan to get us to comment on the political and geographical division, and the traditional lines of division that have existed in this society. But we are a different political party. The people have begun to coalesce all races, all classes, all creeds, around the People's Partnership, in a way that frightens you. So you want to reintroduce these kinds of artificial divisions in order to go back 20 years. We are not going back there, we are going 20 years forward with the People's Partnership Government. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, in talking about the attempt by the Government to develop those areas, the Member for La Brea said that would lead to a degeneration of Port of Spain. He is totally wrong. It is very wicked when you do a thing like that. What he should be telling the House is that for all these years, Port of Spain has always had Ministers and Members of Parliament of the PNM. If today Port of Spain is in the state it is, it is because they have not developed it. They have not made Port of Spain more attractive, which is what we are beginning to do. [*Desk thumping*] We have put a statement of intent in that in terms of south-east Port of Spain, in this budget, and we are going to do it, and we are going to achieve it, and we are going to change the face of Port of Spain.

What they should do is make friends once more with Mr. Louis Lee Sing their mayor, and ask him why he has \$41 million in unspent balances, that he is not spending for the benefit of projects for the people of Port of Spain. Why he is not doing that? [*Desk thumping*] When I had a meeting with Mr. Lee Sing recently, I asked him, "What are you doing with this money as unspent balances? What are you doing with it? Why did you not spend it? Why did you not go and develop the basketball courts in Port of Spain? Why did you not develop homework centres? Why did you not do X, Y and Z, projects for the benefit of people?" Then he said, "I will send you the projects, Minister, for you to sign off on." Up

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to this day I have not received the projects. Why is Mr. Lee Sing and the PNM punishing the people of Port of Spain, and putting \$41 million in unspent balances in the country? [*Crosstalk*] Why are you doing that?

The attack on central and south is really a more subtle attack, but I will not fan that fire.

You see, they talk about how many small businesses have been developed. One of the very popular street names in this Parliament is Cuchawan Trace. So I decided to go into the constituency of my colleague, the hon. Member for Oropouche East, and parts of Oropouche west. I decided that I would research how many businesses exist from Cuchawan Trace to Clarke Road Junction in Penal, along the SS Erin Road. I counted it one night, and then I asked the Chairman of the Penal/Debe Corporation, “Please count for me how many businesses exist on that line.”

For those of us who know that region, two years ago you still had many empty lots in that area. Five years ago you still had some with silk cane growing up. I want you to take a drive from Penal where they sell doubles to Clarke Road Junction. I am not even going into Penal proper. This is what the Chairman sent me yesterday.

He said that a survey was conducted this morning from Cuchawan Trace Junction/Debe, along the SS Erin Road to Clarke Road Junction, Penal. There are approximately 213 businesses located along the surveyed road. Additionally, there are four malls with businesses within them. Lall’s Shopping Mall, 40 businesses. GN Shopping Centre, 30 businesses; the Indian Expo, 25 businesses; Bridgecross Mall, 20 businesses. Total contained within the malls, 115. The total amount of businesses along the surveyed route is 328.

I make a point about that because if people have the spirit of entrepreneurship and they get up and help themselves, God man, let us congratulate them. [*Desk thumping*] Let us congratulate them. They are helping themselves. Every time you have a small business you employ two to four people, so these people might be employing well over 1,500 persons in that area. So when they attack the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development—Members you should go around the country and you would notice how many businesses have, in fact, opened in the last two or three years.

Mr. McLeod: I know, but they do not know.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: I raise this for another reason. We are computing GDP in this country, and the growth in GDP. I wonder whether the GDP takes into recognition this kind of development that is also taking place in the country. How are you computing GDP? If you look at the expansion of business, if you drive from Chaguanas to Flanagin Town, I can tell you right now you would see five or six new businesses and buildings have gone up in that area. How are we including all this expansion in the small and medium-sized business sector in the computation of GDP? How are we doing it? I ask this of the people of the Central Bank. It has to be economic growth.

If you look at the Charleiville Main Road going down to Chaguanas, you should see what is happening there, the whole stretch is a series of new businesses. It is the same thing along the Chase Village Road. We have to talk about it in the computation of the figures.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for La Brea spoke about the fishing community, and that we are doing nothing for the fishing community. I sent him a copy of this, but perhaps he has not read it: *Fulfilling the Promise*. This was published in May of this year to reflect the last year of achievements of the People's Partnership Government. In this document you will see that the Ministry of Food Production rehabilitated 11 fishing sites in Trinidad, and by the end of 2012 a further 11 would be refurbished—22 by the end of 2012. Minister of Finance and the Economy, how are all those activities being brought into GDP?

Then he talked about mega projects in Debe and all that, but he forgot to say conveniently that the people of Point Fortin would also be employed in those projects. He forgot to say that the students in Port Fortin, Los Bajos, Santa flora and Los Iros will also go to school in the university in Debe. They will also work in the hospital in Penal. They will also have use of the facilities of the cycling track in Siparia. Why are you distorting what is the reality for political convenience and expediency?

They also spoke about discrimination. In today's newspaper it says that yesterday the Member of Parliament for St. Ann's West was talking about her constituency not getting anything. I just want to take one area, a common area to all of us, the National Self-Help Commission. There are two kinds of projects I will talk about: emergency repair and reconstruction, assistance grants and minor repairs and reconstruction grants. Diego Martin Central got 26 projects; Diego Martin East, 81; Diego Martin West, 39; Laventille East, 84; Laventille West, 73; Port of Spain/St. Ann's West 43; Port of Spain South, 65; St. Ann's East, 37; Point Fortin, 54.

And now I come to central Trinidad: Caroni Central, 14; Caroni East, 57; Chaguanas, 47; Couva North, 39; Couva South, 15; Oropouche East and West, 74, and Siparia 96. Where is the discrimination—[*Desk thumping*—using the National Self-Help Commission as an example of what I am speaking about? This Government is a government that has pledged to do good to all men and to everyone in this country, and we are fulfilling that in terms of what we are doing.

Mr. Speaker, yes I went and had meetings, as I am having as Minister of Local Government, with the Chambers, the Rotary Clubs, the Lions Clubs and so on, because I believe that local government touches the lives of everyone. And we believe also as a government that we should embrace everyone in the function of governance, and deliver to the population, so that everyone has a stake and a feeling of ownership of what this Government is doing. We believe in walking hand in hand and side by side; that is why we call ourselves a partnership and not a coalition. We are a partnership and we intend to fulfil the demands of being a partner with the population. When they talk about trust, you will see who really trusts who in this country, because the people continue to trust the People's Partnership much more than they trust them. [*Desk thumping*]

It is important to remind the national population through this Parliament where the economy is at this particular point, given the financial and economic fundamentals, since the Opposition has been carrying the message where they want the people to believe that things are bad in this country—to the point where I even heard the Chamber President of Penal say that we are on a precipice, and what have you. But what is the truth?

If you go to pages 13 and 14 of the budget statement, you would see some interesting statistics presented by the Minister of Finance and the Economy. I thought it was important to repeat those statistics and figures here today. The balance of payment surplus for 2011 was US \$2,258 million. Projected for 2012 is US \$2,443 million. It is a strong balance of payment position. Trinidad and Tobago continues to be a creditor member of the IMF. In other words, we are a lender to the IMF, not a borrower. That is a strong position. [*Desk thumping*] The Heritage and Stabilisation Fund has been climbing. It is now US \$4,547 million. Foreign exchange reserves for 2011 is \$9.8 billion, and the foreign exchange reserve projected for 2012 is \$10.28 billion, representing perhaps the highest level of import cover over 14.3 months. So where is this economy really on a precipice?

12.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, inflation, of course, averaging 7.1 per cent, declining from a high of 10.6 in 2010. And I spoke about foreign direct investment. If that is not enough, let me add something to it. Let me talk about private sector credit because you have to look at how people are borrowing in a country to also understand the state of the country.

Quoting from banking statistics, commercial banks, outstanding loans to business—for the private sector, listen to this: 2010 was \$21.4 billion; 2011, 22.8 billion. The private sector borrowed \$1.4 billion more 2011 over 2010. So, how can you say that the private sector is not investing in the country? At the end of the first quarter of 2012, it was \$22.7 billion. Loans outstanding to consumers: in 2010 it was 19.083 billion, but 2011 it was \$20.079 billion; this means that the people of the country, consumers, borrowed \$996 million more.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: More economic activity.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, there are some things you look at in a country to get a feel of business activity, to get a feel of what is happening—and if you look at new car sales. Let us look at that: 2010, in this country, an average of over 1,000 cars per month were sold—12,330 new cars were sold in this country, and I am not counting foreign used “eh”. In 2011 it went up by 635 to 12,965, and for the first six months of this year, we have already sold 7,095 new cars in this country. People are investing in new cars. And, I understand it was about 9,000 foreign-used cars already sold for the year in the country.

Mr. Speaker, they talk about how we treat this country. We did not impose any new personal taxes. We did not impose any new corporate taxes. We decided that we are going to leave space for the business community and for people to be able to spend in the country, and for business to expand, rather than take money away—because when you want to excite an economy, you have to create a situation where people would spend money in the country or invest money. That part of the budget and the philosophy of the budget—so well done by the Minister of Finance and the Economy, who comes from the private sector, and who has run a successful financial institution for a number of years—he has brought that philosophy on track into Government, [*Desk thumping*] and we commend him for it. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, in that context, when you examine the economic and financial fundamentals, and further examine the measures in the budget, you cannot but conclude—in fact, Member for Point Fortin, you must conclude—that this budget

is not only a people's budget, but it is a gateway to opportunities like you have never seen or experienced before. This budget is a gateway to opportunity, and I will show you.

Hon. Member: She knows that.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: I will show you how it is a gateway to opportunities. Let us take the construction sector.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: You looking for a headline?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Let us take the construction sector. The budget has tax incentives for housing development, and particularly for the middle class persons in this country who want affordable housing. What the Minister of Finance and the Economy has done, he has exempted from income tax, profits—the gains or profits—derived from the initial sale of newly constructed houses, by any person registered as a trader in such houses where the cost of the house, excluding land, is below \$1.5 million. That gives people the opportunity to register now as a trader in houses, and to get into business, and provide housing for the communities.

So, a man could have two or three lots of land that he has not been using, and he wants to get into business, he wants to increase his own personal wealth, he can register as a trader, go and build on that land and sell those houses now, and he would not have to pay taxes on the gains or profits.

The same thing the Minister of Finance and the Economy has done with the sale of developed lands for residential housing. So, people can develop their five or six acres that they have—three acres—two acres, and again it would be free from taxes. He has gone further with the tax exemption for construction of commercial buildings, where they are exempt from corporation tax for five years. What are the implications of this? This country has been saying that the construction sector needs a boost.

Well here, you have been talking about plans, Member for Point Fortin, here is the articulation of a firm set of plans to do that, because when the construction sector gets going, what happens? The block factories get going, the cement factory gets going, the people who make furniture, who make cupboards and so on, they get going. The PVC factories producing material up in Century Eslon, elsewhere, get going. The galvanize manufacturers get going. The paint factories get going; the banks and financing of mortgagees get going and employment gets going. This is what we are doing, and this is what you are not seeing. So, you talk about plans.

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Mr. Speaker, with the creative industries also. The removal of VAT on specific machinery and equipment, for example film equipment—and the Minister of Finance and the Economy has been very creative himself, in an attempt to promote and expand the local fashion industry; to expand production in the entertainment industries; to create jobs and national wealth. He has given tax incentives of 150 per cent deduction up to a maximum of \$3 million.

When there is corporate sponsorship of nationals in the local fashion industry or where there is corporate sponsorship of audio, video, visual production; for local educational entertainment. You know what means? That means that people can go now and do what we have to do. Do training films for example and supply it to the university, supply it to the secondary school system. A whole new industry will be developed around this incentive,.

And of course, if you look at a very important thing that has happened in terms of this budget, there is an amendment to the Electronic Transactions Act, 2011, and I read from a very important document here produced by Ernst & Young, focus on Trinidad and Tobago budget 2013, and where they say:

The hon. Minister of Finance has proclaimed the Electronic Transactions Act, 2011, in order to give legal effect to the use of electronic signatures and electronic transactions in Trinidad and Tobago, including electronic signatures to be used in the submission of goods declarations to the Comptroller of Customs and Excise. The amendment to accommodate the acceptance of electronic signatures in T&T, particularly by the Comptroller of Customs and Excise will facilitate faster lodging and processing of declarations for both import and export of goods.

So, when you talked about reform, perhaps you did not see within the budget that there are many areas of reform that are being introduced. Perhaps you forgot, or conveniently forgot, that the Minister in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, Sen. The Hon. Vasant Bharath, has indicated that we are bringing down the registration of a company from 43 days to three days, and he will do it.

Hon. Member: When?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: And he will do it.

Hon. Member: How you mean when?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: So, there is reform, and I will tell you about some of the reforms that are taking place in local government also. One can go on and on to show you, with so many areas of the budget, you have gateways to opportunities.

Hon. Member: That is what it is.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, this budget as I said is also a people's budget. We can talk about the NIS benefits.

Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: The NIS benefits which are very, very important, and which for so long, should have been done. Increase in maternity allowance from 13 weeks to 14 weeks. Increase in grants. The following grants payable under the NIS would be increased by 50 per cent effective January 01: maternity grant, special maternity grant, retirement grant and funeral grant by 50 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, and the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy has announced increases also in benefits such as, sickness, maternity, invalidity, survivors and employment injury.

Hon. Member: Good job.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Benefits would be increased 25 per cent in 2013 [*Desk thumping*]—and 20 per cent in 2014. We have always been on the pathway of the people; always on the side of the people.

Mr. Indarsingh: The small man.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Because we cannot ignore the small man, you are right. For so many years mothers with children who suffered from cerebral palsy had difficulties going to work—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: And what did this Government do? Under the URP Social, envisioned by the Prime Minister, and administered by the Member of Parliament for Caroni Central and Minister of the People and Social Development. In this document you would read: URP Social has employed over 200 mothers of children with cerebral palsy to work in social centres. Why? Because it allows them to earn an income and provide care for children with special needs, so that in turn other parents of children with special needs may seek employment. That is creativity at its best, and that is also taking care of those who need to be taken care of because this Government is on the side of the dispossessed, the poor. [*Desk thumping*] This Government is caring. This Government is compassionate, and that is why people love this Government.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Really?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: And that is why people trust this Government. [Crosstalk]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: What were the figures at Mid Centre Mall?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, the differently abled have not been left out in this—1,300 to 1,500.

Hon. Member: First increase in four years.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: First increase in four years. They talk about GATE. GATE has not been dropped. Let us make that clear. GATE has not been affected.

Hon. Member: No cut, it has opened wider.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: \$834 million is spent on GATE.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: An increase from 600 million.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: As my friend said. [Crosstalk] We are not leaving people where they are in this country you know. Our attempt is always to carry people a little higher [Crosstalk] and this is why we have made provisions in the budget, that where business concerns employ CEPEP and URP workers, they will be able to get 150 per cent tax uplift because we want people to do better. We want people to climb the social ladder. We want people to climb the quality of life ladder in Trinidad and Tobago. This is what this partnership Government is all about. That is what they voted for. They voted to move ahead and move forward, and we are bringing about the change that will give them that opportunity in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Indarsingh: Good run.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: We talk about the quality of life, and sometimes we miss the little things that affect the quality of life—driver's permits, driver's permits. Now you can pay for a driver's permit for five years, \$500. Ten years, \$1,000 and you do not have to go back there for 10 years, right. So what do you do? You bring down the pressure of all these people who are crowding the licensing office—[Interruption]

Hon. Member: Of course.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: —on a daily basis to renew their permits.

Mr. Indarsingh: Productivity.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: And you talk about change, Member for Point Fortin? That is change.

Hon. Member: That is change. Real change. [Desk thumping]

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: You see, when you look for change, you must look for the 1,001 little things that amount to the big change.

Mr. Peters: Of course. That is why we decentralize.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, I can continue and give you several other examples of how this change is coming about. The Member for Point Fortin spoke about her area, and spoke about development in her area. Maybe the Member for Point Fortin should pay a visit to the Point Fortin Regional Corporation. [*Laughter*] Maybe the Member for Point Fortin should ask for a meeting with the mayor of Point Fortin.

Hon. Member: “They doh see her.”

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: I do not know when last you really visited the regional corporation, Member. Or when you shook hands with the mayor of Point Fortin, but I just want to tell you that the mayor of Point Fortin—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Indarsingh: When last you went down for Borough Day?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: —under this People’s Partnership administration has been given \$6.1 million more this year under recurrent expenditure to spend in Point Fortin, and maybe he could use some of that \$6.1 million that he is believed, extra, to make sure that those areas that you called out, that they get some attention, and also—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: I wonder why—

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: —he has gotten \$17.4 million for development funding. So some of the projects you should go and begin to lobby him in order to get it.

Hon. Member: Lobby the mayor.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: But you said that the Chamber of Commerce told you that I said, ask Mrs. Gopee-Scoon. You know what their response was, Member for Point Fortin?

Hon. Member: Who is she? Who is she?

Hon. Member: Oh God!

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: You know what the response was? They said, Minister, tell the Prime Minister that we want a shadow MP here quick, quick, quick. [*Desk thumping and laughter*] Quick, quick, quick. [*Crosstalk*] They have

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“dissed”, like young people say, “they dis already” the Member for Point Fortin, and they are beginning to think about a new representative, a People’s Partnership representative in Point Fortin.

1.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, this brings me to the point of talking about local government and what comes under my portfolio as the Minister of Local Government. Apart from the Ministry of Local Government at Kent House, I am responsible for 14 regional corporations, the National Commission for Self Help, SWMCOL, the Rural Development Company, Community Improvement Services Limited, Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises Limited and in the URP programme, URP Infrastructure. Dr. Glenn Ramadharsingh is responsible for URP Social and Sen. The Hon. Devant Maharaj, the Minister of Food Production for URP Agriculture.

I just want to say to the national population that this People’s Partnership Government, there has always been a claim that local government has not been getting enough funding. [*Crosstalk*] But, the amount of money to be transferred to local government corporations this year is \$57 million higher than last year. [*Desk thumping*] And that is direct transfers, and there is another \$246 million that is there under goods and services also. So, there has been an increase in the amount of money given to local government corporations this year.

Hon. Member: Good, good. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: And in total \$228.2 million has been given to local government corporations under development programmes.

Mr. Indarsingh: Connecting with the people.

Miss Mc Donald: Through you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you Member for Tabaquite for giving way. I was looking at the accounts and that head 37 for goods and services, I realized that there was a big jump, like about, a couple millions well—\$200-plus million—could you explain what that is all about, please?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Those are provisions for wage increases that have been negotiated.

Miss Mc Donald: Oh.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, I want to start with the URP programme. The country may not know this, but the URP programme costs this country \$389 million a year. Three hundred and eighty nine million dollars a year is what this URP programme costs this country.

I believe that the country deserves value for this money even if the programme is meant to be an Unemployment Relief Programme. The country deserves value for this money.

Hon. Member: That is right.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: The average URP worker gets about \$70 a day. That is what a URP worker gets. If you equate that with a grocery clerk or a fast-food outlet at about \$15—\$16 an hour, one should expect at least four good and proper hours of work from a URP worker, and that is my intention. How to increase the productivity of the URP programme?

Mr. Speaker, the programme needs to be reformed and made more productive, therefore it is a given. The Prime Minister already has taken on that challenge when she took the URP under her portfolio, by creating the URP Social, by creating the URP Agriculture and by creating the URP Infrastructure. One must congratulate her for having that vision and forethought because she saw the importance of linking productive activities with labour, even if it meant unemployment relief. Mr. Speaker, in that regard, I just want to share with you something. Just to share with you the fact that URP workers can be productive workers.

When I came into the position of Minister of Local Government—and I just want to report for this period because I have the data for it—I challenged the senior administration of the URP to do some work. Let us see what we can do. I got them to identify the projects that they had on hand, and to start by doing the estimates for those projects, doing the drawings for those projects, and we counted 175 projects—sorry, 195 projects below \$500,000 which is the limit of a URP project. We counted also 93 projects where the material cost was below \$70,000 and for which you use URP construction gangs.

I want to tell you, as of the end of September 30, 2012—starting in the month of August, preparing everything to start in the third week of August with the projects, I put on record and I lift and tip my hat off to the URP workers and the URP administration—175 projects have been completed and 85 of the 93 projects have also been done under the CORE programme—175 community projects and all across this country.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Where?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: You got, Member for Point Fortin, several box drains in your constituency also. [*Crosstalk*] You got in your constituency.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: That is all! That is all, box drain? [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Let me tell you further, a total of 12,141 metres of box drains were constructed; 12,141 metres multiplied by 3.3, which is 39 inches; if you convert it into feet, 3.3, you get 40,000 feet; and you divide it by 5,280 you get 7.6 miles of box drain built by URP in just three months in Trinidad and Tobago, and we can therefore make the URP programme a productive programme in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Member: Yes, we can. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: And that is the transformation that I intend with respect to the URP programme.

I just want to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that as of now I have invited each Member of Parliament to give me five community projects and five CORE projects, which means that you will have 205 by 205, almost 410 projects ready to start in the next three weeks in Trinidad and Tobago.

Dr. Gopeesingh: All constituencies “eh”.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: And all constituencies equal; equal across all constituencies.

Hon. Member: “ALLL”.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Talk, talk, talk. Talk, talk, talk. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, the small contracting sector has never been as happy as it has been under this People’s Partnership Government. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, if that is not enough I am in discussions with my good friend, the Minister of Health and Member for Barataria/San Juan. We go to hospitals, we go to health centres and we complain about the condition of the bathrooms, the condition of the floors and so on. I have invited the Minister of Health to let us have discussions on how we might train URP people, working in shifts of four hours, to ensure that the bathrooms in the hospitals are kept cleaner, the floors are kept cleaner, and they can also act as customer service reps in the health system so that during the day you can have the handyman from the URP programme painting, so that the facilities are better maintained and you can have an all-round better environment.

That is change. [*Desk thumping*] You see, what we are doing is not just doing any work, but making purposeful work for people, and when people do purposeful work, people become excited about what they do and they become more productive.

Mr. De Coteau: URP medical. [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, we will give it an appropriate name.

Hon. Member: Laugh boy. You laugh.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, you do not leave people where they are, you take people forward. I am in discussions with the Minister who deals with Nedco and I have sent him a proposal and he is very heartened by the proposal, in which we want to take three groups of persons as a pilot project—35 north, 35 central, 35 south—and train them in the basics of project management, train them in the basics of managing the finances of a project, so that they no longer work for the URP programme but they may become small contractors in the URP programme. [*Desk thumping*]

Then we use Nedco to do the training, but Nedco can also help them finance the contracts, and the payment for the contracts can then be assigned to Nedco and then they can get the profits from that programme, so they begin to work for themselves. If you do not empower people you are not doing anything for people, and we are about empowering people in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

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.

Mr. Speaker: Before you continue, hon. Member, I would like you not to address the Member for Point Fortin, address the Chair. There is a tendency for you to create this kind of energy around and across the floor. I would like you to let the energy flow in this direction. [*Laughter*] So, please address the Chair and not the Member for Point Fortin.

At this time I would suggest that we have lunch. This sitting is now suspended until nine minutes past two.

1.09 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

2.09 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just when we broke for lunch I was making the point that in the People's Partnership Government, we are not about the enslavement of people, we are about the empowerment of people;

we are about freeing up people; we are about causing people to rise from where they are, to higher levels and standards, and a better quality life. And, Mr. Speaker, in that vein I want to thank the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance and the Economy, who have placed in the budget the responsibility for the National Commission for Self Help to build 100 houses for the next three years—100 each—for people who are poor, for the indigent and other people who would qualify, and just to say that right now we are working out the criteria for qualification.

But, Mr. Speaker, as I was also saying earlier, this is a partnership Government; we work in partnership with the community; we work in partnership with the NGOs and other service organizations, and this would also be an opportunity for community organizations to join with us in helping us to build these homes, so that there is a sense of ownership by the community, and an ability to participate and contribute in a meaningful way into the lives of others.

2.10 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of local government, I want to place on record my appreciation to the former Minister of Local Government, Mr. Chandresh Sharma, also to the Member for Couva South, Mr. Rudy Indarsingh, and also to the Deputy Speaker of the House, Mrs. Nela Khan, for the good work they did and the hard work they did while they were at the Ministry of Local Government, putting in place foundations and putting in place the platform upon which I am building for the future, and again I want to thank them and record my appreciation and congratulations for their hard work.

Mr. Speaker, the matter of local government reform has been on the agenda for many, many years and, in building on the work of the former Minister of Local Government, Cabinet approved a policy on local government transformation and modernization. Even as I speak, the document is at the printers being printed for distribution and for comments, and for a number of consultations that will take place over the next two months. The vision we have for local government is threefold: One, to deliver better quality service to the community: this means that what we wish to do is be more responsive, be more flexible, be professional, strive for excellence and be customer-centred. Secondly, to facilitate the building of better communities: this will be done at the level of local government through the development programmes in particular, and as I said earlier \$228 million has been allocated to local government corporations for development programmes. Thirdly, to build stronger councils: more empowered

councils and this would be demonstrated in the policy document where several reforms that will in fact empower and make councils stronger are in fact included in the policy document.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of stronger councils, we will engage in human resource development, we will look at the cadre of professional staff and review their performance and where necessary make changes. No longer would the regional corporations be a place where people would simply come and mark time. It will be a place where people will come to make a meaningful contribution.

As a result of the intent to make sure that there are meaningful contributions and value adding, standards of performance have now been developed for all the professional staff—that is, the medical officers of health, the corporate secretary, who is normally an attorney at law, the engineer, the financial officer and such other officers who form that professional cadre. Their performance would be reviewed on a quarterly basis so that we are sure that what they are placed there for will in fact be done.

Mr. Speaker, what we also noticed in terms of building better communities is that we are working towards having local government develop better coordination between local government and other agencies in the Ministries as well as to engage in widespread consultations with members of the public with respect to the introduction of change. What matters to people, at the end of the day, are the projects which impact upon the quality of life. I want to tell you what are some of the changes that are taking place in order to improve the delivery of services and also to improve the communities.

Mr. Speaker, it will surprise you to know that it would normally take—after a budget is passed—approximately seven to nine months before projects actually start, before moneys are drawn down. The reason for this is simple. The corporations would normally wait for the budget to be passed and then they will decide that these are the projects they want to do, and then they will engage in detailed estimates, by which time Christmas has come and Christmas has gone and then we are into the new year.

What we did this year is a little different for 2012/2013. We asked the corporations to look at what your DP estimates were for last year and to do your detailed estimates for projects based on last year's estimates. If you get more money you will of course be able to do more projects, but let us start with last year's DP estimates. Of course, this year they have gotten more money in the DP estimates and as of yesterday, 12 of the 14 corporations have completed their DP estimates in detail. In other words, they are ready to go.

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As soon as the budget is passed they will be able to apply for funding and then they can start up projects. What is interesting in this regard, Mr. Speaker, is that for the very first time in the history of local government, the Penal/Debe Corporation has already put out tenders for 29 projects in the new financial year. [*Desk thumping*] The Penal/Debe Corporation will be doing 98 projects this year and all will be done.

I want to congratulate the Penal/Debe Corporation as well as the other corporations for completing 98 per cent of their development work for last year. [*Desk thumping*]—98 per cent. It is a history-making record performance by the corporations in terms of how they have spent their money and how they have done their work. But, Mr. Speaker, it is always important for people to understand the nature of the work. We have several categories of work that are done under the development programme. You have drainage and irrigation—what we call box drains, box culverts and so on. You have roads and bridges; you have recreation facilities; you have cemeteries and cremation sites and there are other categories, but these are the major ones that you have.

I want to tell you, Mr. Speaker, a very interesting statistic that I would like to give you. In the year 2012/2013 for the 12 corporations that have already finished and sent in their estimates, 297 roads and bridges projects will be done; and under the drainage and irrigation, 290 projects so far for the 12 corporations will be done. This means that 507 communities in these 12 corporations will benefit from the work of the local government corporations. Five hundred and seven, Mr. Speaker; all of these projects are ready to start. It just depends on how the flow of money comes from the Ministry of Finance and the Economy and we are on our way.

When you take these 507 projects and you add the other 410 projects, between the URP physical infrastructure and the regional corporations, you are looking at a minimum of 1,000 projects this year—1,000 projects in 1,000 communities. You know what is the impact of that on the small contractors on the landscape? The small contracting sector will benefit in particular from these projects. The local government is not just about the drains and the roads. Local government has the potential to energize the economy. This is one of the reasons why we are on this very aggressive drive to use local government to energize the economy. It empowers the small and medium-size contractors.

Mr. Speaker, if this goes well and if we can meet the midterm review and get new funding we can even do more projects. So in other words, you can have two six-month cycles of projects rather than having one. So local government has the

capacity under this kind of reform and thinking to actually double the amount of work that they have done in the past. This is the vision that we will set in terms of the achievement we desire.

Mr. Speaker, this says something. It says or perhaps gives a lie to the thought that the public sector is necessarily inefficient. That is not necessarily true. The public sector can be efficient and the local government will in fact demonstrate, in this year 2012/2013, that the people in local government will be setting new standards for public servants and public sector performance in Trinidad and Tobago. We in the People's Partnership know that the country voted for higher productivity. The country voted for higher performance and the country voted for delivery, the kind that you feel, taste and smell, and we intend to deliver, to deliver to the population what they voted for.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, if you respect the professionalism of the public servant, if you treat them with dignity, if you give them respect and appreciate that they are accountable and have certain processes to follow, you will develop a relationship of trust, with them which will lead to high performance. This is the relationship we as a Government are developing with the public service, and where there is trust there is going to be performance, there is going to be creativity, there is going to be reform and the reform will come from the public service itself for the advantage of the community.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Local Government intends to lead the productivity revolution and set new standards for performance. This is the collective mission that I declare on behalf of all local government corporations and my Ministry to which we are committed.

There are other matters that are of concern to the public with respect to local government which I want to refer to. One of the bad habits we have in this country, and it continues to be a problem, is the way we dispose of our garbage and our attitude to the environment. It is not good to have to say that you have to police people in order to have a clean environment. But sometimes consequences are necessary in order to change behaviours until we can develop the mental set where we do not need to be regulated and we are self-motivated in terms of new behaviours.

In this regard, the former Minister of Local Government, my colleague, the Member for Fyzabad, had initiated a programme for 135 more litter wardens, and the interviewing process of those litter wardens is now in train. In addition to that, with regard to public health there is a shortage of public health inspectors in Trinidad and Tobago. Believe it or not there is a shortage of public health inspectors.

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Cabinet recently agreed that the Ministry of Local Government will award 50 scholarships for persons to study at COSTAATT in order to be trained to become public health inspectors in the regional Corporations. Why are public health inspectors important? They are important because local government is also going to be given additional responsibilities with the reform that is taking place and where we will be dealing more with planning activities and the approval of house plans and other plans will be delineated in the particular Bill that is coming before Parliament for debate. So we are preparing our personnel in order to accommodate that change that is anticipated.

There is also a shortage of municipal police officers, and at this time we are interviewing 45 potential candidates and we have advertised for additional officers in order to develop a full complement of municipal police officers. But, even as we do that, Mr. Speaker, we have to speed up things in the country, speed up decision making. We have to save time and at the Ministry of Local Government what we have done within the recent weeks is introduced videoconferencing between the head office and the other regional corporations. So that today, the Mayaro Regional Corporation does not have to travel from Mayaro to Port of Spain in order to hold a meeting. We are using videoconferencing. [*Desk thumping*]

2.25 p.m.

Sangre Grande does not have to travel; Penal does not have to travel, and within a month the 14 corporations will be hooked up to video conferencing facilities and we will cut down hours and hours of productive time and not have people move around the country. [*Desk thumping*] This is the change also. And when you can save time like this you can get more work done, and we are moving also in that direction.

Mr. Speaker, markets are an important aspect of our culture and we need to ensure that people in this country have beautiful markets, not just to go and shop, but where the vendors and the farmers can sell in a great environment. If you go to my website any time—my Facebook—you will see a very beautiful picture of the Siparia market which is being constructed and which I believe will be completed by the end of December. For the very first time Siparia—under the leadership of the hon. Prime Minister in the Siparia constituency—will have a brand new market for farmers and for shoppers. [*Desk thumping*] And it is not just a pie in the sky; it is there, being constructed now, and will be completed before the end of the year.

The San Juan market is almost complete, and recently we opened the Marabella market which is a temporary facility until the big market is built. But just to tell you that the Penal market has been refurbished and there is a mall at the top of the market. The Rio Claro market has also been refurbished; the Princes Town market has been refurbished; the Arima market has been refurbished and the Mayaro market has also been refurbished, and very soon you will see in Chaguanas, a state-of-the-art abattoir which has already been designed, and the Chaguanas Borough Corporation will soon be putting out expressions of interest for building that. Perhaps it is going to be under the PPP model at a cost of approximately \$30 million to \$32 million.

You would have heard from the budget statement of the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy that under the private/public sector partnership, four regional corporations' administrative buildings have been identified for construction: the Princes Town administrative complex, the Diego Martin administrative complex, or what we call town hall; the Arima town hall, or administrative complex and the Penal/Debe administrative complex, all of these under the PP model.

Mr. Speaker, it is interesting, you know, prior to 2000, or about the year 2004—2005, nine of these buildings were designed, and if you go to the office of the Minister of Local Government you will see pictures on the wall of all of these buildings. But do you know what? Only one was built—

Hon. Member: Chaguanas.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: The Chaguanas Borough Corporation where I was the mayor—only one was built. [*Desk thumping*] Only one was built! And somehow it is karmic that we have come full circle to begin to build the rest of those buildings here in Trinidad and Tobago. But, you see, that is part of the building up of the rural communities. These administrative complexes can then serve as one-stop shops for people, so you do not have to come into Port of Spain for everything. You can stay there in your communities and benefit from the services of Government in one location. So this is the vision of the Government with respect to these matters.

Mr. Speaker, disaster management is also an aspect of local government functioning and the local government corporations, and we are moving to strengthen disaster management at the level of local government. In each corporation there is a disaster management unit. In fact, local government is regarded as the first response to matters that occur in the nature of disasters.

The previous year the Ministry acquired five portable habitat shelters. In other words, a habitat shelter is a shelter that you put up in order to assist people to stay while you deal with the disaster. These are air-conditioned and they have generators. The five of them cost \$3 million; and also what we call skidsteer loaders, five also were bought at a cost of \$1 million. These items were distributed to the municipal corporations deemed most-at-risk to hazards, particularly flood and landslides.

Mr. Speaker, the matter of policy reform, as I said, is extremely important to local government, and it is our intention to begin those discussions in the second week of November this year. But there are some ideas for the future that we want to put in place, and one will be a project implementation unit at the head office of the Ministry of Local Government, given that we are targeting so many projects—1,000 project this year, though they be small projects, but we need to make sure that these projects are properly tendered; these projects are properly run; that they remain within budget; that there are no cost overruns and what have you.

But I want to go back to disaster management and to let the population know that we are going to, this year, acquire five more portable habitat shelters at a cost of \$3.8 million, and we are also going to be acquiring a global positioning system to be used in local government. We are going to be engaging in a lot of training, in particular, of disaster management personnel, so that they can better serve the interest of the country.

Mr. Speaker, it has been a very enjoyable moment for me to stand here as Minister of Local Government and to share these couple of thoughts and ideas with you, as we point to the future and as we develop a new vision of local government and new levels of performance, and new standards for performance at the level of local government.

I want to thank all the chairmen and mayors of the corporations, the councillors, who have been working very hard. Mr. Speaker, you know, several things have been said about councillors, but I want to say to you that if there are people who are close to people, in politics, it is councillors in this country. They are very, very close to people. [*Desk thumping*]

You do not expect that everyone is going to perform at the same level, but I want to tell you that over the last three months, the councillors have been walking their electoral districts; they have been collecting data. That data is being brought back to me. Then I take that data and I put it back through the URP programme, or through the development programme at the level of local government. The finest family you will find right now is, in fact, the local government family, as we move to make a difference in the lives of people.

I want to thank the hon. Prime Minister for giving me the opportunity to serve at the level of local government, and to assure the country that you are in for exciting times with local government in Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Prakash Ramadhar): Mr. Speaker, thank you again for the opportunity to make a contribution to this very important debate. Let me say from the beginning how proud I am to be on this side of the House. [*Desk thumping*] Being a newcomer to politics myself, when I entered, I thought the debate of 2010 was great; I thought the debate of 2011 was excellent; I have not a word to describe what I have heard from my colleagues on this side. [*Desk thumping*]

Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, we were given the benefit of the contribution from the Member for Tunapuna, and he had said, you know, maybe the economy had been able to survive and, in any event, to probably grow by some magic. But it was not magic; it was sheer genius. And to have heard the Member for Tunapuna yesterday, inspired, I think, all of us. He was able to bring very esoteric concepts of economics to a very basic level that even I understood it. Maybe not all of us in the House understood it. And when I had heard the Minister of Finance and the Economy deliver the budget in such elegant and simple terms, that it is a budget that was prepared with the people of Trinidad and Tobago in mind, not just with flowery language, but with real world and realistic things that could be implemented—that have been implemented—in all societies through the world to influence the growth of their economy.

But I am hearing and I am seeing in the newspapers, headlines: “Worst budget ever”; all sorts of characterizations of a most negative sort, but hearing the contributions of my learned seniors, learned friends: the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre; the Member for Caroni East and, certainly, the Member for Tabaquite, and I go around the room—the Member for Tobago West—you realize that what is happening here is what we had heard more than a decade ago, that performance really beats “ol’ talk” any day. [*Desk thumping*] And this Government is about performing for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

If one was to listen to the remonstrations on the other side and not listen to the truth, you would believe that this country was at an all-time low. But I have had the good fortune, as the Leader of the Congress of the People, to have to go through this nation and to meet and treat with persons from every walk of life, and I want to tell my friends on the other side, there is a Trinidad and Tobago outside

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of Port of Spain. [*Desk thumping*] There is an entire nation that knows the truth of what this Government has promised from 2010 to 2011 and to 2012; this Government is actually delivering on those promises.

Nothing happens as quickly as we may want it to, but it is certainly happening faster than many expect it to. What is happening is that there is a fear being generated on the other side to a sense of paranoia that everything is demonized; that everything must be—what shall I say?—given that name of failure, of betrayal, of lack of trust, so that the population, they believe, will follow the propaganda and not the truth.

But I say that we are to be judged not by what we say, but by what we say and also what we do. And to hear the Minister of Local Government, today, put an end to the lies—and forgive me for using that word—because if you were to listen yesterday to my friends on the other side, you would believe there was ultimate discrimination by this Government against constituencies not now controlled by the People's Partnership.

But what are the facts? My friend from Tabaquite has put the figures before you; he has put the projects before you, and the people on the ground know what is happening, and, therefore, I am even more proud to stand and contribute today, because as a member of this People's Partnership and as a member and the leader of the Congress of the People, this budget is visionary. We believe that Government must be there to facilitate and create an environment for the people of the nation to reach their full potential, not for the Government to be the main employer of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, because we have seen what the politics has done in terms of the dependency, where people are led to believe that you require government work, and if you do not have it, you will perish and, therefore, use the people as pawns in a political voting bank.

But for the first time this nation is seeing real effort to change that. URP and CEPEP are critically important components because when we had the orgy of expenditure that we saw in the last regime, things were not done to ensure that we had a sustainable economy that will be able to nurture the children of this nation to the best that we could give them: the best education, yes; the best health facilities, yes; the best of everything. That is what a government is supposed to try to prepare our nation for; to create employment and a new economy that is sustainable in the long-term, that is not damaging to the environment.

I do not want to have to remind this population, the fear that was put into all of us when we heard we were getting three smelters, nor to those who were

worried that a government could be so callous at the Essar Steel project to destroy irreplaceable wetlands and fish feeding areas; a government that was not concerned about poisoning the air, the earth and the waters.

This Government must change that. We can no longer depend solely on oil and gas. As one of my colleagues had said, the economic base must be not so narrowly placed that you rely only on those things. That is why we move now to expanding the economic base into new industries. For instance, you have heard about the tax incentives for the performing arts, for artistic and video productions; 150 per cent tax write-off. So that, you know, Mr. Speaker, simple things that we take for granted but not really thinking it through.

When we talk about local production of artistic material, many have forgotten that this nation was riveted to “No Boundaries”, to “The Turn of the Tides”, but now, a large part of our population is glued into “Jersey Shore”, and things that are not helpful to the development of our people, our culture or our economy.

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By this initiative we could create a whole new generation of artistes, actors, performers and producers, who truly see Trinidad and Tobago because the most wonderful landscape you could imagine anywhere can be found here in Trinidad and Tobago. This place could be a production site internationally but we could start at home. These are simple things, but necessary things that would nurture a sense of community, a sense of pride in our nation. This is what the Minister of Finance and the Economy has put as one objective.

The training of URP and CEPEP workers to go into meaningful employment, this is something the COP applauds, because it would mean then, that those make-work programmes are really to the benefit of those who fall through the cracks and cannot get sustainable, meaningful employment that would take them to their highest potential, but as they enjoy that period of protection—and that is what it is—so that no family should be hungry, no child, mother or father should be deprived of the basics of food and electricity and water and shelter. That is a safety net, but they move from there to higher ground. These are things that we applaud.

You know, what worries me more than anything else is that this new team, some of them are new and there are some bright lights on the other side. I will not deny that.

Mr. Sharma: They are not here today.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Then I heard something yesterday that made me shiver, and revolt in cold recognition that nothing much has changed on the other side. I remember this issue of the rapid rail. I asked my friends to consider this. The rapid rail was to cost, if I recall, \$25 billion to put into place and several billion more annual recurrent expenditure on it. I heard the Leader of the Opposition put forward that idea again, as if it was something that could really dramatically improve our nation's life.

I want to ask, \$25 billion? I understand one of the most modern buses, the luxury ones, cost maybe a million dollars—if so much, but let us assume it is a million dollars. Their plan would be to spend \$25 billion on a rapid rail when you could have gotten how many buses?

Mr. Sharma: Too many.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Twenty-five billion dollars is 25,000 buses that could service all of our main highways. Service every small village in this nation and as the Local Government Minister and the Minister of Works return to where we should be, to an infrastructure that should be First World in this country, having regard to all the resources that this country has had, and whatever we have now, we make best, do and give value for money, so that there would be no loss. [Interruption] Yes, 25 thousand thousand is 25 billion. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Sharma: We will make it double-decker with half the buses.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: These are things that have never crossed their minds. Mega projects, without real value to the people. I was there Sir, when we fought; men on my right, men on my left, ladies on my—all around. We fought that rapid rail and for good reason. You know why, Sir? I asked the PNM, how could they ever suggest to run the rapid rail through the heart and soul of the nation. Not along the corridors of transport you know. You know what the alignment was? They would run it through the agricultural lands of Aranguez.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Central.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Through—“hear dis nah”—the most expensive real estate in Valsayn. Take all of them out. Go down into central. Once again the most fertile agriculture lands and into communities that had built themselves from scratch into wonderful homes and precious communities.

The intent that we suspected then was that they wished to destroy those communities and to spend money in a flagrant exercise of wastage, never before

seen. Then I heard my friend from Port of Spain North/St. Ann's—I did not sleep well thinking about it. The flippancy with which it was referred to, that \$485 million, what wrong if you could draw some plans for \$485 million. I understand the Minister of Works and Infrastructure now uses that package—the pre-feasibility you know not the feasibility—as a footstool. Four hundred and eighty-five million dollars could have given us a hospital. By the maths and by the cost that my friend the Minister of Education is able to produce secondary schools, would give you 15 secondary schools. We get a box of paper. A box of paper for that, and they are proud of that. I do not like to go back in history but those who do not remember their history are bound to repeat it.

We are hearing and sensing now a move in this nation—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: That is their policy.

Hon. P. Ramadhar:—for the propaganda of failure and disgrace to be thrown onto this side. We will have none of it. I believe in truth and I believe in fairness. If there is wrong and you know as the Leader of the COP—and in my party wherever there is wrong we speak out against it, but where there is right, and where there is goodness and service to people, we will always recognize it. We will partner with those who have the will of the people and the interest of the people on their side.

Mr. Speaker, we heard when the Minister of Finance and the Economy was delivering and speaking about property tax—“St. Augustine, whey yuh sayin bout dat Axe the tax.” Let me make it abundantly clear, that programme of “axe the tax” that was a term coined by my sister-in-law Cheryl Ramadhar. It started from a programme that was even bigger called, “no taxation without representation.”

In 2009, when the PNM sought to introduce that property tax regime, we thought it was not worthy of a democratic society, because what they were going to do, there would have been arbitrary valuations on properties. There would have been the taxation of those properties without proper consultation with the people, and that the moneys raised from communities would have gone not to service those communities, you know, but into that deep, dark, hole where our hundreds of billions of dollars of the people's wealth had been wasted for one decade before that. We saw what they were doing with the resources of the nation, and we said that will not work. We will not stand for that. We will axe that tax.

No one in this country believes that there should be no taxes on properties for the benefit of the communities. That is what we are talking about. When the Minister of Finance and the Economy speaks, that is my understanding—that the

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property tax that he is speaking about will be one that is fair, where the valuations are reasonable and realistic and that the income generated from those taxes will be used to uplift the community from which those taxes come. That is why he speaks to the need for proper consultation with the communities before we go forward. The COP will partner with that.

Mr. Speaker, I do not intend to speak very long here today. I think it is necessary for us to be very, very simple in the understanding of what a budget is all about. A budget is where you allocate the resources of a nation, how you are going to spend it and how you are going to use it for the benefit of our people.

I hear criticisms left, right and centre about deficit spending and a deficit budget. The question is, with a government service that is already huge, with an impoverished population that we inherited—when I say, impoverished, where work was required from Government otherwise the people will not have work—what do you do? Do you raise taxes to generate income to pay for all of that or do you do a combination of both? So you go into deficit spending to be able to fulfil the obligations of recurrent expenditure of the Government but you also use money from that to stimulate economic growth.

I congratulate the Minister of Finance and the Economy for using tax incentives for home development and land development because it cannot be left to state agencies to look after those things alone. This worked before. It worked in the 1990s. When effectively, where oil was \$9—was it, Minister? Gas was even less—far, far, less. The economy was lifted because of the partnership with the private sector.

If you want to know how to do business, partner with business people. That is what this Government's vision is about—to remove the largeness of Government and put it to where the environment is created that business will take care to be competitive, to be able to rise to the challenges that continue to come from every corner of this globe. Government could never react in good time with that because the considerations of Government will be different from the considerations of profit-driven business ventures.

That is why it is necessary now. I do not like a deficit budget, but it is a necessary evil until things become far more stable, far better and the economy is put into a better and safer place. That is why I was so heartened when I heard from the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, that the intent is to come to a social compact with the

people, with the trade unions, with employers and Government, to ensure that we work together to ensure—as he said, if you do not cover all the players, that nobody is really covered, because if business is to fail, workers will lose. If workers lose, the country fails, and therefore, Government would have failed.

So, we need to find that balance amongst all the players, where everybody believes they come out, win, win, win. That is not an easy thing, especially in an environment where the population has started to mistrust Government for the last decade—when they saw that bandits and criminals were getting the wealth, they were getting the contracts and the resources, where criminality was allowed to run free, where they saw high government officials stealing with impunity.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Same thing here.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Yeah, you could say that. You know much about that. I will not be distracted by the mutterings of my friends because this is very, very serious. A society inherits those things that come with it but societal changes do not come overnight. It comes by slow, steady and deliberate action.

That is why, under the leadership of our Prime Minister, we have engaged on public procurement policy to bring into legislation. For the first time in this nation a Government is seeking to do that. [*Desk thumping*] When the Partnership came into Government, we did not expect that all corruption would end, because the systems that were there—it was almost a way of doing business—that you have to “pass something” to get anything done. It happens up till today. What is important is the direction and intent of this Government, to get rid of that sort of thing, slowly but surely, by attrition and certainly by the production of things like the FIU and giving the resources to the police to do their work, then the society will and must change.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday, I heard from my friends on the other side—who got killed in Laventille? The Minister of National Security—I hold no brief for him. As you know, he and I have had our public differences but you must give Jack his jacket. [*Interruption*]

Mr. McLeod: Especially this one.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: When for 30 days in an area that was devastated by murders, and not just murders you know—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Mr. Morality slow down.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Would you like to speak now?

Mr. Sharma: I wonder if you close to St. Ann’s.

Dr. Gopeesingh: She close to St. Ann's—

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Listen, Mr. Speaker, the horror of it is that not just citizens who were being executed, you know, but children were being cold-bloodedly executed. No collateral damage here. Hits were put on children, Member for Arima. Hits were put on children! How could a society endure that?

Whatever the Minister of National Security did to have put a stop to that or to put a slow to it, I congratulate him. [*Desk thumping*] Once law and order was restored—and I mean law and order for both sides “eh”. There must never be an abuse of citizens in the exercise of lawful authority. My party has spoken about that and we stand firm on that.

But what has happened in the last month in Laventille [*Crosstalk*] we go talk about last night. Doh be proud of it. I understand dey proud now dey get ah murder in Laventille.” I feel so hurt.

2.55 p.m.

Mr. Sharma: “Yuh eh shame?”

Hon. P. Ramadhar: I asked the question—things do not just happen, you know. When persons stand in this august Chamber, this is the height of office in this nation, this is the heart and soul of the conscience of a country and people speak and empower the lawless. I will tell you this, no law-abiding citizen is afraid of law enforcement agencies if you put them there to protect you. It was no surprise to me when I read in the papers today—contrary to what all the representatives on that side said that the people were afraid and they “lock down and thing”—the people are celebrating.

Hon. Member: Which people?

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Which people? Go and find out from your own. [*Laughter*] The people of Trinidad and Tobago, those in Laventille. Do not believe that because you represent a certain area that we do not have rights to go there. I, as leader of the Congress of the People, have real ties there and before the election of 2010 the complaints that they are talking about now, are the same complaints that existed when the PNM was in Government. So this hypocrisy has got to end. It has got to end and it has got to end now. [*Desk thumping*]

Coming from this House, yesterday, they condemned the return of law and order and peace to a community. The actions to restore law and order that were condemned in some way was a message sent—I do not mean intentional by the

way—to empower those who do not wish to see a lawful society, to go out and commit that murder last night. You have to understand the psychology of things. There is a consequence to action, there is a consequence to your words and there is a spirit that moves. If people believe that they have protection from high, they will do the things that they are accustomed to doing. Guess what? We are not to be deterred in our effort to return law and order to this country to make it safe again. [*Desk thumping*]

Back to the social compact, Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, we were talking about. My friends will suggest—[*Interruption*—sorry, lawyer thing. Members on the other side would suggest that we should not have a deficit budget. So when they march with others from the unions for their pay rises and certain conditions, are we to tell our brothers and sisters who are in need, no? When workers say they are going on strike, do you think it is out of spite only? No! It is about the improvement for their wives, for their children and for their families. They want to get the best they could, and they have a right to do that legitimately to strike or to issue strike notice.

When I drive along on the priority bus route sometimes and you see the thousands of persons who pay the price when labour is withheld or when areas are left unprotected because we choose to—what—relax and reflect and other things, it is a painful thing and some may want to suggest that it is not an act of patriots. That is the balance, and we have a duty as a Government to do the things necessary to ensure that all of those in our society are given a fair and proper wage and conditions. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I have been thinking—why is this nation in such turmoil, apart from the political mischief that many in the profession spread? There is something very important that we must realize. If your population feels that they are not cared for, they would not care for you. The mistrust of Government that I had been speaking about, we are inheriting that. This PNM Government that we had in the past—do you know what my little nephew told me years ago? He said, “They do not like poor people, you know. They like people being poor.” [*Laughter*] I will tell you why. I thought it was a joke, but when I thought about it—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: You nephew is as bright as you.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: He has a double scholarship. Double open scholarship. I am very proud of him. Let me tell you why I would say that.

Mr. Speaker, there was a Government in place that was removed and that Government was gifted to the PNM in 2002. Before that period, there was

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protection of the working man by rent restriction, rent control. We had rent restriction boards so that any person who was renting and felt that they were being abused, that their rent was too high, or the conditions of their rental property were below human levels, you could have gone to that board and gotten protection. Guess what happened?

In 2002, that PNM Government—I will tell you that there are good people on that side too, but somehow if you are part of something bigger—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Check yourself.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: You need to know why it is they allowed these things to happen. They allowed that legislation to lapse in 2002. Well you could say maybe they were careless and did not think about it, but do you know what? They made a policy decision in 2006 to have it removed and not have it brought back. I am proud to say that the leader of the People's Partnership, Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar and her Cabinet, has mandated my Ministry, the Ministry of Legal Affairs, to begin consultations which we have concluded.

Madam Prime Minister, a report and a policy position will be brought to the Cabinet for approval, so we will bring legislation to return protection to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Do you know what has happened in those years, Mr. Speaker? Rents have gone through the roof, literally, where one room apartments go for \$4,000 and \$2,000. That is one thing, the rental levels, but if you see some of the apartments that are rented out, they are below standards fit for any human habitation.

So, what our intent is, having done the consultations in east, west, north and in the south, and in Tobago, is that we are moving to a position where before you even consider renting a property, you have to have to meet basic minimum requirements, and then we shall grade those properties so that you could know immediately—you cannot even think about asking for a certain figure unless it is a grade four or grade five. It would bring some protection, but we wanted to do it in a way that it would be fair to the landlord and to the tenant. So therefore the consultations were with all stakeholders. I intend to have that policy brought into law within a year for the protection of our people in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, something that has bothered many in the nation: the issue of conveyancing and mortgages. Once again, I am proud the Prime Minister and this Cabinet have authorized the policy document to go forward for consultations

which have begun, so that for the first time this Government will be taking on financial institutions for the protection of the small man, of the working man in this country, so that a lot of the abuses that have come to us will be finally dealt with.

There are huge forces against us, but we will be undeterred in bringing about a fair environment for those who require financing from financial institutions. I will give you an example. We have always heard the simple argument that your brother, cousin or friend may be a lawyer, but you go to financial institutions and they tell you that you have to use their lawyer and you have to pay for that lawyer. We say, “Financial institutions, yes, you may have your lawyer, but you will pay for it and you will not transfer that money onto the back of those who have come to you.” [*Desk thumping*] That is one. There are many, many other things, but I am just highlighting some of the most important things.

Mr. Speaker, I myself had to bring to an end a mortgage some time ago. My own property which I used as collateral, paid off the loan, but before I could get back that property in my name, I had to pay a release,—\$6,000 for a document—that says I have paid off all the money and, therefore, it is back to you. Of course, we are in consultations and at the end of which it is our intent to introduce this, that your receipt for last payment will act as a final release and the property returns to you for no extra money. [*Desk thumping*] Simple things that make the world of difference in the lives of people.

Hear this one, Mr. Speaker. In difficult economic times, good and decent people in the past in this nation have lost their homes because they may have lost their jobs, they may have fallen ill and could not afford the mortgage. We say, look, the banks have a right to exercise their legal rights on a mortgage, but guess what this Government and this Cabinet of the People’s Partnership have approved? That before you could sell a home, where more than 50 per cent of the mortgage has been paid, you do not just execute that mortgage. You have to go to the court to get an order so that there will be a hearing to determine whether the person, the mortgagee, has fallen into bad circumstances for any good reason and, therefore, whether that mortgage or that loan should be recalculated and new conditions put. So, no longer will persons be in fear of losing their homes where more than 50 per cent of the mortgage has already been paid for good reason.

These are simple, but very, very important things that strengthen the social fabric so the people of this nation could feel that there is a Government that cares about them and looks out to protect them. Therefore, the compact that my friend the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development is speaking

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about will be easier to address because if nobody is looking out for me, why do I have to care about you? We want to return to a society where everybody cares about everybody else and, more important, those you give the authority to rule care about the people and do the things necessary to protect them.

Mr. Speaker, there is so much more I could tell you about.

Hon. Member: “Tell them nah man.”

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Constitutional reform. Every day we hear the churning need for constitutional reform, constitutional reform. Guess what? This Cabinet, under the leadership of the Prime Minister, has already directed that I take control of that and we are in the process. For the last several months, a lot of work has gone on in a small committee, within my Ministry, to prepare the groundwork for the launch of the consultations for the new Constitution that we wish to have in this nation. [*Desk thumping*]

As a bare minimum, the things that we promised in the People’s Partnership manifesto will and must be delivered in terms of constitutional reform. Fix election dates, fix terms, you name it, Mr. Speaker. We will strengthen democracy in this nation. In the consultations, it is our intent to have at least 17 throughout the nation—Trinidad, and in Tobago, Prime Minister—that the people will tell us what they want in their Constitution, unlike where a draft was put unto our heads, the most anti-democratic Constitution that was put onto us and then we had to comment about things. We say, no. We will give you the basic minimum that we promised you and then you tell us what else you want, what structures you need.

Prime Minister, with all due respect, Mr. Speaker, it may very well require a phased basis because I believe there is something called the “rate of absorption” and we are seeing commissions come and commissions go and nothing has been done to our Constitution, but under the People’s Partnership Government, for the first time since 1976, you will see a real adjustment to the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, again, the Ministry of Legal Affairs, small Ministry, smallest budget in the nation, but very powerful in the things that we do. We in the Ministry of Legal Affairs have something called the IP office, Intellectual Property office. That office is manned by some of the most brilliant people in this country, and we have an office that is really the envy of the entire region—in fact, the world. In fact, today, I was supposed to have addressed the World Intellectual Property Organization in Geneva, but I had to be here. I wanted to be here. The reason I am speaking about this is that intellectual property and the office that we

have, the envy of the region at least, is working to create that environment and a public education programme so that all our citizens will truly understand that your thoughts, the creativity of this nation, is one of the greatest wealths of this nation that we have not yet attempted to tap.

Many hear about Bill Gates, Steve Jobs—great inventors. Many hear that Bill Gates is one of the richest men in the world, but very few make the connection that it is because of his intellectual capacity and the intellectual property that that brought, and the ownership of that and the licensing and the ability to create and generate wealth that he is the wealthiest man in the world. We have a people who are totally without doubt and reservation, in terms of the per capita, the brain power of this nation, is an envy also to the entire world.

Dr. Gopeesingh: The brilliance.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: The brilliance of our people. So that intellectual property, once the children of our nation start realizing that their thoughts and their creations and innovations are things that they could earn a livelihood with to create new industries—because as a friend of mine, Mr. Maxime, puts it: where you have limited land space you have to use head space, and that is something critically important for a very small country, with the brightest people you could find anywhere in the world.

Just a week ago, one of my school friends, Sanjeev Seereeram, a gold medallist, presidential gold, one of the most brilliant human beings I have ever known, who wrote missions and created the—to Mars at NASA. Yes! Taught at MIT. Just last week he was back here in Trinidad to receive an award from one of our institutions. He is but one and there are many, many others like him throughout the world. We need to create an environment where they feel they could come back here to Trinidad and be able to find the resources necessary for them to put that brain power for the benefit of our country. [*Desk thumping*]

3.10 p.m.

To that end, Mr. Speaker, the creativity that we speak about, against a lot of resistance, the People's Partnership Government Cabinet has approved the assent to the Madrid Protocol. What that does—and the Hague Agreement. Do you know that if you have an invention a trademark or industrial design and you need to have it protected, you have to have it registered here first, but then, every country you want protection in, you have to go or send it and pay lawyers in every single country to have it protected? Under this new effort, once it becomes law, the

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Hague Convention and the Madrid Protocol, you register your idea, your design and your trademark here and you would be protected in 75 countries throughout the world for no extra expense.

Hon. Member: Fantastic.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: We met serious resistance in this country, but we went forward with it still because it was in the interest of our people.

Mr. Seemungal: “Yuh protected in Trinidad?”

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Yes.

Mr. Seemungal: Thank God!

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Mr. Speaker, a lot of work has been done, a lot of work needs to be done, but all this work will come to naught unless the truth is spoken and the people feel that they are part of the progress of this nation.

To that end, one of the first things—and I want to congratulate my friend, my colleague from La Horquetta/Talparo. When he was in my Ministry with me, we started a programme immediately realizing that our Ministry, right here in South Quay, was one of the most important people’s Ministry because we help you from your birth to your death—birth certificates to death certificates and everything in-between. Land registration, your deeds which secure your wealth—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: From cradle to grave!

Hon. P. Ramadhar:—from cradle to grave. Do you know what we did under the guidance of the People’s Partnership and the Cabinet? From that time, we have opened 14 e-registration centres throughout the country *[Desk thumping]* remembering that this country is not just Port of Spain. There are people in Rio Claro, we opened an office there. *[Desk thumping]* There are people in Tobago. The first one we opened in Tobago. There are people—*[Interruption]* You name it, everywhere outside of Port of Spain and we are open to service. Member for Point Fortin, you were there and you welcomed us so well. We opened in Point Fortin.

Dr. Gopeesingh: She was there for the first time. *[Laughter]*

Hon. P. Ramadhar: I want to tell you something. The people of Point Fortin were so happy that the best welcome we got anywhere—talk the truth, Member for Point Fortin—was down in Point Fortin. They could not believe!

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: I always treat my people well.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Under the PNM, they never got anything like that. The People's Partnership came in, within the first year and a half, "bram!" We opened an office down there. [*Desk thumping*]

Let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, I have said it before and it is worth repeating. When the idea to give laptops to children came about, I heard my friend from Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West complain bitterly about it.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: No, I did not complain. [*Laughter*]

Hon. Member: You objected!

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Let me tell you, listen—[*Crosstalk*] All right. Well, "ah hear you", with all due respect. Do you know what that has done?

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Misrepresenting the truth!

Hon. P. Ramadhar: What that has done is that it has given a computer, not just to the child, but to the home, to the family and, Prime Minister, to even the villages. [*Desk thumping*]

As wireless access improves, we have opened up every nook and cranny of this nation to the entire world. There is good and there is bad in that, but more important than anything else, is the feeling amongst our children that they are being connected, that they are on equal par with children in China, children in India, children in the United States and wherever. But on the practical side of that, as new legislation comes before this Parliament, a lot is lined up on the runway and ready to take off, that we could pay by credit card for Government services. Prime Minister, thank you for your vision! You do not need to leave your home to make an application for any of the documents that are required from my Ministry at least, and from what I have spoken with my other friends, for no other Ministry would you need to leave your home. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, in my Ministry—when I say mine, because I love it, right, [*Laughter*] because it was created by our present Prime Minister and her legacy is powerful even today.

Mr. Imbert: "What yuh mean created!" It was there before. Since Kangaloo was—

Mr. Sharma: "Keep quiet nah man!"

Hon. P. Ramadhar: "Listen, ah desk and two chairs!"

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Actually a desk and one chair.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: “One chair; sorry, ah say two chairs.” [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, the point that I am making is that at this point in time, where you do not have to pay for your first birth certificate, you could go to any of the 14 centres and, guess what? “When yuh reach there, if yuh doh get it right away, yuh doh ever have to return.” We have instituted now the posting out of all documents to your home so “yuh doh have to trouble yourself.” [*Desk thumping*] That is just the tip of the spear as more—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Seemungal: “How long it take yuh to get a birth certificate?”

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Well, this is not a boast; this is a statement that I get regularly. A man I hardly knew said, “What have you done with your Ministry? I came and dropped off my son to get a birth certificate and I went to park the car and by the time I coming out the car, he reach back.” [*Desk thumping*] “Not reach back to say that he ha tuh come back tomorrow or whenever, yuh know; yuh reach back with birth certificate in hand.” [*Crosstalk*] It used to take two years.

In San Fernando—[*Continuous crosstalk*] “Yeah, it taking two minutes now.” These are the things. You see the kind of resistance we are getting, Mr. Speaker? “Yuh hear the noise.” [*Continuous crosstalk*] “Oh jeezanages!”

Mr. Sharma: “Yuh doh want de country to succeed.”

Hon. Member: Conduct yourself.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Complimentary birth certificates for each and every one of you. There is another certificate that I do not want to yet give to you. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Sharma: That will take five minutes!

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Mr. Speaker, for the first time in the history of this country, there will be a full-fledged Ministry in San Fernando. So in terms of land registry and deed documents, you do not need to come to Port of Spain ever again. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Sharma: That removes 20 per cent of the traffic.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Within a month, we will be doing the same in Arima—full-fledged Ministry. These are things—it is sounding simple but they are really, really significant.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Local Government, when he was the Minister of

Foreign Affairs and Communications, we had a chat because on one of my—I had visited the New York Consular office there, and my Ministry told me that they have a major problem because a lot of our citizens who live away, some of them unfortunately, illegally away—[*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. P. Ramadhar: Thank you very much. I thought I would be 15 minutes but there is so much. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, thank you, colleagues, for the extension of my time. I was on the point where many of our citizens live illegally abroad and they work, but to cash their cheques, they require two forms of ID—one, a passport and one, probably a driving permit. Very often, there are queries, when they now apply for a new passport, they require a new birth certificate and there are questions to be asked and answers given, otherwise they would not be able to get their new passports.

Do you know what is a simple solution that we arrived at, Mr. Speaker? We sent up a team headed by the Registrar General, wonderful person, a true patriot of this nation—went to New York, went to Canada, to Miami, to London, and we put in place training for the embassy and consulate staff there for them to do the interviews. Where there is a higher need even, we are using Skype to do the interviews from any of those locations so that those citizens do not have to go through the trauma of deciding whether to risk coming back home to get that necessary document. Once it is approved, here is TTPost, we post it to their homes, wherever they live in this world, and we continue that effort. Simple but important developments. [*Desk thumping*]

On a sadder note, when one has a death in the family, painful and grievous as it is, you have to go through the trauma of seeking out the registrar of deaths in certain parts. Sometimes people do not know where they live; you have to literally investigate, find this person and wait at their convenience and speak at their convenience. Sometimes they are cooking, sometimes they are not home, and you have to return. Do you know what we have done in the Ministry? Again, I thank my colleague from La Horquetta/Talparo and all those in the Ministry who have helped with this. You have seven days' service now at the hospital and in every one of our e-registration centres. You go, there is a number if no one is there on

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weekends, and they will come and do the necessary, so that you will not be delayed and further traumatized to deal with your loved one who has passed. Once again, people oriented; doing the people's business, making their lives easier.

Mr. Speaker, it will come as a great surprise, but not to our Prime Minister, that there are several hundred thousand persons in this country who do not have full names on their birth certificates. Do you know why? In the old days, the old registrars would put in whatever name there is, sometimes without a surname, and send it up. Once that goes into the record, after one year, the law says you cannot interfere with it.

So today, I do not know if my friend from Fyzabad—I have not seen his birth certificate [*Laughter*] or whether he has his full name on it. This Government has taken the decision and legislation is prepared once again on the runway ready for take-off to come to this Parliament for approval, so that we would be able to insert your proper name on a birth certificate, so you walk with one document; not walking with a document plus affidavit from everybody else. Simple things like that!

We are moving—in fact, we are ready. Legislation required on the runway ready for take-off for the issuance of electronic marriage certificates so that you would not have to wait the extended periods that you do, to have hand-written ones sent to the Ministry, certified and then written up and sent out to you—a matter of minutes. These are things that we are doing.

Mr. Speaker, consumer protection: I cannot imagine in the year 2012 with a full department of dedicated servants of the people at the Consumer Affairs Division, they have no legal authority to enforce any right for any consumer in this country. All they could do is to make a phone call, do some investigation and ask the supplier if they would help out.

Hon. Member: “No man, no man!”

Hon. P. Ramadhar: That is the truth. They have no power.

Mr. Imbert: After two and a half years?

Mr. Sharma: After 40 years! [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Consumer legislation is coming. We are now in consultation with the Judiciary to provide special training for judges and magistrates. So, this is the vision of this Government, that if you have any issue from any supplier, you come to the Consumer Affairs Department, let us know—you call us, email us, we shall investigate it for you. If there is merit in it, you do

not have a single thing to do again, that the Consumer Affairs Department takes over from you and enforces your right to the courts or wherever for you to have protection. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Mr. Speaker, maybe I have spoken too much because I want to show more than we speak.

Mr. Peters: Speak, man! This is Parliament.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: I believe that this People's Partnership Government is the best political vehicle that this country has ever seen. [*Desk thumping*] Of course, amongst ourselves, we may have disagreements, but what is important is that once we know that each of our partners is dedicated to the service of the people, dedicated to a new level, the high energy politics that Mr. Dookeran spoke about, that we will continue to grow, learn from each other, strengthen each other, work together, in the service of our people.

3.25 p.m.

And for the first time, Mr. Speaker, this nation will start feeling a sense of patriotism. And I say this: patriotism is not just about waving a flag at sporting victories, patriotism is what we see every day in every corner of this nation, where the servants of the people quietly help their brothers and sisters, serve each other without any fanfare, without recognition.

I tell you as an example, there are persons in my IPO office and in the Ministry generally who receive offers, high salaries that we could never afford in government, but they choose to stay because they love their work and they know the very importance of what they do. In every community we have people like that, who continue to be the unsung heroes of this nation. Let us, in this People's Partnership Government, do the things that would say that we recognize each and every citizen as a person who is special, who has a right to be here, who has a right to equal opportunity at every level, who has a right to the fulfilment of their full potential, who has a right to fairness, who has a right to the best of health care, to the best of education and from that they will give the best to this nation. For the first time this country will see a government that creates the environment that we can become one people, one nation with one future. Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

Miss Alicia Hospedales (Arouca/Maloney): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Up the ante.

Miss A. Hospedales: I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this debate on the Appropriation Bill 2013. I would also like to commend our political

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leader as well as all my colleagues on this side who went before me exposing the misinformation and also the deception of the Government. *[Interruption]* Yes, thank you.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Tabaquite indicated that the Member for La Brea stated in his contribution yesterday that areas such as Debe, Penal, Siparia, Chaguanas will degenerate Port of Spain. That is false. That is not the truth that the Member was speaking. The Member for La Brea did not say anything like that, but what he was highlighting was the development projects in the La Brea and particularly Point Fortin areas and other areas of the south-west peninsula that were taken out of that area and placed elsewhere. He highlighted approximately 25 projects, indicating that all these projects were removed from the La Brea area particularly and have now been sent elsewhere or have been cancelled entirely.

The Member for La Brea was highlighting the inequitable distribution of projects under the UNC-A Government. Later on, I would talk to you about inequitable distribution of projects. The Member for Tabaquite asked a question: Why are you distorting the reality for political expediency? I am asking that question back to him. I wish he was in his seat to hear. Why is the Member for Tabaquite distorting the reality for political expediency? The Member for Tabaquite talked about how they treat the people of this country. I found that to be very, very, very, interesting because they treat the people of this country as though they are mindless, thoughtless and have no intelligence whatsoever. They treat them as though they have no values, no principles, no standards and will accept anything. They also treat the people of this country as though they are available to be bought. They can easily be bought. They treat the people of this country as though they have no dignity and no worth; they are doormats that can be walked on. *[Crosstalk]* That is true.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Tabaquite said the people of this country trust this Government and I found that to be laughable.

Mrs. Thomas: Comical.

Miss A. Hospedales: Comical, because what he failed to realize is that the people of this country no longer trust the Government. *[Desk thumping]* I would like to ask: Do the people of this country trust this Government—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Jeffrey: No.

Miss A. Hospedales:—after the Resmi fiasco?

Mr. Jeffrey: No.

Miss A. Hospedales: Do they trust them after section 34?

Mr. Jeffrey: No.

Miss A. Hospedales: Do they trust them after the state of emergency?

Mr. Jeffrey: No.

Miss A. Hospedales: Do they trust them after the Anti-Gang Bill?

Mr. Jeffrey: Absolutely no.

Miss A. Hospedales: And when they keep or suppress crime statistics for us and say that it is a PNM murder, do they trust them?

Mr. Jeffrey: No.

Miss A. Hospedales: No, no way, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jeffrey: Absolutely no.

Miss A. Hospedales: The Member for St. Augustine—fortunately left his seat—said that he is proud to be a member of the Government, proud to be a partner of the Government, misleading the people of this country, proud to be a member because he stood here and claimed and praised himself. The only thing he did not do was pat himself on the shoulder or beat up his chest stating that the computerized birth certificate is basically established under them. That is a programme that has been established since June of 2003. [*Desk thumping*] That programme has been implemented since June 2003. [*Desk thumping*]

In 2011, in the budget we were told by the previous Minister of Finance that they were facing the issues and turning the economy around. For 2012, he came back again and he told us that they were moving from steady foundation to economic transformation. We know the truth. “Winston economics” did not work. It never worked. Because of the falsehood that was perpetrated, he told us that they will turn the economy around but, under the PNM, they came and they found a stable economy. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: That is right.

Mr. Jeffrey: Yes.

Miss A. Hospedales: A stable economy. Mr. Speaker, he said that they are moving the economy from steady foundation to economic transformation. That was not the reality. They caused the economy to be in a worse-off shape than it

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was under the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*] The current Minister of Finance and the Economy is telling us that they are stimulating growth and generating prosperity in the economy. They are going to implement a whole lot of different measures. I am asking him: when, where, how is this going to happen? He copied and pasted all the measures that were used previously presented by the previous Minister of Finance. What he failed to realize is that those things did not work and will not work. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, we all know about the falsehood that has been perpetrated by the Government. The people of this country are tired. They are fed up. Every single day is a new issue. What the Government needs to tell us right now is what is the true state of the economy. They gave everyone the impression that they are not to account for what is taking place in the economy. They can manipulate figures up and down and they can make these projections that are untrue and people would believe them. We would like to tell them that it is time for them to stop the falsehood and begin to tell the people the truth.

Their mischief—I remember, in 2010, the Minister of Finance came and he was making these statements, very false statements, the economy is in a bad shape and we have no money and we cannot raise people's pay. He was telling the whole world that. The mischief turned back on them—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Boomerang.

Miss A. Hospedales:—because when they should have been inviting or encouraging investors to come to Trinidad and Tobago, what they were doing was chasing investors away. What happened as a result? A number of businesses were forced to close down. Many workers were unemployed. Even during the state of emergency, there were significant numbers of persons who were unemployed, particularly in the service sector as a result. A lot of those business owners who maintained their business did so under a number of challenges. They had to fire staff. They were not able to meet their rents. Particularly in places like the malls they were unable to meet their rents and still are unable to meet their rents on a monthly basis. This was the impact of the falsehood that was perpetrated by the previous Minister of Finance.

If they had been transparent, they would have been able to come—be truthful to the nation and then people might have been able to understand and support.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Exactly.

Miss A. Hospedales: But as a result of the falsehood that was perpetrated, people have lost trust in them. They do not believe them anymore. [*Desk thumping*]

I would like to ask the current Minister of Finance and the Economy to tell us about the real state of the economy. Tell us what is happening. What exactly is happening with the economy. I am forced to ask because, like the previous Minister of Finance, he failed to give a detailed review of the economy. For the first time we came and we had a budget statement read by this Minister of Finance and the Economy—first budget statement as a new Minister of Finance and the Economy, but there is no review of the economy.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Imagine that.

Miss A. Hospedales: Based on the limited information provided, we are asked—we are left to guess. We have to guess exactly what the Government is doing, what the state of the economy is. Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask him: What is there to hide? Can you tell us how much was transferred into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund? We do not know. He came and he gave us the total figure that is in the fund. We do not know how much was transferred there.

His failure to provide us with information is not a reflection of the transparency and the accountability that was stated in the overview of their manifesto by their political leader, that they, as a party, when they get into government, would be transparent and accountable. We know that that is far from the truth. They are not transparent and they have not been accountable to the people of this country. What are they really trying to hide?

On May 30, I read an article by the previous Governor of the Central Bank, Mr. Ewart Williams, and he projected a grim forecast for the economic growth in 2012. The *Central Bank's Economic Bulletin* for July 2012 also states that growth in the domestic economy was flat, sluggish and that we were in a technical recession and that is what the Minister of Finance and the Economy needs to come here and tell us. Give us the true reality of where the economy is today.

Mr. Speaker, the information that we received from the previous Central Bank Governor is the most credible compared to what the Government has presented to us over the last few days. The presentation of the budget by the Minister of Finance and the Economy has posed, as I have said, many, many, many, many questions than answers for the citizens of this country. It is yet another example of a very vague, very quiz-type, fill-in-the-blanks-type of budget. We are asked, as citizens of this country, to fill in the blanks because they have not presented to us the information.

The Minister of Finance and the Economy told us that they have room to pursue a policy for stimulating the economy and further stated that this does not

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mean that they would tolerate extravagant spending. I just want to repeat that. He said that this does not mean—they have a policy to stimulate the economy—that they will tolerate extravagant spending. I laughed when I heard that because, under the UNC-A Government, they have demonstrated to the country that they like extravagant spending. They love it.

3.40 p.m.

Let me provide you with some of the examples of extravagant spending: \$12 million trip to India, just over \$860,000 for the Prime Minister's sister to accompany her on 11 trips across the globe. Mr. Speaker, over \$1 million a month for Ministers to travel overseas, gaining frequent flyer miles—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Jeffrey: Whooooo!

Miss A. Hospedales:—going all over the world. Over \$400,000 was spent by a Minister to buy a vehicle—“ah Ministry vehicle eh, ah Porsche”—for him to drive around in. Over \$35 million was spent for the Independence Day celebration.

Mr. Jeffrey: Ohhhhhh! Whey!

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Fete, after fete, after fete.

Miss A. Hospedales: Thirty-five million dollars, that is just extravagant spending; \$50 million for the Queen's Park Savannah stands.

Mr. Jeffrey: Wow!

Miss A. Hospedales: Fifty million dollars and, Mr. Speaker, apart from that, over \$308.8 million cost overruns in the south National Academy for the Performing Arts. This is the extravagant spending he said they will not tolerate. This list can go on and on. Millions of dollars of taxpayers' money being spent by this Government, and they must not account for it? They pretend that they must not account for it.

Members of the Government continue to behave as though the people of this country are not listening; they have listened and they continue to listen. They listened to the budget statement and they will continue to listen to you all. The Minister of Finance and the Economy told the members of the population—so they were listening—that they would have to pay property taxes, more on fuel, and will eventually have to pay more on other taxes, because there will be an overview of the general tax system. What he failed to tell them was why he did not cut the allocation for the Government's spending in terms of frequent frolics,

freebies, their fetes and the events? Why did he not cut the allocation for that? Why was there not a cut in allocation for the Government's overseas travel? Remember, I said before, \$27 million, \$1 million a month, official entertainment, hosting of events and their publicity machinery.

Mr. Speaker, the Government intends to spend the following in the next fiscal year for overseas travel alone, over \$40 million; overseas travel alone. For official entertainment, over \$6 million [*sic*]; hosting of events, over 74 million; that is what they plan to spend. Publicity machinery: over \$1.3 billion on publicity, [*Crosstalk and interruption*] that is for the Government. The Government intends to spend that, so I will break it down just now, right? I will break it down.

Mr. Jeffrey: Yes! Yes!

Miss A. Hospedales: The Member for Tabaquite said, where is the Government going with all this spending? And I would like to ask him, yes, where is the Government going with all this spending? Over \$1.3 billion. The Member for St. Augustine was saying 400-and-something-million can build a hospital. I am saying over \$1.3 billion that they are using for their publicity machinery can build a hospital for Point Fortin.

Mr. Jeffrey: Yes! Yes!

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Precisely!

Miss A. Hospedales: Right? So, not just thousands of dollars have been spent, or they intend to spend, not just thousands of dollars, but a billion and over. These figures are only for the Ministries and do not include the statutory boards and authorities, and also the special purpose companies. So, if I had to add those figures on to those figures, it will just escalate even further. So, I am asking, is this what they said that they are not going to tolerate—the extravagant spending? It is really laughable. Can you imagine how much more money would be spent if the Government allocated—or if I had to add up as I indicated before, money allocated to the statutory boards, et cetera?

Mr. Speaker, let me just provide you with a breakdown, and I am giving them first, second and third place winners in different categories. [*Laughter*] In the category of frequent flyers, in first place is the Office of the Prime Minister [*Desk thumping*] over \$6 million. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Jeffrey: Whooooo! [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: What? What?

Miss A. Hospedales: In the category of frequent flyers, first place goes to the Office of the Prime Minister, over \$6 million. [*Desk thumping*] In second place,

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we have the Ministry of Foreign Affairs [*Desk thumping*] over \$6 million, a few thousand dollars less than what the Office of the Prime Minister got.

Mr. Jeffrey: Wow!

Miss A. Hospedales: Then, in third place, we have the Ministry of National Security, with over \$5 million. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Jeffrey: Whooooo! [*Crosstalk and interruption*]

Hon. Member: “Doh forget the Minister of National Security.”

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: “Not de Minister, he cyar get it.”

Miss A. Hospedales: Mr. Speaker, for official entertainment, the first place winner is the Office of the Prime Minister, \$3 million. [*Desk thumping*] Then in second place, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Jeffrey: Wow!

Miss A. Hospedales:—with over \$2 million. This is what they would be spending, in fiscal 2013. In third place, we have the Ministry of Education, with over \$2 million.

Mr. Jeffrey: Whooooo! [*Desk thumping*]

Miss A. Hospedales: For hosting events, we have first place, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs, over \$5 million, [*Crosstalk*] to host events, that is the fetes, the freebies and the frolics, you know. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, in the second place we have the Ministry of Education, over \$4 million. In third place, we have the Ministry of Trade and Industry, over \$4 million again just short of a few thousand dollars. Publicity machinery, oh my God, Mr. Speaker, “ah have to stop for dis one and—leh meh take ah drink for this one.” [*Miss Hospedales drinks water from a glass*] [*Laughter and crosstalk*] It is water. For publicity, in first place, the Ministry of Tourism with over \$70 million.

Mr. Jeffrey: Oh! Woi! [*Desk thumping*]

Miss A. Hospedales: I could not believe this one, over \$70 million, [*Crosstalk and interruption*] in publicity.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: That is more than the whole Ministry of National Diversity and Social Integration. [*Laughter*]

Miss A. Hospedales: That is right.

Mr. Jeffrey: “Whey!”

Miss A. Hospedales: Over \$70 million! In second place, we had the Ministry of Health, over \$11 million, and in third place, the Ministry of National Security again, winning two races, over \$8 million. Mr. Speaker, this is the orgy of expenditure that the Member for St. Augustine was talking about, this is the orgy of expenditure. [*Desk thumping, laughter and crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: Unparliamentary language. [*Laughter*]

Miss A. Hospedales: The Minister of Finance and the Economy's statement that they will not tolerate extravagant spending is false and misleading, again, and when the Government should be taking the lead in cutting down their allocations on wasteful—and ceasing wasteful spending, they have been crowned with the biggest budget for fete, fun and personal pleasure.

You know, the Member for Tabagite, again, I have to make reference to him, he said the budget is a gateway for spending opportunities. This is a demonstration that the budget—that is how they view it, the budget is a gateway for spending opportunities for them. I call on the Government to stop their frequent flights, stop gaining frequent flyer miles, limit your entertainment, frolics, fetes, freebies and cut your propaganda vote. I encourage them to cut back, so that at the end of the day they will be setting an example for the people of this country.

I just remembered something, while talking about that. I encourage them to get ready, pack your bags, because “just now yuh going out of office.” [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: Yea! Yea!

Miss A. Hospedales: No, no, it is a reality. [*Laughter and interruption*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Leaving, but not on a jet plane. [*Crosstalk*]

Miss A. Hospedales: Mr. Speaker, I seek your protection.

Hon. Member: Protection from me? [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

Miss A. Hospedales: This is biggest budget ever, over \$58.49 billion with a deficit \$7.669 billion, but the Minister of Finance and the Economy failed to tell us where the country's revenue will come from. I will talk a little about that later on, about some revenue generation measures—a revenue generation measure that we discovered today. What systems are in place to ensure that the country acquires the projected 1.2 per cent growth that they have been talking about?

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Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance and the Economy came and told us that they are going to implement the land and building tax, bringing back property tax. He did not tell us exactly when they propose—is it going to be in the next month? In the next two months? In the next year?

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: We do not know.

Miss A. Hospedales: The citizens of this country need some measure of predictability, and I think he needs to let people know exactly when they propose to re-implement the property tax.

Can the Minister define for us what he means by: the local fashion industry? He said that they are giving so many incentives to the local fashion industry, but really, how do you define it? Are there set boundaries? Exactly what does he mean? What industries make up the local fashion industry? How wide are they willing to go? Or how narrow are they going to remain?

What tax incentives will be offered to the international financial centre investors? They say that are going to encourage people to come in and invest. We have not heard anything about what are some of the incentives that they are going to be offering.

With reference to the reduction of VAT on food items, how does the Minister determine what is a basic food? He never told us. They gave us a list of foods and he has not provided us with their understanding of what a basic food is, because what we are seeing is that things like olives and capers, so many other—jams, jellies and all of these things—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Pancake syrup, pancake mix, phoulorie mix.

Miss A. Hospedales:—have gotten on to the list, right? So I really want him to indicate how he defines basic food, because I am sure if he had consulted with the staff of the targeted conditional cash transfer programme of the Ministry of the People and Social Development, he would have been provided with a list of basic items that their clients normally use, and they would have been able to make further recommendations in terms of basic food items that will be beneficial to their clients, and will cause them to eat a balanced diet.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister needs to also tell us who would be benefiting from the reduction of VAT. He also needs to tell us how much it will cost the Government. I saw an article in the newspapers where the Minister of Trade and Industry was stating that the reduction of VAT on basic foods will actually cost the Government \$400 million. We are tired of the projections, the guessing games.

We want to know exactly how much it would cost. We want concrete figures that are grounded in facts as well. How long will the removal of VAT remain off the selected food items? We have not been told. Is it going to be a month, two months, six months, a year, two years? How long is it going to remain off? So, again, we are left guessing, trying to fill in the blanks.

I am looking forward to the responses that the Minister of Finance and the Economy will give to the questions that we have asked, not just the ones that I am asking, but also all my colleagues on this side, all the questions that they would have asked.

There are other critical areas that the budget did not bring relief in and they are as follows: what will be done to address the serious declines that have been taking place in the agricultural sector?

3.55 p.m.

I was able to compare the current statistics from last year to this year and the year before, from 2009 to 2010 and, Mr. Speaker, I just want to refer to the report on the *Review of the Economy*. In 2012, it said that the agricultural sector is expected to contract by a further 4.9 per cent. So, it contracted before and it is expected to contract further. Data from the National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation (NAMDEVCO) show a substantial drop in the availability of most vegetable crops at the northern wholesale market during the first quarter of 2012. So there has been a significant decline in some of the crops.

The report on agriculture in the *Review of the Economy 2012* further states that there have been significant decreases in vegetable production for the period 2011—2012, when compared to the period October 2009 to March 2010.

Mr. Speaker, for the production of bodi, during the period October 2011 to March 2012, there was a 0.7 per cent decrease, but when you look at the period October 2009 to March 2010, there was a 171.5 per cent increase. For ochro, there was a 10.10 per cent decrease during the period October 2011 to March 2012; but in October 2009 to March 2010, there was 79.5 per cent increase in ochro. For sorrel, there was an 89 per cent decrease during the October 2011 to March 2012 period; but in October 2009 to March 2010, there was a 226.0 per cent increase under the People's National Movement. For cucumber, there was a 42.2 per cent decrease during the period October 2011 to March 2012; but during the period October 2009 to March 2010, there was a 60 per cent increase under the People's National Movement.

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This list can go on and on, but with all these declines taking place and with a significant increase in the food import bill, it is evident that the Government's food security programme—I read in their mid-term policy framework, it says that they are going to put Trinidad and Tobago on the table but, Mr. Speaker, this is far from the truth because in the newspaper we have the Minister of Food Production saying to the country that it is cheaper to import food for so many other reasons.

I wonder if this was to support their new proposal to fund the establishment of several mega farms—"several", they did not say one mega farm; they said "several" mega farms in Guyana. So they are telling us that they are going to reduce their food import bill by 50 per cent, yet they are establishing mega farms in another country. Is that not going to increase the food import bill? That is so contradictory and I agree, Member for La Brea, you cannot trust them. They cannot be trusted.

Who are they really trying to fool? They think that the people of Trinidad and Tobago are thoughtless, mindless and lacking in intelligence. That is what they think and that is far from the truth. [*Desk thumping*] The people of this country are very intelligent and they are listening to you. It is quite evident that the UNC-A Government does not have a comprehensive plan for the agricultural sector despite what they say. They do not have a comprehensive plan for the sector; for none of the sectors, as a matter of fact.

Where are the mega farms? We had proposed, under the People's National Movement, to establish several mega farms. Where is the Agriculture Ranger Squad, previously called the Praedial Larceny Unit under the People's National Movement? Where is it? They have disbanded it. Where is it? [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for La Brea, I would like to hear the hon. Member, but your constant interruption is disturbing me and, of course, disturbing the Hansard reporter. So could you allow the Member for Arouca/Maloney to speak in silence, please! I come to her protection. Continue, hon. Member!

Miss A. Hospedales: Mr. Speaker, I would also like to ask them, where are their plans for the development of the agri-business sector? Where are their plans? They have failed the agricultural sector. A senior person, an expert in the agricultural sector, stated that they have failed them. I will talk about it later on.

They have failed in their plans—even before the plans have been implemented—to reduce the food import bill by 50 per cent. Another area of

concern that I want to talk about: you know, the Member for Tabaquite stood and boasted about the Unemployment Relief Programme. I have so many concerns about this programme. Let me tell you why.

For the fiscal period 2012, \$452 million was spent in the URP, Unemployment Relief Programme, and the Member for Tabaquite stood and said it was 300 and something million dollars. In their budget document, it is \$452 million. Fifty-nine core projects, they said, were done; 31 self-help projects and 51 beautification projects plus 121 rivers and ravines, they said, were dredged.

Mr. Speaker, I have to ask the Member for Tabaquite: where were these projects done? I can tell you, in the constituency of Arouca/Maloney, when the People's National Movement was in office, there were 17 work teams under the Unemployment Relief Programme, and they did work. They were doing beautification, construction and sanitation. There are 28 of these groups now in the constituency of Arouca/Maloney and none of them can be found. They are not doing anything in the constituency.

People are actually being paid to stay home. I have information that even a 70-year-old granny receives a cheque every month from the Unemployment Relief Programme. These are ghost gangs and I am saying that the police need to investigate the Unemployment Relief Programme because there is a lot of fraud taking place in that programme. [*Desk thumping*] Right now, I agree it needs to be restructured, but the first thing that needs to be done is that those people who are rostered for work need to be asked to report for work and ensure that they work. They cannot be receiving a salary for doing nothing and many of us on this side can say that.

In our constituencies, the work teams are there but they are not visible. They are not doing anything. The people are not working; they are receiving cheques for doing nothing and that is a major concern of all the Members of Parliament on this side.

If we were to minus the amount of money being paid to all these workers from the amount of money allocated and we also were to put aside some money for the project, it would never have cost \$452 million. There has to be a comprehensive review of the Unemployment Relief Programme and they need to ensure that people work.

Mr. Speaker, one other thing I want to highlight about the Unemployment Relief Programme. The Minister boasted that the mothers of children who have cerebral palsy are being employed with the Unemployment Relief Programme,

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but how sustainable is this? When someone works three, four or five times for the year, when they get on to one cycle, they would have to break them; they remain home; they have to wait a whole month before they get their pay in order to purchase things to take care of themselves and their children. How sustainable is this? I would not even boast about something like that because it really does not make sense to those mothers. The Member for Tabaquite said this is how they treat the people of this country and I am asking: is this how you treat mothers with special children?

The other thing I want to highlight is that, in the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme 2013*, under Head 39, Ministry of Public Utilities, Item 51, the Government has indicated that \$6 million was allocated for additional transmission infrastructure. This transmission infrastructure, they said, will be built to move power from Union Estate. The Member for La Brea made reference to it. They are moving power from Union Estate into the national grid and the power they are going to move was intended for the aluminium smelter and for other industrial work in the Union Estate.

The removal of the power from the Union Estate marks the closure of any industrial development in La Brea on the western peninsula. [*Desk thumping*] I want to ask the Minister of Finance and the Economy: was not the south-west peninsula identified as a growth pole? Based on this information, no development is going to take place in that area; none whatsoever.

I would like to ask the Government or the Minister of Finance and the Economy to tell us where is the need for power in the national grid? They are saying that they are going to take over 400 megawatts of power from Union Estate and put it in the national grid. Where is the need for that power? How long will it take for the power to be moved? Who is going to pay for the power in the meantime? He needs to let us know that. How much will it cost T&TEC, the Government and the taxpayers of this country? How much is it going to cost and will this have an implication on the rate of electricity? Will we have to pay more for electricity? The Minister of Finance and the Economy needs to tell us because somebody has to pay for it and we need to know whether or not we will have to pay for the electricity and how much will our electricity bills go up by?

I would also like the Minister of Finance and the Economy to tell us what they have planned for the future of TTPost. I understand TTPost is struggling on a month-to-month basis. They are unable to pay their staff and meet their financial commitments. What is happening with TTPost? Can the Minister of Finance and the Economy tell us whether or not the employees at TTPost will be retrenched?

Is there going to be a cut in the number of staff? Just imagine, they are struggling to make staff payments and to commit to other payments on a monthly basis. What is really happening at TTPost? Will these workers be eventually sent home? You need to come straight with the people because you are dealing with people's well-being, their lives.

The Minister of Finance and the Economy also needs to tell us why the non-taxable special allowance is not going to be paid to the municipal police? As far as I am advised, approximately two months ago the municipal police met with the Minister of National Security and the Minister of Local Government, the Member for Tabaquite, and they made commitments to them that they will receive the non-taxable special allowance; but on Monday, October 01, the Minister of Finance and the Economy announced that SRPs will receive the non-taxable special allowance of \$1,000, but there was no mention of the municipal police.

I am happy that the SRPs received it because, in consultation with the SRPs of the northern division, they had made a request and it was forwarded to the Minister of National Security. I am happy they would have responded favourably to them, but a commitment was made to the municipal police.

4.10 p.m.

A commitment was made to them. Mr. Speaker, a commitment was made to the municipal police. They were also told that they will go forward to seek the Cabinet's approval, et cetera, et cetera. They were giving them assurances that they will receive the allowance.

Mr. Speaker, when these members heard that they were not receiving the non-taxable special allowance they were all disappointed, and they wondered whether or not they can really trust the Government. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: And they abandoned their job!

Miss A. Hospedales: Mr. Speaker, I received a press release that was issued by the municipal police officers. It says:

Municipal police officers are entitled to fair and equal treatment under the law. Disgruntled officers not in receipt of \$1,000 allowance, they continue to be sidelined.

Mr. Speaker, they made reference to several meetings. Not just that one meeting held over the last two months—several meetings held with the Minister of National Security, with the Minister of Local Government who gave constant assurances to them that they will receive the allowance.

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These members work alongside the SRPs and members of the police service. All of them basically possess the same qualifications, undergo the same training, wear the same uniform; the only difference is that the shoulder titles are actually missing. They are exposed to the same risks—[*Interruption*]

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

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

Miss A. Hospedales: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, the municipal police officers are exposed to the same risks and liabilities as SRP officers, as well as ordinary police officers. Apart from that, they also highlighted the fact that an attorney at law working under the municipal corporation only gets \$375, when compared to an attorney at law who works within the Trinidad and Tobago police service, who gets \$3,000 plus other perks.

What they are really asking is that they be treated fairly and equitably; that the same allowance that is given to the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service officers and the SRPs, that they also benefit from that as well.

Mr. Indarsingh: Break and queue!

Miss A. Hospedales: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Local Government talked about the hiring of 45 more municipal police officers. You know, that is a good thing in terms of bringing on additional staff, but when you give assurances to people who fall under your purview it is very important that you try your best to fulfil those assurances that have been given.

The Minister of Finance and the Economy indicated that no—I would like the Minister of Finance and the Economy to really reconsider, sit with his colleagues and reconsider this need or request by the municipal police to receive the non-taxable special allowance. As well, the Member for St. Augustine in his contribution, he said that—and I will quote:

We as a Government, have to ensure that all these people are given a better wage. Are we to tell our brothers who are in need, no? Mr. Speaker—it is for their betterment, their wives and their children.

I am saying on behalf of the municipal police officers that this increase that they are asking for, as the Member for St. Augustine said, is for their betterment—the betterment of their lives, their wives and their children. In cases where there are women—the betterment of their lives, their husbands and their children.

I would really like the Minister of Finance and the Economy to take a second look at that, reconsider and try his best to fulfil the assurances that would have been given by his colleagues, both the Minister of Local Government and Minister of National Security. The Minister of Finance and the Economy told us that alleviating the incidence of poverty is at the heart of their socio-economic agenda.

Despite job growth, Mr. Speaker—he continues to say that, despite growth and the decreasing levels of poverty, 16.7 per cent is deemed to be poor and living under the poverty line. A further 0.9 is deemed to be vulnerable. I would like to ask the Minister of Finance and the Economy, could you tell us how you arrived at these figures? Because, the reality—I remembered the Member for La Brea making reference to Vincent Cabrera stating that that is not the reality. Those figures are not the reality.

Mr. Speaker, I would like him to tell us exactly where they got the information from. Again, it is probably a manipulation of the figures again—going up, going down to suit their own fancy. The reality is that thousands of people have been unemployed under the UNC Government. Those who were contracted, their contracts were removed or taken away even before the contracts came to an end. Those who came to the end of their contract were not given a renewal.

Hon. Member: Vicious attack!

Miss A. Hospedales: If they are still there, it is on a month-to-month basis. So, there are thousands of people whose lives have been affected. They are unable to meet basic food needs for their families; unable. They should know because this thing called the “temporary food card”, a lot of people have to rely on that because they have no food to put on their tables to feed their children. [*Desk thumping*] So how can you say that poverty levels have decreased? The reality is there has been an increase in poverty levels, probably ranging around 20/25 per cent. That is the reality.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, the unemployment figure as well is probably double digits because if you have no work, you have no money to buy the things that you need and what happens eventually is that the person either begins living on the poverty line or below the poverty line. That is the reality of a lot of people in this country right now. They have no work—as a result, no pay, and they are unable to meet the basic needs of their families. [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Under the People’s Partnership!

Miss A. Hospedales: Yes! Under the UNC-A Government. The number of persons unable to produce food for their families has increased significantly. I am not sure where exactly the Government goes to shop or whether or not they go into the areas in a constituency where people complain. I have had many scenarios where people are actually working to pay their rent.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Yep!

Miss A. Hospedales: They are just working to pay their rent. They cannot send their children to school.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Not even that!

Miss A. Hospedales: They cannot buy food, they cannot recreate. [*Crosstalk*] They are just working to pay their rent. That is the reality of many people in Trinidad and Tobago. So when you say poverty levels have decreased, that figure is unrealistic.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Arouca/Maloney—that back bench comprising of the Member for Couva South coming down, please, I am hearing you distinctly, and you are disturbing the Member who is making a contribution. Kindly allow the Member to speak in silence. Continue hon. Member.

Miss A. Hospedales: Mr. Speaker, the previous Minister of Finance and the current Minister of Finance and the Economy said they have lost credibility because they have not been able to present us with the real picture of the economy with respect to poverty, with respect to unemployment; they have not presented to us the real picture.

Hon. Member: “Yuh lookin pretty!”

Miss A. Hospedales: Let me tell you a little about their poverty reduction strategy. One of their strategies for poverty reduction is called Direct Impact. The Member for Caroni Central thumps his chest and boasts that this programme is working so well. “You know what I call that programme? It is not Direct Impact you know, it is pound the pavement because, you know, what is happening? The only achievement that the Member for Caroni Central has received is working miles.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: People’s lives have not improved.

Miss A. Hospedales: That is the only achievement because the lives of people remain unchanged, their problems have not been resolved, and many of them, hundreds have not even gotten feedback from the Ministry of the People and Social Development. Their needs continue to go unmet. That is why I say, it is pound the pavement, “is not any direct impact”—direct impact to the media.

Mr. Jeffrey: To the media!

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Yes, media!

Miss A. Hospedales: Yes, direct impact to the media, not to the lives of the people of this country. Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask them how they measure the reduction in poverty—by the number of hampers that you distribute? The Member for Caroni Central goes out there and distributes hampers. What? A hamper a year results in poverty reduction? That is the most ludicrous thing I have ever heard before. A hamper a year results in poverty reduction.

That is what he does. He goes out there, distributes a hamper and then makes a record of it and says we have reduced poverty by 2 per cent a year. So, every year distribute, you know—it is just not adding up, Mr. Speaker. That is not a poverty reduction strategy.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: It's a sham.

Miss A. Hospedales: That programme is “vaille-que-vaille”. It just deserves to be scrapped entirely.

Hon. Member: No hampers for people now?

Miss A. Hospedales: In the *Social Sector Investment Programme* report—“leh meh tell yuh” what happened as well, Mr. Speaker, even the recording of the programme lacks credibility. In the report on the social sector investment programme for 2012 they said that they visited Maloney between the period October 2011 to April 2012. Mr. Speaker, the Member—they do not record, because, if they were recording, if that programme had structure, they would have known they visited Maloney on July 19, 2011. Why do I know? Mr. Speaker, I remember that day. People were so disgusted, they were so upset, they just did not want to see the Minister because you know, they said that he ran through the community. He was walking so fast, disabled people and the elderly came to speak with him, he said he could not wait, he had to continue. [*Laughter*] He disregarded the people so “ah cyah forget dat day”, and I even have a recording on my cell phone of a member of the community who expressed his disgust. A “vaille-que-vaille” programme, with no structure whatsoever.

Hon. Member: Put it on YouTube!

Miss A. Hospedales: Yeah, I can do that—with no structure whatsoever. One other thing I want to ask the Government. Where do they intend to get revenue to support their social programmes such as the failed Direct Impact programme and the many freebies that they are giving out?

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I am asking this because earlier on it was brought to our attention that Lotto/Scratch tickets are being sold at an NLCB Lotto booth on Cor. Rosalino Street and Tragarete Road. You know what the Lotto/Scratch ticket has on it? Mr. Speaker, these are the two tickets—[*Member holds up tickets*] one says red hot win, and the other one crowns [*Inaudible*] It is Lotto/Scratch tickets, but at the bottom of these tickets is marked proceeds to social programmes. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, proceeds, “yuh know”. [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Scandalous!

Miss A. Hospedales: The both of them. One, the crowns [*Inaudible*] of band has proceeds to social programmes at the top, and the red hot win has proceeds to social programmes on the bottom.

4.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Government, when was this approved? Who approved this? Was this approved by the Cabinet? Why was the Parliament or the country not informed about this measure? All proceeds go—on a Lotto/Scratch ticket—to the social programmes. This is just another example of section 34. Who provides oversight?

I would like to know who provides oversight for the money when the money is collected. There are so many questions about this. I am really appalled. Lotto/Scratch tickets, all proceeds—well “proceeds”, not all proceeds—go to social programmes. Is this your revenue generation measure for the social programmes? The Government needs to answer and they need to let us know about this revenue generation measure that they have in place. They need to tell us more about it.

Another area I want to highlight is the issue of the removal of the homeless. The reason I am highlighting this is, there is an incident that just cannot go out of my mind. On May 31 this year, I got a call. I was just about to leave home to head into Port of Spain to submit my Integrity Commission forms, when a friend of mine called me and said that they need help for a homeless man who was knocked down the day before.

She said to me when they saw him cars were just passing by. She and some members of staff at the Intercommercial Bank took him and put him on the pavement, directly at the back of the bank on the opposite side, on the pavement. They called the EHS; they called the Ministry of the People and Social Development—no answer. They called the Ministry of Health—no answer.

What happened is that the EHS eventually came, and because the homeless man had defecated himself, they left him there. So when she called me he had spent the night there. He was drenched by the rain and was unable to move because he had injured his foot, and there was no way that he would have been able to move to get attention from any medical doctor or so.

Mr. Speaker, what happened was I called the Social Displacement Unit and they said they could not do anything, and because I continued and said that this man is a human being, he is not an animal, somebody needs to do something, eventually two field officers were sent.

Mr. Speaker, the EHS eventually came and, again, because the man defecated himself, they hem and hawed but, again, I had to implore with them that this is a human being, he is not an animal, we need to get him out of here; get him to the hospital. Mr. Speaker, myself, a lady who came from the Auditor General's Department and the two EHS workers—we put on gloves on and lifted him up and put him onto the stretcher—

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: That is caring!

Miss Hospedales:—and put him in the ambulance because that man is a human being.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: That is caring!

Miss Hospedales: He is not an animal.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Hands-on caring!

Miss A. Hospedales: He even has a name. He told us his name, as well as he told us that he was not knocked down, but he fell from a scaffolding and injured his leg and, as a result, he could not walk. So, all the while we had to be there reassuring him, comforting him, talking with him and trying to ensure that he was taken away from where he was lying on the pavement for almost 24 hours to the hospital to receive attention. The State has a responsibility to look after these people. [*Desk thumping*] They have a responsibility. He is just one example of so many other homeless people that have been left to die by the Government on the street.

Mr. Speaker, there are still good people in Trinidad and Tobago: the staff from the Intercommercial Bank, the lady from the Auditor General's Department and the EHS workers, all of us worked to ensure that this gentleman was helped.

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I would also like to just briefly highlight and indicate to the Government that it needs to do more. When I looked at what they had done for 2012 for the homeless persons, it amounts to very little. They really need to do more for these people. These people are people with names who come from families. Yes, they may have fallen out from the system, but they need to be assisted to get back on their feet.

I just want to take a little time to highlight some issues regarding the Arouca/Maloney constituency. During the budget presentation on October 01, 2012 by the Minister of Finance and the Economy, the Minister re-announced the construction of four High Courts in Trincity and three other areas. I am convinced that the Minister's statement was a copy and paste exercise. If he was aware of the—it was not a consultation, it was an information session that was held in the Trincity area—the residents and myself were invited by the Minister and the Ministry of Justice staff to come to this “consultation”, because when we went there we were informed that the court was going to be constructed; the request for proposals went out. We were also informed of the design of the building and all the things that would be placed within the building, like the services offered and so on.

They did not consult with us, and both myself and the residents of Trincity rejected the idea of the construction of any courts in Trincity. We are saying to the Government, we do not want any courts there. We are saying no to you. A lot of the residents passionately expressed their concerns as to the reasons they do not want the court there.

The previous Minister of Justice was privy to the concerns, plus a follow-up note was sent to him outlining all that was discussed during the information session, as well as indicating to him that, as agreed, the court should be placed elsewhere, there were alternatives provided by the residents as to where exactly they think the court can be relocated. It is important that the current Minister of Finance and the Economy and his colleagues take that into consideration. We do not want the High Courts in Trincity; build an ECCE centre.

The Ministry of Education has been struggling for the longest while to acquire land in the Trincity area for the construction of an ECCE centre. We say build an ECCE centre. I had spoken to the Minister of Health about the construction of a health centre for Trincity. We say build a health centre. We are also saying to build the multipurpose centre because, again, the Ministry of Community

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Development has been struggling to acquire land. In the Trincity area, we say build a community centre for the residents of Trincity. [*Desk thumping*] We do not want a court. I am just making sure and stating, again, we do not want a court.

There have been some problems in the constituency with respect to drainage, and the issue of flooding. I want to indicate that I looked at the Public Sector Investment Programme for upgrade of water channels, rivers and ravines, et cetera, and I did not see “not one” river in Arouca/Maloney mentioned. Some of the water channels they have mentioned are in San Juan, Mausica, Arima, Cascade, St. Ann’s, La Quesa, Tacarigua and Tunapuna rivers and the Blackman ravine. It is quite amazing also that no river or ravine was mentioned in the Arouca/Maloney constituency; and none was mentioned for Diego Martin and Maraval which experienced severe flooding recently.

I wrote to the previous Minister of Works and Infrastructure indicating to him that the river just above Bacaday Junction needed to be desilted because the river had risen in terms of the mud and stones, et cetera, coming down, and it needed to be desilted, especially to protect the community of Nicholas Gardens, since 2010. Up to today, that river has not been desilted by the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure. I rewrote the letter making a request to the current Minister of Works and Infrastructure, and I am hoping that he eventually responds to that.

After lobbying for extensive drainage work to be done in the Trincity area, we are finally able to get some drainage work done between the communities of Dinsley and Casselton. Mr. Speaker, a catchment pond is also being built because that area has significant flooding, particularly in the Dinsley as well as Beaulieu areas. So, I am thankful for the fact that that has been done.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to make one recommendation that the Government considers doing a proper drainage study in the entire Arouca area, and also address some of the drainage needs in Lopinot/Bon Air West. Lopinot/Bon Air West is my neighbouring constituency. They are facing north—[*Interruption*] Yes, I must talk for him. The thing is, the poor drainage in his area affects Arouca/Maloney and causes flooding in my area, so I must ask for him. [*Desk thumping*] So, I am hoping that they take their time and do a comprehensive drainage study. I am sure the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West would agree with me. In doing that comprehensive drainage study do some extensive drainage work and upgrade the poor drainage that is taking place right now, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, additionally, the report in the *Public Sector Investment Programme* listed all recreational grounds that would be upgraded, particularly

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those under the purview under the regional corporations—13 recreational grounds under the purview of the regional corporations which have been identified, but all of them belong to the Members of the Government.

We have Aranguéz Recreation Ground, Aranguéz; Postman Drive, Chaguanas; Grande Riviere, Sangre Grande; Mount D'or, St. Joseph; Knowles Street, Curepe; George Village, Tableland; Galaxy Gardens, Boys Lane, D'Abadie; Michelle Samaroo, Carapo; Lilee Trace, Siparia; Three Roads, Caroni; and Sapatay, Caroni.

Hon. Member: What?

Miss A. Hospedales: Mr. Speaker, not one recreational ground under the regional corporations for PNM constituencies has been listed. Not one! They want to talk about equitable distribution. I also took a look at the community centres listed under the Ministry of Community Development, and only two out of 10 have been listed for community centres in constituencies on this side. None has been mentioned for the constituency of Arouca/Maloney. I am wondering if the residents of Arouca/Maloney are being chastised for voting for the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*] I have to ask that question.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to ask the Minister of Education to visit the Arouca Government Primary School and the Bon Air Government Primary School because they are in dire need of infrastructural work. The Arouca Government Primary School is 100 years old, and the school is overcrowded. It was built for a capacity of 450 students and it has over 600 children and, as a result of that, they are in need of a new building to be reconstructed. They are requesting a two-storey building with science, music, reading rooms, pan storage rooms, a multipurpose hall and a cafeteria.

Mr. Speaker, even though I sent correspondence to the Education Facilities Company Limited, I have not received any responses for this particular school. The Bon Air Government Primary School was reconstructed last year, but it is riddled with problems: termite-ridden furniture; the floor was never tiled—it was painted and as a result the concrete dust affects the children and staff with sinus and asthma problems. Mr. Speaker, there is also need for a staff room to be constructed, proper toilet facilities and the outfitting of a science room plus a multipurpose hall.

4.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, in closing I would just like to say that the Minister of Finance and the Economy should be ashamed to raise his head after this budget because it is riddled with falsehood, pretence and deception. He should be reminded of

what people had to say about the budget this year. Mr. Speaker, in closing, people had this to say: The PP Government cannot be trusted to keep a single word; I am certain that an examination of their past budgets will show many promises, little action; the budget means nothing for the PP, but an opportunity for politicking. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, someone else said the budget was disappointing, nothing tangible for the farming sector. It is an off-balanced budget, a continuation of last year's budget, too vague, too disappointing. The budget is a package without a plan. The budget is just another "cut and paste exercise", as I said earlier, with the extent of making members of the population pay for the Government's extravagant spending.

Hon. Member: Oh God!

Miss A. Hospedales: Yes, spending on their frolics, their fetes, their floats and their freebies. Mr. Speaker, this budget is a failed budget, by a failed government who failed to implement. The Member for St. Augustine, he said this, and I just want to close by saying to the Member for St. Augustine and the Members of the Government, you will all be judged, not just for what you say but for what you do. Mr. Speaker, I thank you. [*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 very important debate. It is with great humility and utmost deference to this honourable Chamber that I rise to do so, this afternoon. I will respond to some of the statements made by the Member for Arouca/Maloney, but I will not want to waste too much of my time since I want to make a constructive contribution to this debate on this matter. I think that the Member for Arouca/Maloney started off well.

Hon. Member: Really?

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: Yes. She said that they are mindless, thoughtless, have no intelligence, no principles, no value, and I thought that she describes the People's National Movement very well. [*Laughter*] She thinks that people are available to be bought. You have no dignity, no worth and no longer trust the Government, that is why they were voted out two years ago, and that is why the People's Partnership is here, today, running the country.

If you listened to the contributions of the MPs and Ministers across on this side, Mr. Speaker, this would have been a watershed lesson these couple of days

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in political science and government for first-class students across the world. [*Desk thumping*] Each Minister elicited the programmes and policies of their Ministry and “explashed” them to the national population so well. Government is no longer hiding, government is no longer on the run, there is a government of the people, a government of social integration, a government of national diversity, a government that is there for the people of Trinidad and Tobago—that they feel comfortable, that they can have a conversation, that they can have a voice and they can be listened to.

She went on to criticize the Member, and—you know, one would think an august Member of the financial community, like Minister, Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai, coming from the business community to help to drive the economy of Trinidad and Tobago from the Government, would have been treated with some sense of dignity and respect, but instead she went on to describe him in very, very, unkind terms and I will let her go with that. The people will judge the way that she has spoken, not only of hon. Minister Howai but also the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs, Winston Dookeran, who saved the economy of Trinidad and Tobago and she dare question his plans and policies—“From Steady Foundation to Economic Transformation”, words that he made true, that he brought to life.

How does that compare to the former Minister of Finance who, on a night before Old Year’s night, took her money from Clico, having pre-knowledge that it was a failing financial institution and using that to her own financial benefit? How does that compare? Not even informing her colleagues to save their own little cash, but pulling out hers and her mother’s at a time when the country was least suspecting, and you compare that type of leadership—a lady who wrote a book on ethics, but certainly did not pay attention to when she was writing it. She did not read it herself, apparently.

Does this Opposition want to tell us that they do not know that Clico cost this Government \$19 billion? And do they feel that they can fool us that when they put these high-rise buildings up in Port of Spain that it cost the country billions of dollars, that we of the People’s Partnership had to repay short-term loans? They put us in a position of debt and we had to rescue the country from the reckless. But I want to tell you something, you put up those high-rise buildings all over Port of Spain, you did not have a plan, but we now will put the foundations for those buildings. We will put emphasis on the people of Trinidad and Tobago and build from the bottom go up. Quoting from the former Governor of the Central Bank—well, I would not even bother. That is the same guy who

criticized your administration and ensured that your entire government was crippled by his reckless statements from time to time. And trying to find things, she criticizes our celebration of the 50th anniversary of this country.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: But of course, it was fete, after fete, after fete.

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: That we should not have expended funds in that activity. Well, let me tell you something. This Government is proud to be here, proud to be playing the role that it is—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Arouca/Maloney, Point Fortin, Members on this side of the House, I have to protect the Member for Caroni Central, he is not getting a chance to speak—he is being interrupted. You have my full protection, continue.

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I took copious notes while the Member was speaking, I did not want to interrupt her in the way that she is doing now. I am saying, you question that. This Government does not apologize for expending moneys to celebrate our history; that is part of the Ministry of National Diversity and Social Integration to reflect on the great past that we have had. Our heroes—the fact that we have two Olympic gold medallists in the country and one is of recent vintage, we are proud of that. And let me tell you something, “yuh doh become 50 twice in your life, you only become 50 once”, and we are proud to have the magnificent celebrations throughout the length and breadth of this country with our Olympic heroes and our Prime Minister, and the love of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I saw a young man in Tunapuna who had to be hoisted on a truck with Dr. Moonilal and Mr. Jack Warner, insisting that he play “ah hand” or two for them. A steel pan side blocked the bus because they wanted to do a song for the Ministers and the entourage that was following. That is national pride. That is creating intellectual space for development for the future of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. De Coteau: Partnering with the people.

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: You criticized \$27 million a year spending in overseas; you spent more than that.

Mr. Sharma: Much more.

Hon. Member: A hundred million.

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: How much?

Hon. Member: Three hundred and seventy-one million.

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: Three hundred and seventy-one million, and you are criticizing 27 million? Shame on you! Stand up and deny that you spent that amount of money on foreign travel. Stand up!

Hon. Member: Apologize! Apologize!

Mr. Hypolite: What period of time? [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: Apparently, the Member who spoke, you are answering too.

Mr. Speaker: Hold on Member for Caroni Central, please. Member for Point Fortin and also Arouca/Maloney—Arouca/Maloney, I gave you total protection, could you cooperate with the Speaker and allow the Member to speak in silence? This crosstalk is causing too much disturbance. So I am appealing to both the Members for Point Fortin and Arouca/Maloney. Continue hon. Member.

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me calm down a bit. I think that the temperature is heating up inside here a little bit, and I do not want to lose the facts and the logical train of our arguments. But they cannot deny it. We remember they were wasting the space in the newspapers, pulling out double pages upon double pages, Happy Teacher's Day—everything they celebrated under the sun. We were wondering where they were getting those calendars from because every day the Ministries—and what they were really doing? And there was a conspiracy at work that we are now being affected by. They were trying to buy the newspapers and the media of this country to promote themselves at the expense of the people, and they cannot compare the figures that we have spent against theirs.

In any case, she talks about ever extravagant spending. Imagine being part of the last administration and she will not admit that the Brian Lara Stadium was over budget by some \$1.3 billion. I mean, and you accuse this Government of extravagant spending. Then you go to publicity and you call it “publicity machinery” and you attack the poor Ministry of Tourism.

Your Member for Diego Martin North/East stood up in this Parliament and chastised the Government for not promoting Trinidad and Tobago all over the world, and for the fact that Jamaica is almost 10 times ahead of us in terms of promoting, and that Barbados is ahead, and what are we doing, and you come here in direct contradiction, stark contradiction to him, and attack the poor

Ministry of Tourism for trying to sell Trinidad and Tobago to the world so that we could depend less on the blessings of oil and gas and stimulate the non-oil sector of Trinidad and Tobago. Build a tourism product that will have Trinidad and Tobago out there in the global market space and create more economic opportunities for our manufacturers—that is what this debate is about and you criticize that.

Well, I want to tell you, some amount of PR is important, and I think you should practise a little more PR because I saw in the MP Monitor in the Sunday *Express* that large segments of the Arouca/Maloney constituency said that they do not know what you look like. [*Laughter*] So I think some amount of PR might be important in your local community.

Mr. Speaker, I find the Member tended to be sometimes very unladylike. She said, “Let me take ah drink fuh this”, an “orgy of expenditure”. Words that really leaned, you know, not very, very, formal contributions. Telling us to get ready, “pack up yuh bag and go”. We have to cut Members’ contribution here so that you all do not have to stay here for two weeks, and telling us to pack up our bags and go. Asking us where the revenue will come from after they know they frittered most of it away.

4.55 p.m.

Apparently they do not listen to very important contributions in the House.

Miss Hospedales: Tell us about the Lotto tickets.

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: I will tell you about the Lotto tickets. I do not know. The NLCB probably has social programmes that they contribute to and, yes, they do contribute to the Ministry of the People and Social Development, but on a project basis, by purchasing wheelchairs for poor people throughout Trinidad and Tobago, of which you as an MP get two and sometimes five from the Ministry at periods in time in the country. It is at your constituency office, and you could stand and deny that too. There seems to be a lot of denying at the time of budget debate; they seem to go into denial syndrome.

Mr. Speaker, maybe I should address you more often. [*Laughter*] With regard to the land and building tax, the Minister of Foreign Affairs explained that. You know what? You all need to be reasonable in your contributions so that people would really believe that you believe what you say. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, being all embracing, said “I know that if we say land and building tax there would be the impression out there that it is some kind—” He said, “Let me

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tell you that when you are creating a modern tax structure, the platform, you must have proper land and building taxes, so that the value of people's land, the worth of their house would be relevant to the financial circumstances in which they find themselves." And so I found it unfortunate. Well you attacked the agricultural sector.

We are no longer into only agriculture. We are about a Ministry of Food Production. [*Desk thumping*] We are on a journey that is a very trudging path, because the PNM consistently over the years spent less than 0.5 per cent of the budget on agriculture, on food and on making us less dependent on food imports. I have Members here who have the more deadly statistics for you.

What is most sad is that when we entered the Ministry of the People and Social Development, a group of persons—I always felt: why were they protesting? I always listened to them. The Member for Arouca/Maloney would have been part of that Ministry of Social Development. The mothers would bring their children in wheelchairs, in their arms, and they would be protesting on the Brian Lara Promenade, and they kept saying that government after government did not do anything for them.

I put a team together of Calvin James, Vijay Gangapersad and Inshan Mohammed. Mr. Barrington "Skippy" Thomas, a name they "doh" like to hear, was part of that team, because he was empathetic. I said, "We are going to sit here," and I moved like the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development. I said, "We are not going to move from here until—," and it took us eight and a half hours of discussion. After many meetings—but the final meeting—the URP programme was under Minister McLeod.

We approached him and we said that these ladies say they have to take care of this child 24/7. Some of them need to be fed intra-abdominally because they cannot swallow. Some of them need special preparations. The mother becomes a full-time nurse. She cannot step out of the house. She has to first leave the job she had because she has brought a child into the world. It is almost now like she has to pay a price for having this child, and she has no income. The father, in many instances might leave that mother, and she becomes alone having to feed this child, having no job.

We took these people and put them in a special training programme, a facility that existed before under the URP training programme, and gave them a respectable \$80 a day.

Miss Hospedales: Would the Member give way?

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: And the Member comes here and says, “How do you treat these mothers?” The former administration never did anything for the mothers of cerebral palsy children, and now they are talking.

Miss Hospedales: That is false.

Hon. Members: Shame!

Mr. Speaker: Member for Arouca/Maloney, that is disrespectful. It is disorderly. You either rise on a point of order, but you do not use your mike and speak into it whilst a Member is speaking. It is disorderly. Do not repeat that again.

Hon. Members, I think the time has come for us to pause. We will suspend for tea at this time. May I ask the Leader of Government Business and the Acting Chief Whip to get your Members together, so when we come back here at 5.30 we have a minimum of 12 Members to start our business again.

A trend is developing where when we come back here we do not have a quorum. I am not prepared to preside over that arrangement any longer. I want to appeal to the Leader of Government Business, and to your good self, to make sure your Members are back here, a minimum of 12, so we can start promptly at 5.30. This sitting is now suspended until 5.30.

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.30 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: Mr. Speaker, I really did not want to go from the Ministry of the People and Social Development, but I cannot do so without just having a whirlwind tour of that side, with a few words for some of their comments.

My colleague from La Brea reminds me of Rip Van Winkle, just realizing that apparently the Partnership was in power for the past two years: What about this road? What about this recreation ground? Fully forgetting that he was a Minister of State in the Ministry of Science and Tertiary Education. So we will move on.

Mr. Sharma: “He need rope for maga goat.”

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West—not much to reply to, except that she is a victim of this Opposition mentality. Do not let it get to you too much. Remember that you are preparing to govern, and so knocking down and breaking down all the structures, when you get here there will be nothing for you to do, if you ever do.

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Member for Diego Martin Central—I think my colleagues have dealt extensively with that. Member for St. Ann’s East—nothing noteworthy at this time. Member for Point Fortin—confusion. Member for Diego Martin West—dealt with as well. Perhaps the only one I will really spend a little time on is the Member for Diego Martin North/East. All the bravado—X, Y, Z, not done, not done. Did you do that? He turns to me and I said, “Yes”—never, for the television screen. But let me just tell you that the older persons Act is about to be proclaimed. We have been working very hard to get that done. There are 24 buses for the elderly and differently abled that are at PTSC, under the Minister of Transport, and being prepared to be ready for release throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago. What they have failed to do for 40 years, we will do it.

Imagine the Member asked if we are providing grants for single mothers and special children—did not read the budget of 2012. It is in there. We have provided for it, plus the mothers of special children are hired in the URP Social programme. The Member asked: did you approve the policy for automatic food cards for the differently abled? [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Arouca/Maloney. Please continue.

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Automatic food cards for the differently abled—we had a function at the University of the West Indies Health Economics Department. We had 14 groups of the differently abled there. Our social ambassador, Shamla Maharaj, spoke in earnest. She almost broke down telling us a story that she is so happy today to be a social ambassador, pursuing her masters in agri-business management at the University of the West Indies, a lifelong person dealing with the condition of cerebral palsy. She told us that on her way to Port of Spain to seek assistance and guidance and to look for help, they were put out of a PTSC bus, she and her father, because she was differently abled. Today, the PTSC under the Partnership will give 24 buses to the differently abled in every single region of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

The Member for Laventille East/Morvant is always inaccurate—no, he is Laventille West. The Member is always inaccurate, talking about abuse of power, but needs to tell the population about prisoners working at residences of MPs, and also about the abuse to a giant in the differently abled community. When they were in positions of authority, they were not always MPs; they served on big

boards, the same boards they criticize today. They put out the differently abled, abused them and put security guards again to wheel them away from their wheelchairs, and want to come in this honourable House to talk about abuse.

Hon. Members: Shame!

Mr. Hypolite: Standing Order 36(10).

Mr. Speaker: I did not understand him to be—overruled.

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, I need to really push on at this point in time.

I would like to congratulate the distinguished Minister of Finance and the Economy for etching his academia, his management skills and his vision into the parliamentary debate of Trinidad and Tobago, with a very visionary budget of 2012/2013. I think it was a tour de force of a budget that addressed all sectors. I wish also to compliment my parliamentary colleagues and the public servants who assisted in the preparation of same.

Mr. Speaker, the People's Partnership Government is about prosperity for all, under our distinguished Prime Minister. This budget was not focusing so much on money, but about resources. It was a budget about profit, but also about benefits. It was a profit that concerned stimulus, strength and stability, and so we are very happy to be on this side delivering this budget and defending it here before the population.

I speak on behalf of the Ministry of the People and Social Development. In the spirit of delivering to those who need it the most, I wish to quote Nelson Mandela when he said that overcoming poverty is not a task of charity, but it is an act of justice. Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made, and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings.

Sometimes it falls to a generation to rise and be great. We can be part of a generation like that.

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

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: Over the past few years we have seen the globe unexpectedly hit by crises in climate change, food, energy and finances. The strongest nations with the most powerful economies became weak. Those that had abundant food became hungry. The crises of energy affected many small economies, whilst already-challenged economies were unpredictably hit by environmental disasters which plunged them further into positions of challenge

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and desperation. But in Trinidad and Tobago we have steadied the course, and we are now seeing what appears to be global recovery, and we are seeing recovery in our own economy.

Recent developments have emphasized that economic growth is unequally distributed, and it highlights the shifting of the spheres of economic activity, from the traditional markets of USA, UK, Japan and Germany to the emerging markets of Brazil, Russia, India and China—what is called the BRIC countries.

Therefore we laud in the Global Competitive Report 2012/2013, Trinidad and Tobago is ranked 84th out of 144, but most notably in the sub index basic requirements, Trinidad and Tobago improved from 58 to 41st, an improvement of 17 places. This is after the Chancery Lane, San Fernando, complex, 300 million cost overrun; the government campus of the Legal Affairs tower, 300 million overrun; the Ministry of Education towers, \$300 million over budget, and NAPA and NAPA south combined, 472 million over budget. I already spoke about the Brian Lara Stadium, and I need not even mention the waterfront project.

Therefore, we in the Ministry of the People and Social Development continue to be part of the great work of this Government in renewing and strengthening the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. We want the ordinary Krishna in Icacos, the Donald in San Fernando and Irene in Carenage to know of all the services and products that are available from the Government. We know that before May 2010 many people, if not the majority of Trinidad and Tobago, were unaware of the services of Government and the programmes for development that one could undergo.

We consider every grant we give a hand up, not a giveaway. It is a solid and meaningful investment in the lives of our people along a journey towards empowerment.

5.40 p.m.

The Ministry of the People and Social Development, quite naturally, is the engine room and flagship of the social sector. It is aligned to the pillars: People-Centred; Poverty Eradication and Social Justice; linked to Pillar 5, A More Diversified, Knowledge Intensive Economy, and, ultimately, Pillar 6, Good Governance—People Participation.

As our Prime Minister, we, too, believe in the tenet *vox populi, vox Dei*, the voice of the people is the voice of God. She is a visionary and, similarly, like Peter Drucker—what he calls the third sector—says that although individuals get

a chance to vote at election time, they do not get the opportunity, normally, in administrations to have the chance to make a difference. There can be nationalism, but without citizenship, there can be no commitment to hold the body politic together, nor can there be a sense of satisfaction and pride that comes from making a difference. This is the opportunity that the Ministry of the People and Social Development gives to the ordinary man, woman and child. We give them a voice outside of an election.

That is why these Direct Impact campaigns are important; they may just be 15 months and 18 months old, so they would need time to become part of the fabric of the social sector, but they are already the engine room where engagement between the citizens—facilitating dialogue between the MP, the councillor, the NGOs in the community—is taking place and they are highly subscribed. The next programme will be in Cumuto, Manzanilla on October 24.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to touch on pensions a bit. Our elderly are most important to us; they have given the many years of their life to constructive service to the nation and now they are in the twilight of their careers. One of the first acts of this Government—I had the pleasure of being part of it—was to increase the senior citizens pension to \$3,000 for every person who is 65 years and older, at minimum. At that time 52,790 persons benefited from that and some received an income of up to \$4,000.

Mr. Speaker, I am happy to advise that \$2.201 billion is disbursed today under the senior citizens pension; and 79,942 persons benefit from that. Do you see the alarming increase in the figures? You remember the days when people would be saying they have problems with their pensions; they cannot get their pensions for years?

There are people in this country who are 98 years old and, in their 90s, have had so much problems with getting their pension, but we have facilitated this by creating changes in policy and advocating that certain legislative provisions that were not applicable, not be applied and so we have made the whole process more efficient for persons to get pension so that 79,942 persons, today, can benefit. We must treat our elderly well because it is said that it is the old trees that bear the sweetest fruits. In fact, in the words of Oscar Wilde, he said that youth is such a beautiful thing, it is such a pity that it is wasted on the young.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to speak about our general assistance grants. These are available to persons in emergency cases; individuals and families who live in poverty and their needs cannot be met. This fund is also available in natural

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disasters and/or hurricanes. We are here to ensure that no one is left behind; that all have equal opportunity, equal access and equal space to live, grow and be happy. The Ministry has increased these grants—the People’s Partnership Government, from 2010 to now—100 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, previously, you would have \$10,000 for housing grant repair, today you can access in emergency situations, up to \$20,000 under the Partnership Government; others include the medical equipment grant, domestic help, dietary, clothing, funeral grants. Before the Partnership’s intervention you got \$4,500, today you get \$7,500 to make sure that those who die and leave here are treated with dignity under the Partnership Government. What is most remarkable for us is—Samuel Johnson said that a decent provision for the poor is the true test of civilization.

Mr. Speaker, the first ever world report on disability, 2011, which was produced by the World Health Organization and the World Bank, suggested that one billion people in the world today are affected by some disability. Article 9 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities postulates and states that States should:

“...enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life...”

We signed that Convention in 2007.

In the Manifesto, which is the most read book among the Opposition—it is their favourite book; they read it every night before they go to sleep. In this book, under “Empowering the Differently Abled”, page 42, I quote. We will—

“● Ensure that persons with disabilities enjoy full equality...in... classrooms, washrooms...buildings...land, air and sea transportation.”

We will put:

“The necessary regulatory legislative framework...”

in place.

“Institute a regime of tax concessions on devices and apparatus used by the disabled.”

Done by the Minister of Finance and the Economy in this budget.

We will revise the disability grant. Mr. Speaker, we are happy that there has been a significant—an important increase—in the disability grant of \$1,300 per

month, by the Minister of Finance and the Economy in this budget. We have gotten reports throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago, from all the differently abled groups that they are pleased with the measures of the Government. A differently abled person who is in need, now can access an automatic food card. They do not have to go through all of that bureaucracy. They can get a free bus pass, in collaboration with the Minister of Transport. The hon. Chandresh Sharma will give an automatic bus pass to the differently abled. A scholarship is now being built that will give them \$5,000 to rise up, under this Government. This will cost us an estimated \$318 million to assist the differently abled community.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to turn to the People's Card Programme or what was previously known as the Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme. Mahatma Gandhi once said that there are people in the world that are so hungry that God can only appear to them in the form of bread. We know of the challenges of single mothers of large families, the elderly that have no income and families that are just so large there is not enough bread in the household. We have responded to that by taking the TT Card programme throughout the length and breadth of this country. In the first year, we exposed 30,000 persons who required information and services; in the second year 50,000; and we continue to roll out this product for those who need it the most. It is in this regard that we avoid the seven social sins: politics without principles; wealth without work; pleasure without conscience; knowledge without character; commerce without morality; science without humanity; and worship without sacrifice—as elucidated by Mahatma Gandhi himself.

During fiscal 2012, 6,240 applications were approved and cards distributed; a total of 37,335 persons benefit from the TT Card programme while we have removed close to 5,000 persons who previously did not belong there at all. We have heard stories and tales of persons pulling up with black SUVs, pounding hard music and want to swipe TT Cards. Those days are done. In fact, 1,855 persons are currently under review under the systematic audit process.

Mr. Speaker, of this number, we are holding discussions with service providers; they are employing food card clients in the groceries from which they get their food. We are getting them hired in the groceries so that they can get out of this programme.

In fact, private security companies are now partnering with us and asking for the psychological assessments so that they can determine, along with the résumés, if these persons can be interviewed for a proper job so that they can continue to be

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empowered. Nine hundred clients came for food cards only this year, and we have recognized that they needed further psychological intervention. We have intervened in their lives and their families, and we would have prevented problems because these are the vulnerable in the society. Sometimes someone comes for a card for food but they have a domestic problem; they have a problem with their children; they have a mental problem; a psychological problem. We have trained our TT Card workers to pick up some of these issues and so they are trained in psychological assessment.

For the Christmas' the Member for Arouca/Maloney battering hampers; a hamper might be nothing for her; it might be nothing for the Member for Port of Spain South; it might be nothing for the Member for St. Augustine; but for the mother who has to feed these six children at night and has not worked for the last three weeks, it is a blessing from Almighty God himself. This is something we will not apologize for, assisting the poor and needy. Therefore, while they tried to play Scrooge the first year, I am proud that all the MPs now collect their hampers and we distribute 4,100 hampers for the Christmas season to those who are needy and vulnerable. [*Desk thumping*]

It is the Prophet Muhammad himself that said:

“Do not turn away a poor man... even if all you can give is half a date. If you love the poor and bring them near you,... God will bring you near Him on the Day of Resurrection.”

This is from the Al-Tirmidhi, Hadith in the year 1376.

More than 5,500 families throughout the country who were affected by floods and disasters were given the temporary food card which is the latest social innovation in this part of the world. It is the only product of its kind. When we spoke about it in Chile, it was the members of the Food and Agriculture Organization that wanted the information so that they could document the developments in food security for the poor and vulnerable in Trinidad and Tobago. This programme has seen 92 outreach programmes to identify/target the indigent and needy in the society.

Mr. Speaker, the temporary food card is basically a hamper but also a passport. We talk about the hampers—it is an automatic access to \$450, but if after that month is over and you are still needy, you can go into the social welfare offices and be thoroughly investigated and assessed. If you are needy you get it for another month; then, the third month it is either you are in or you are out. The social welfare officer has the responsibility to give to you a permanent food card

or disqualify you from the programme. Therefore, 8,100 persons have benefited from the temporary food card programme which is the newest programme in the Ministry of the People and Social Development.

Mr. Speaker, our assistance to NGOs, Government cannot do it alone; we need the help of the private sector; we need the help of individuals who are wealthy; we need the corporate world; we need international support to be able to do the work that we do. But, at the Ministry, we also provide support to NGOs to increase their capacity and to provide a more expanded social service. Therefore, we have given to all the NGOs so that they can continue the work that they do.

I can get back to that later in my contribution to itemize the actual contribution that we have made. Suffice it to say that we have contributed \$69 million to NGOs so that they can do more for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, according to the 2005 Survey of Living Conditions there has been a steady decline in the percentage of the population that fall below the poverty line. The level of poverty in Trinidad and Tobago has declined from 35.9 per cent in 1992 to 16.7 per cent. A more recent estimate based on the household budgetary survey of September 2011 says that there has been a further decrease of 4 per cent in the poverty rate since the Partnership Government came into power. This has been because of the collaborative effort of all the Ministries because each Ministry contributes to the social sector; because when people are educated—an education provides the social support—they become empowered.

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. C. De Coteau*]

Question put and agreed to.

5.55 p.m.

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleagues. Mr. Speaker, I briefly want to touch on the area of social research because social research is very important because you do not want to keep doing the same things the same way and expecting different results. In fact, in different societies that is thought to be the definition of insanity. Therefore, social research is important. It is through the research function that we can change the society and have a vision for what we want it to be, by looking at certain indicators: cluster studies, surveys. So, in that regard, the Ministry while

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on the run with the outreach exercises to reach the people, because of the new impetus of the people's unit at the Ministry of the People and Social Development we continue to build the capacity of the Ministry to be a key function of research in the social sector of Trinidad and Trinidad.

Can I read from the Social Sector Investment Programme, about the MOST conference, which is the Management of Social Transformation international conference that we held here in May 2012—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: What page?

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: This is page 19, Sir. Mr. Speaker, thank you.

Through the Ministry of the People and Social Development, and in collaboration with the Trinidad and Tobago National Commission for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, (UNESCO), and the Ministry of Education, and the hon. Minister, we hosted the Second UNESCO MOST Regional Forum of Ministers of the Caribbean and Latin America. The programme was entitled "Promoting Equity and Social Inclusion: Pathways to Prosperity." It gave rise to the forum of which there was a Declaration of Port of Spain 2012. So we have now collaborated with the region and documented our views in social inclusion and equity, as a way to prosperity for the future.

The Ministry is actively pursuing research in knowledge, attitude and behaviour practices in order to determine the level of awareness of HIV among the 50—75 year group. We are looking at multiple indicator cluster surveys with regard to children and the data collection is being analyzed. The status of males surveyed and the Social Sector Investment Programme, Mr. Speaker, are just some of the many programmes of research that are being pursued at the Ministry of the People and Social Development.

The Decentralization Support Unit is actively involved in taking social services to the rural parts of Trinidad and Tobago. During fiscal 2012, an initiative was launched, which is the development of an implementation schedule for the launch of a social safety net programme, the pilot of which will be at Sangre Grande, and then have a national roll- out.

This, Mr. Speaker, is being done in collaboration with the IDB to create a social services centre, where there is no wrong door, where you are not shuttled away with a TT Card or shuttled away at a social welfare, or shuttled away at a poverty alleviation, but you are dealt with, and then the various departments are called to your service, and the entire process is recorded on the computer. So,

there is electronic capability to retrieve information, and so you are no longer a file in a whole bunch of papers in a Ministry; you now have a unique identifier number, which we can trace to see where your grant is, and what assistance is coming to you—[*Crosstalk*]*—*exactly, an electronic file.

And, therefore, I will talk more about biometrics and how it relates to that. All our social services centres are now challenged to be innovative. I wish only to say the services that are available at Couva: a parenting programme in the social welfare office; a health and wellness programme for employees and also clients; partnership with affiliated government entities called PAGE; a programme called Defining Masculine Excellence, a programme called Real Talk; and a series on health care done in collaboration with the Family Planning Association, Vision Optical, the Red Cross and other health suppliers.

The IDB programme, Mr. Speaker, the first loan has been secured as a hybrid operation, comprising a policy-based loan component and an investment component. These will help us to streamline and harmonize the programmes in the Ministry. All of this work is being done alongside the work of the Ministry of the People and Social Development, which has as its core, the People's Issues Resolution Unit. That is a new unit of Government, and they are being set up across the board, in all the Ministries: Ministry of Health; the Ministry of Housing and Environment as an active unit.

All the Ministries that are delivery Ministries now have active units that coordinate with the main People's Issues Resolution Unit, where, on a Monday morning, we have a meeting with a head of department from every single Ministry, telling them the problems of the people, and that person is at the level of a director or higher. That, Mr. Speaker, is in this manifesto. [*Desk thumping*] It is what we promised and it is what we delivered today, two years after, to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

The Ministry of the People and Social Development has a line, 800-4ppl, where we receive calls from the public together with our Internet presence, but we are working on a more sophisticated model, a call centre just like the 911 in America, where you will be able to call in to that and report any problems at all that can be dealt with by the social services and the Ministry of the People and Social Development.

And, therefore, the Ministry of the People and Social Development has also launched the people's bus, which will be rolling into communities throughout the country to further deepen that conversation that we have had.

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Mr. Speaker, the information taken from these tours are being analyzed by the People's Issues Resolution Unit, and we are now able to have a pictographic view of any particular community to see what the main needs are. These will be analyzed and studied by the Quality Assurance Unit so that we can beforehand have a picture of what are the resources we need to walk with in a particular community or we need to go to a particular community centre. So, we are going to profile the communities throughout Trinidad and Tobago, so that we can deliver better to the people, especially in the at risk and vulnerable communities. This will enable the Ministry of the People and Social Development to have efficient customer service, be able to liaise more effectively with other Ministries, gather intelligence in communities as a matter of being proactive, in anticipating and responding to the needs of our clients, provide a secretariat and support services to support coordination, and to act as a clearing house for issues received from other Ministries.

In 2012, we intend to develop a formalized feedback system, and submit those to the interministerial committee. We also coordinate the People's Bridge of Hope, where we get the NGC, the National Energy Company, the NLCB, to donate wheelchairs and medical equipment, so that we can distribute them to the offices of MPs, so that they can give them without the bureaucracy to persons who have not been able to access these items.

Mr. Speaker, we anticipate great progress to be made in this fiscal year with the People's Issues Resolution Unit. As you know, they spin off the outreach exercises which are the direct impacts in community centres, in collaboration with the MPs. And in some areas in the at risk and vulnerable communities their issues of social services are so predominant that we need to go house to house with a knock on the door, because almost every home or every other home, there is an issue where we can bring resources. The Land Settlement Agency, we can bring T&TEC, WASA, community development, we can bring the HDC, we can bring all—we have now social integration with us, so that we can deliver to the people.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you where the Direct Effect has gone: Edinburgh 500, Sea Lots, Bagatelle, Diego Martin, Maloney, Beetham Estate, Port of Spain South, John John, Laventille, Caroni Central, Carlsen Field, Couva South, Cashew Gardens, Debe, Siparia, Couva, Windsor Park, Rivulet Road, Dow Village, Basta Hall, Beaucarro Village, Mayaro, Moruga Tableland—throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago, the Direct Effect programme is rolling through and serving the people. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Milton Friedman said:

“My major problem with the world is a problem of scarcity in the midst of plenty...of people starving while there are unused resources... people having skills...— while not using them.

And so, we now take the Direct Effect programme, and we work around a complex, so that we can descend on that complex and bring the synergies of all the Ministries together in what we call the Poverty Reduction Empowerment Social Strategies, PRESS on, so that our people can press on. This involves moving people from welfare to work—doing so by analyzing our clients and counselling them and trying to find jobs for them so that they can move off welfare. Food security through the URP Social, the ADB, and NAMDEVCO, so that people could have backyard gardens, and so get rid—they can strengthen their food security and get better food, healthy eating, active lifestyles in the Fight the Fat programme with the Ministry of Health.

6.10 p.m.

Hon. Member: “And yuh growing de food, too fuh dem.”

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: Yes, engagement of our youth, giving them skill, because young people need to find their space in the society, and we expose them to the opportunities so that they can find that space so that they do not have to get from national security a place. We prefer if they have a space to grow and develop.

Promotion of positive lifestyles, community-based micro-enterprise, and a special initiative which you will now see throughout the country, which involves youths and no crime. And that in the Cocorite area, Water Hole—we went there up there and we offered the youths a programme where they could go through a course for six weeks and so train to become a sound engineer or a radio broadcasting DJ, but there are two conditions: they had to do a basic electronics course and they had to do a course in journalism. So if you want to be part of this DJ competition, you will have to learn two skills. This is the pilot and we look on with great interest as to how we develop this product called the PRESS-on initiative, Mr. Speaker.

So there is a lot of excitement for the elderly persons. We had the first senior citizens’ Parliament. [*Desk thumping*] It was held in Signature Hall, but we are working on all the requirements to have that [*Crosstalk*] senior citizens’ Parliament in these very honourable halls here, Mr. Speaker. We want to have it

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in the Parliament of the Republic, but we know that we have a lot of work to do to meet your requirements in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, and we will continue that work.

We want to have a Caribbean Sports and Family Day for the Elderly hosted in Trinidad and Tobago within the next fiscal year. That is an initiative. We want to have a choir singing competition for persons 65 years and over throughout Trinidad and Tobago and have a national winner from a community. Those are the activities for the elderly. We believe on this side that there must be healthy ageing. We believe, Mr. Speaker, that we must lift the elderly, that “life”—in the manifesto, as it says—“must begin at 60”, because people are living longer and longer.

We have an ageing population which is a global reality and, therefore, we know that in 15 years’ time our ageing population will double and we have to create new opportunities, engage our elderly in a different way so that we can get more out of their productivity in their later years, so they can contribute to the economic well-being of Trinidad and Tobago, and not be stationary recipients of grants and pensions, so that life will have to re-begin at 60 in the Ministry of the People and Social Development.

We will collaborate with the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development with a new programme to go out and help our single mothers with large families. We will go into these communities and create a new programme through the URP Social for single parents. I spoke to the Minister of Local Government—they cannot leave the home because they have four and five children who are very small, and we are going to give them DVD players and DVD training courses so that they can stay at home and have self-development, self-esteem, alphanumeric courses so that they can continually upgrade themselves while benefiting from the URP, Unemployment Relief Programme. That is the vision of this Government.

We have looked at the studies from Cambodia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Madagascar, Jamaica and Mozambique, and it is now scientifically documented in a book called, *No Small Matter: The Impacts of Poverty, Shocks, and Human Capital Investments*, that when single parents suffer, many single children of that parent suffer, and when they suffer for food and proper educational environment, they have irreversible underdevelopment challenges and that itself in a sense is a disability that this Government will confront and combat, so that they will have a better developmental environment, so that they can grow and develop into productive members of society.

Mr. Speaker, we have finally given to local government—under the CISL—they will build, in the next few months you will see it rising, the first centre for the differently abled built by the Government and people of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Everything we have, Mr. Speaker, is from the colonial powers and foreign powers they gave us as a gift. This is the first time the people of Trinidad and Tobago under Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar will raise a building for the differently abled with our own hands and our own money.

Hon. Member: In central Trinidad, again.

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: I feel that my time is running out, Mr. Speaker, and I am not even halfway through. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, I come to the area, of social displacement.

Hon. Member: What about political displacement?

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: This social displacement will ensure the political displacement of the Opposition for a very long time, because they have resigned their mayors of Port of Spain, they have resigned their Ministers of social—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Caroni Central, it is 11 minutes you have again.

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: Oh, thank you very much. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. They have resigned them. Permanent Secretaries have gone home and had sleepless nights that their Ministers “buff” them under the PNM—“try and do something about social displacement”. High-ranking members of the Government have stepped aside and walked away from vagrants in Port of Spain, unwilling to confront an issue that has been dogging this country for 50 years. They have shied away, come out of recording studios, talked on radio glibly about their plans for the social sector and walked over a vagrant to get to their Prado and their big vehicles. [*Interruption*] “What you have? A Range Rover.”

They have pretended as if they did not see these people, who are human beings, as the Member for Arouca/Maloney quite rightly said. What do we do? Do we continue to hide from this problem? Well, I want to tell you something: the Cabinet of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has embraced a new project that will see the beginning of the end of this problem that has infested the capital city and parts of Trinidad and Tobago.

Do we know that we have deportees coming in here at four o’clock in the night on cargo planes sometimes?

Hon. Member: Four o’clock in the morning.

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: Four o'clock in the morning. Thank you very much, that is why our colleagues are so close to us here. Do you know that these people are coming back from Baghdad, Iraq and parts of the world where there are wars raging and have the capacity to build bombs and destroy life and limb? That is why the Ministry is strengthening our Deportee Support Programme, so that we can strengthen the efforts of people like Wayne Chance and Vision on a Mission, so that they can keep us safer at nights with people coming in with knowledge of how to run organized crime and how to become Mafia bosses, and so this work is important. And so we are embracing the new Ministry of National Diversity and Social Integration to form an action committee to deal with the deportees that are coming to Trinidad and Tobago.

My brother Minister, who describes himself as a qualitative ministry, will be part of that effort so that we can transform the minds of those who were once Trinidadians and have been sent here again and may elect to go to a life that will not be healthy and beneficial to us.

Mr. Speaker, there is a new plan for street dwelling and every single day at the Ministry of the People and Social Development, we are working this plan to bring in for the first time all the technical services that we need, but we know that the Government cannot do it alone, so part of this arrangement involves incorporating the private sector and engaging services from that sector to work. It is almost like a model that will have private/public sector partnership. It is the only way to do it, while not compromising the respect and dignity for human beings, so that each team will have a person like Dr. Lincoln Douglas, the Minister of Arts and Multiculturalism, whose studies have been in the rehabilitation of the mind, to treat people like human beings and change them, using medical and psychological persuasion and motivation.

This plan has a lot of work, but we are determined and passionate so that we would be able to reduce the street dwellers that are now numbered approximately 1,419 in Trinidad and Tobago; we would like to reduce that figure to 400 before Christmas. That is our target, to half the population of street dwellers before Christmas. It includes rebuilding the Centre for the Socially Displaced into a more acceptable environment for people to live and learn and be rehabilitated along with a series of measures that I will not have the time to explain here today.

Allow me, Mr. Speaker, to talk a little about Caroni Central. For me, Mr. Speaker, Caroni Central is a centre of the world. When you stand on the mountain that is Indian Trail, you can see north and south of Trinidad and Tobago and a lot

of work is going on there from all the Ministries. After two years, the People's Partnership have endured, we have persevered, we have excelled. It is a difficult task for this not to have taken place because there is a leader who leads from in front. It is the firm call of the Prime Minister that her Ministers must be on the front line, because the front line today is the bottom line.

In 2001, the PNM became the victim of a vicious internecine warfare, thankfully, and they persisted for two years to recklessly fritter away the patrimony of Trinidad and Tobago. The people rose up, the UNC, the party that had historically championed the cause of the poor, got together with the COP, a party that gave a studied opinion of national issues; the labour voice led by Minister McLeod, whose contribution to the national dialogue could never be diminished; Ashworth Jack, a young man who served in politics at all levels, part of a grass roots party; and the man who led the Black Power Revolution. What a team. Today, the Prime Minister has created an environment of social justice by making sure that no child dies if they need life-saving surgery up to a million dollars, ensures that no child has to peep into a rich person's laptop, they have their own under this administration, that they have a voice in Government, through the Ministry of the People and Social Development, and a roadmap through the Ministry of National Diversity and Social Integration. People-centred, future-focused, performance-driven, a Prime Minister for the people, by the people and of the people.

Mr. Speaker, she says to the women, "Hold my hand," to the men, "We care," and to the children, "Suffer the children unto me." Let us continue to walk into a new era of caring. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for St. Joseph.

Mr. Herbert Volney (*St. Joseph*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am grateful, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on this measure, [*Desk thumping*] a Bill entitled: "An Act to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30th day of September, 2013."

I congratulate the good gentleman and Senator, the Minister of Finance and the Economy, for his signal effort in what is clearly a seamless transfer of the fiscal and monetary baton of affairs of the State. By doing this, as he has, the hon. Minister is setting a clear path of national development after two very difficult years of stabilizing the economy and saving us from a meltdown through prior years of fiscal recklessness.

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6.25 p.m.

It would be remiss of me if I did not also recognize, Mr. Speaker, the work and contribution of the Member for Tunapuna in this regard. The hon. Member found a total economic mess from the Clico/Hindu Credit Union threat to economic stability and possible meltdown, the settling of outstanding wage negotiations and has presided over the substantial clearance of domestic debt for goods and services left by the previous Manning administration.

I am very happy to know that we now have a Minister of Finance and the Economy who fully appreciates that the time to spend is now, to spend wisely and, in so doing, to get value for money spent. That is the essence of a banking portfolio that the hon. Minister has had for many years. And I have no doubt that in the next two and a half years, there will be an unprecedented building boom in Trinidad and Tobago.

I have listened to the very many contributions from the Members on both sides of the House. I must confess that on this side of the House here, that I have come to suffer somewhat from Opposition parliamentary vertigo, and I am trying to keep my balance as I stand here this evening, Mr. Speaker.

I am very proud of my parliamentary colleagues on the Government side of the House. [*Desk thumping*] I would like to single out the contributions of the Members for Tunapuna—philosophically, he was waxing hot—for Tabaquite, for Pointe-a-Pierre and for Tobago West for particular mention. What I can say is that the good people of Tobago have, in its representative for Tobago West, a veritable lion—measured, well-spoken, [*Desk thumping*] passionate and of wise counsel. I am very proud of the Minister for Tobago Development and Member for Tobago West. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Well said.

Mr. H. Volney: Ministers have, at their respective turns at the crease, spoken of all that we can expect in fiscal 2013. Much has been said and, quite clearly, this incoming budgetary period will see a culmination of planning and a roll-out of ministerial policy.

As a former Minister in the Cabinet of this Government, I can attest to the credibility and integrity of the process of governance during that period of service. While it is that the electors have a legitimate expectation of delivery on platform promises, the Government of the People's Partnership has much to be proud of in terms of what it has delivered.

I want to remind the Members here present, Mr. Speaker, and the national

community listening in and viewing, that in our system of governance, a government is elected for a period of five years. A government is not elected for two and a half years. Given the mandate of the people to administer the affairs of Trinidad and Tobago for a full five years, it is early time, indeed, to seek to cast judgment on the performance of the People's Partnership Government, and it must be given the opportunity to fulfil its mandate and to fulfil and provide all the pledges it has made in its campaign manifesto. However, I should like to give one example dear to me of ministerial success that is very easy to comprehend.

On May 28, 2010, I believe it was that day, I was sworn in as Trinidad and Tobago's first Minister of Justice. In the short time I was honoured to serve as Minister, I built a Ministry from scratch, which has now become a flagship of Government. In the last year, I piloted four significant Bills, all of which received parliamentary approval. There was the DNA Act of 2012; the Legal Aid and Advisory (Amdt.) Act of 2012; the Administration of Justice (Criminal Proceedings) Act of 2011; and the Administration of Justice (Electronic Monitoring) Act of 2012.

Additionally, as Minister as I then was, I brought numerous notes to Cabinet in order to introduce long-needed policy adjustments necessary for laying the groundwork for statutory interventions in the future. In this regard, Mr. Speaker, the Cabinet approved the policy for the drafting and the introduction of the Prison Rules of 2012, the Administration of Justice (Parole) Bill of 2012, and the Administration of Justice (Offender Management) Bill of 2012. These interventions, then under my watch, were formulated to work in tandem with other progressive bits of legislation to restore certainty and balance in the criminal justice system by recognizing the right of the State to interdict and punish and the right of the individual to the protection of the law, to respect for the dignity of the accused, the convicted and the condemned and to restorative justice.

The Ministry of Justice, then under my watch, developed a template for court construction using a design brief of the Judiciary. Cabinet has approved the construction of five judicial centres, four in Trinidad and one in Tobago. I can only say that the process of procurement for the development of these courts had to be stopped under the National MTS Company after it was discovered that there was interference in the process. In order to assure the integrity of that process and out of deference to concerns raised of it, I took a note to Cabinet to stop that process and to have it redone by NIPDEC in accordance with its own tried procurement rules.

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I am happy to say that up to the time of my loss of ministerial office, request for proposals had been issued, time had been enlarged for the receipt of bids and later closed with a number of bids being received in what can only be described as an open and transparent process of procurement; and may the best bids win, Mr. Speaker.

The Ministry of Justice, under my watch, also publicly invited expressions of interest for the provision of devices and services for the implementation of electronic monitoring in Trinidad and Tobago. In this regard, iGovTT was engaged to pursue the procurement process in which 10 companies expressed an interest. These 10 companies were later given an opportunity to convince the Ministry of Justice through iGovTT that their packages and devices should be adopted in the implementation of electronic monitoring.

I expect that in the course of parliamentary debate that the new Minister of Justice, who I wish well and I pledge my continued support in the interest of our nation, that she will speak to all these matters.

In fiscal 2012, the Ministry of Justice also hosted the Commonwealth North Atlantic Commemorative Law Ministers Conference on June 25 and 26 in Port of Spain. There were eight Attorneys General and Ministers of Justice from the region as well as delegates from Canada, India and New Zealand. The Solicitor General of England and Wales, the hon. Edward Garnier QC, MP, was our distinguished special guest. The theme of the conference was “Fifty Years of Progress in Criminal Justice in Trinidad and Tobago”.

Mr. Speaker, just one week before my ministerial demise and within two months of being assigned the very heavy responsibility for the prisons, I presided over the roll-out of Rise Maximum Radio, a prison radio and the first for this part of the region. The germ of this project has been propagated and financed by the Ministry of Justice over the preceding 18 months. I am so very proud of this achievement of the Government, the People’s Partnership Government, which will be used as a tool of restorative justice by the dissemination of the word to those who are in prison, that is, the dissemination of the good news of salvation and redemption.

So, Mr. Speaker, your Member of Parliament for St. Joseph has served honourably in the executive estate of the Constitution. In time others will say, I have no doubt, with distinction. But then nothing is forever, not even life. I have had the rare distinction of serving in all three estates, a humbling experience that is indelible in the landscape of governance. And so now, Mr. Speaker, I come to the business of my electors in the riding of St. Joseph, which I now call my

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“Ministry” of St. Joseph with great pride, I must say, although the pecuniary benefits are not the same.

With some pride I can say that I am one of a few Members of this Chamber who reside in their constituency. There are benefits to residency in one’s constituency. My presence among my electors means that I am omnipresent in their midst and very accessible to their call.

I am assured by the Minister of Local Government that finally the residents of Bamboo Grove No. 1 will get their walking track around the recreation ground as part of the URP special projects earmarked for the constituency of St. Joseph in 2012.

Mr. Speaker, I stand here—I sit here and I hear those opposite complaining, complaining, complaining. If they only wait, it will happen for them. I have waited, my constituents have waited our turn and these projects are coming. So, patience. Nothing happens overnight.

The residents of this very Bamboo Grove No. 1, long forgotten and neglected in the years of the PNM rule, have now benefited from an upgraded drainage system with the provision of numerous box drains and bridges in their community and the electrification of their park. I am told by the Minister of Works and Infrastructure of the award of a contract to develop some 600 hundred metres of Singh Street Extension, involving box drains and refurbishment of the road. Bamboo No. 1 has never had it so good and I am thankful to the People’s Partnership Government.

In fiscal 2013, I shall continue to press the Minister of Works and Infrastructure, and his Minister of State in that Ministry, for the construction of a new bridge to replace the Bailey bridge over the St. Joseph River at Jamboree Park in Valsayn North. Recent dredging and de-silting of the St. Joseph River from the Farm Road bridge to the Caroni River has spared the residents of lower Valsayn North of annual flooding. Last year it was extremely traumatic for residents in this area, Mr. Speaker, and engineers from the Ministry, I am told, are working assiduously at doing a re-engineering of the drainage system in this part of the constituency.

6.40 p.m.

The Minister of Housing has advised me that very soon, Mr. Speaker, we in St. Joseph shall be welcoming some new constituents in the now ready East Grove Extension Housing Estate. The Housing Development Corporation has

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completed the sewerage treatment plant for that development which I am told is now operationalized. Of course, there are teething problems with the elevator units in the multistorey units, and I trust that these matters would be addressed, with some dispatch, to ease the frustrations of my constituents who now have to climb several floors, in some cases as many as seven levels, to reach their apartment. I see that the hon. Minister is making some notes, yes.

While I am on the issue of housing, Mr. Speaker, I wish to alert the hon. Minister of the rather unsatisfactory method by which houses are being allocated in my constituency. Each week I am inundated with applications for housing from my constituency. I have to be providing tissue for crying, for tears, from poor people in the constituency of St. Joseph; that may require additional funds for the constituency office, Mr. Speaker, because of the need for more tissue paper to accommodate all these tears.

I have constituents who have been waiting in faith for over 20 years. There is no justice in the system for allocations by the HDC. I am not being, or trying to be, critical of the Minister but of the system that leaves much to be desired. As far as I see it, there are many young, single persons already in house—in government housing units in the Mount Hope and the Ramgoolie Housing Schemes, while families with desperate housing needs—public officers aplenty, who have done service to State; prison officers aplenty, members of the protective services aplenty; all deserving, all long in line still waiting in faith for an allocation.

I have written the Chief Executive Officer of the HDC, one Miss Jerlean John, hundreds of letters, literally hundreds, without even the courtesy of a response. Very disrespectful, I must say, of a Member of Parliament elected by the people of my constituency. Take notes Minister.

While it is to be expected that housing is precious little in its stock, I expect and I agitate on behalf of my constituents, for the very least, the courtesy of an acknowledgement of receipt of my letters, hon. Minister, and I trust that you will find it in your way to make even a 10 per cent allocation to my constituents of the allocation of housing stock constructed in the constituency of St. Joseph.

Hon. Member: Ten per cent.

Mr. H. Volney: Even 10 per cent I will be happy with. Since 2010, some 10 constituents—out of over 500 I have written for—have received housing units. I am grateful for the 10 because they are happy, Mr. Speaker. In the nearby constituency of St. Augustine a housing development at Real Spring, planned by NUGFW, the trade union, for its membership, and partly completed since 2009

with duplex and single units ready for occupation, has stood there unallocated. That, Mr. Speaker, is an insult to persons with legitimate expectations for housing. Completed units, standing there, and you have people living in deplorable conditions, waiting for over 20 years. I am sure the hon. Minister did not know of these matters, and that he will look into them because we are on the same side of the House, you know, even if I am sitting over here, you know [*Desk thumping*] and I need his intervention.

At Farm Road, also called Bangladesh, the people live in unsatisfactory conditions. While my constituents there have asked for certificates of comfort for their small spaces, I have convinced them that this is not the long-term solution. There is a large area of land to the south of WASA and to the west of Farm Road that I have been working with the Land Settlement Agency to earmark for low income housing as a method of alleviating poverty. Poor people do not need three-bedroom apartments, they need a shelter; one bedroom for an old lady, that is all she asks for—one bedroom, a little living room and dining room, a bathroom and toilet and a kitchen. That is what the poor people want.

So that the Ministry of Housing has now got to look at what is being built. What is needed in my constituency is housing for poor people, especially the little old lady who has to take \$2,500 out of her \$3,000 pension to give to unscrupulous landlords, who, if she only misses one payment she is on the street like a vagrant, adding to problems to the Minister of the People and Social Development. Mr. Speaker, what else can I say but bring this to the attention of my friends on this side of the House.

So, Mr. Speaker, the Land Settlement Agency has been working with me. This is a work in progress, and in fiscal 2014 I pray that the Minister of Finance and the Economy will ask for the allocation in this regard, would provide for the allocation for the alleviation of poverty, poor people's houses in my constituency. While I am in the Farm Road area, because it is one of the poorest areas in this country, I have raised with the Minister of Education—indeed, just moments ago again—the need as a matter of urgency to open the now completed St. Joseph Secondary School at Farm Road, St. Joseph.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Not completed yet, 5 per cent again.

Mr. H. Volney: It is 95 per cent completed. Thank you, Minister, but it is unacceptable that this school should remain unopened, even if 5 per cent is to be completed. For the last year while students and teachers continue to languish in the nearby 40-year-old dilapidated building, I have been there. I was invited to go, and I do not miss any invitation in my constituency.

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My constituents and their children for that school, some 750 students strong, would like the Ministry of Education to open our school, hon. Minister, as a matter of some urgency. I have also made representations to the chairman of the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, and lately the Minister of National Security, to break down an illegal fencing of close to an acre of land along the St. Joseph river on Farm Road, in an area that has been designated as the muster point for the St. Joseph Secondary School.

Imagine, Mr. Speaker, a man claims the designated muster point area for a secondary school—a squatter—and puts up rusty old galvanize all around it, and I cannot get help in my constituency to have it removed, even though a lawful order has been duly issued for its removal by the appropriate authority. The children have no muster point, 750 of them, and I cannot get anyone with the fortitude to uphold the law, to mash it down. It is an illegal structure that is enclosing children's muster point in my constituency. "What all yuh wah meh to do, to get a backhoe one night and to lick it down?" Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, I do not want to do that, but these children need their muster point.

The residents of the heritage town of St. Joseph would be happy to know that I am assured by the Minister of Local Government—no, this is by the Minister of State in the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, that both King Street and Abercromby Street in St. Joseph will be resurfaced in this budgetary period, so no more potholes on the major streets in St. Joseph.

I come now to upper Mendez Drive. The residents there can look forward to the construction of a box drain and the bringing of water into their area in fiscal 2013. In Quarry Drive, Champs Fleurs I am told that a retaining wall will be constructed to deal with the landslip that threatens one of the houses in the community. The railing project from the top to the bottom of Quarry Drive happily is complete, thanks to the National Self-Help Commission. This commission, Mr. Speaker, any Member of this House would tell you, is one of the best performing units of governance in Trinidad and Tobago—the National Self-Help Commission—and the Minister of Community Development will also be visiting very soon to tell us of a date for the handover of the Quarry Drive Community Centre that has been completed for the last two years.

The Sports Company is moving into Mt. D'or in fiscal 2013 in order to develop the recreation grounds into a modern, sporting facility, with electrical overhead lighting in the area in order to allow for night games. I propose, Mr. Speaker, to have the recreation grounds rebranded after one of the upcoming [*sic*] footballers, the late Atiba Duncan. I call his name in this Parliament, gunned

down by a policeman this year, and in respect of which a charge is yet to be proffered. This project was unceremoniously stopped by the PNM-controlled San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation in a turf war over progress. In Mt. Lambert I am assured by the Minister of Local Government, the Member for Tabaquite, that a new pavement for the entire length of First Avenue will be a reality in fiscal 2013.

I have also asked for the rehabilitation of Circular Extension Mount Lambert with proper and adequate pipe-laying to bring water to the over 200 residents in the Garden Area. A major project would be taken there to fix all the slip drains and pavements in the next year.

Mount Lambert, Mr. Speaker, will feel the loving hand of the People's Partnership Government in fiscal 2013. In Mt. Hope, I am assured by the Minister of Community Development that the Mt. Hope Community Centre, now nearing completion, will be opened in fiscal 2013. At last, I say.

In Maitigual, another part of my constituency, I am working hard to find a way to have Government purchase the last parcel of flatland, in that hilly area, for the construction of a basketball court and children's playground. Maitigual, Mr. Speaker, will not be left behind.

At San Juan Hill, the Sports Company has agreed to the establishment of a children's playground in the area. In response to the concerns of residents for the overgrowth of weeds, I have requested the CEPEP contractors to include these residents in their zone of operations.

But perhaps the most elusive of all my wishes for my constituency, Mr. Speaker, is the provision of washroom facilities at the Aranguez Savannah. For the last two years I have tried to convince the chairman of the PNM-controlled San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation of the distress of her burgesses in not having such a facility. I have tried getting the PNM councillor for Champs Fleurs/Mr. Lambert, in whose electoral district the savannah is located, to impress upon his chairperson, an unelected alderman, to agree in principle for the construction of this toilet facility.

6.55 p.m.

I have asked my councillors on the western and southern sides of the Aranguez Savannah to request of the chairman her indulgence for statutory permission. I even said that I could get people to build the facility at no expense to taxpayers. But, no, the chairman, in an expression of power, has stopped progress for the construction of this facility at the Aranguez Savannah. Should I,

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Mr. Speaker, rally 10,000-and-counting constituents into a protest for a toilet facility at the Aranguéz Savannah? Should I do that?

Hon. Member: It is a smelly issue.

Mr. H. Volney: I know it is a smelly issue, Minister. From the Organs soccer clinic of little boys and girls on a Saturday morning to the oldest citizens trying to keep healthy and who may need such a facility. Thousands of people use the Aranguéz Savannah every day, and they have been asking me for such a facility, but low and cheap politics, the kind of politics that I have been hearing from this side here in front of me—this lower bench in front of me—from the start of this debate in this House, is what is holding that up.

But I am grateful to the Minister of Local Government for the provision of some help to build box drains in the lower Aranguéz district and to the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure for the drains on Johnny King Road in the garden area of Aranguéz.

Hon. Minister of Education, there is a new, a brand new early childhood centre on upper Johnny King Road in Aranguéz to be opened. Might the Member please have my school opened, Mr. Minister. We have many children and their parents who are looking forward to the opening of this facility.

In fiscal 2013, I pray that the Ministry of Food Production would visit the Aranguéz and Bamboo No. 1 farming communities to see all the good road work that has been done in the last year. The Minister would be happy to see all the agricultural produce coming to market from this food basket and produced in very difficult and trying circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, the constituency of St. Joseph has been well served by the hard-working crews of CEPEP. They have asked me to ask the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy and the Government for a little more in their wage package, and I ask that the hon. Minister find a way to help these very poor persons, largely single mothers, who depend very dearly on this little support package every fortnight.

So, as I close, Mr. Speaker, I wish to congratulate the Minister of Finance and the Economy for a generous budget and for a vision for the future. The Government is to be commended for keeping the course despite the criticisms of those who are obviously hungry for power. The Government has a further two and a half years to deliver on its platform promises. I can assure the hon. Prime Minister that my constituents, the 10,835 who voted for me in 2010, and the

thousands of others who I represent, and who will be on our platform in 2015, that we will continue to support the People's Partnership Government, provided—provided—that there is continued delivery of goods and services to the poor, that this Government avoids the stench of PNM corruption of the past, and keep the people's faith.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker. And in this budget I will say, when the time comes, I am in support of the measure.

The Minister of Science and Technology (Hon. Dr. Rupert Griffith): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Before I start let me congratulate my colleague from St. Joseph, the Member for St. Joseph, for such a powerful contribution, and I see that he maintains the high level of usual energy he has in representing the people of St. Joseph. I congratulate you. But I do want to advise you, however, that you need not impose, how you put it, the self-imposed opposition parliamentary vertigo over on that side, and to say that we on this side will welcome you anytime to come back on the Government Benches. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, we have been in this Chamber—well, we know the budget was presented last Monday—for many, many hours since Friday, debating the budget, or the Appropriation Bill 2012/2013. All of my colleagues on this side have spoken and refuted all of the allegations, the wild statements, baseless suggestions and delusional perceptions coming out from the Opposition Benches.

Mr. Speaker, I am very saddened to see the quality of those contributions.

Mr. Peters: Yes, I am sad too.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: I have been in this Parliament since 1991 as you are aware, Mr. Speaker. And I sat on all sides of the Parliament as a little boy and as a young adult; I sat in the gallery and “take in” some powerful debates. You will recall former Members as Seukeran, “Seuky” we used to call him, and Rudranath Capildeo, even Eric Williams at times, and those times, Mr. Speaker, the House had no parliamentary speaking limits.

Hon. Member: What?

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: Yes, they had no parliamentary speaking limits. Mr. Speaker, you know that. When a debate started and “they really begin” to filibuster, “you talking about days” and long, long hours in this Parliament.

But, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you and others for your wisdom for imposing parliamentary limits on this side, because I could well imagine what it

would be like if those on the Opposition side, all of them taking 75 minutes, if we had no limits, I am sure all of us on this side would be like our Member for St. Joseph, suffering opposition political vertigo. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, I am heartened here tonight to make my contribution to the budget debate in the context of my new portfolio as Minister of Science and Technology. First of all, I would like to extend to the Minister of Finance and the Economy my hearty congratulations to him and to the two Ministers in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy and the entire staff of the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, who worked assiduously and untiringly to present this budget, Stimulating Growth, Generating Prosperity. Mr. Speaker, this budget is undoubtedly a people's budget, and it reaffirms the commitment of this Government, led by the astute and dynamic leader, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar [*Desk thumping*] in fostering prosperity for, not some of the citizens as the Opposition claimed, but all of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to sincerely thank my predecessor, Sen. The Hon. Fazal Karim, Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, for championing the cause of ICT development, especially in the areas of capacity building and training. Due to his efforts our citizens are now more ably equipped to live in, and contribute to, a modern and competitive Trinidad and Tobago. The creation of a Ministry of Science and Technology on June 25 this year was not carried out by mere whim, but rather it was a purposeful act which reflects a clear understanding by this Government that every modern and successful society must focus on science and technology if it is to experience sustainable economic growth and development in the 21st Century.

The Ministry, which is primarily responsible for the formulation of policy for the development of science and technology in Trinidad and Tobago also has under its purview the following three agencies: the National Information Communication Technology Company Limited, known as iGovTT; the National Institute of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology, known as NIHERST; and the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, known as TATT.

Mr. Speaker, this information age in which we all live is characterized by the rapid and continuous change in which technological advancement is charting a new and even revolutionary course of human development. We either harness the potential of science and technology to our advantage or run the risk of continuously playing catch up with the international landscape, or even worse, simply being left behind in this brave new world we live in.

In this regard, Mr. Speaker, science and technology, and I dare say, innovation, have been ascribed a place of importance in the national development thrust, which is informed by increasing global acceptance and knowledge, creativity and their commercialization provide the foundation for knowledge-based productivity, economic reliance and global competitiveness.

For it is to be noted that Trinidad and Tobago is immersed in an increasingly rapid-changing global environment, in which the swift exchange and delivery of information is crucial in every sphere of life, trade and commerce, education and even culture and entertainment. I am convinced, Mr. Speaker, that we are on the right trajectory, given the track record of those developed countries that have placed science, technology and innovation, STI, at the forefront of their development strategies, and the focus being placed on this area by international organizations.

Mr. Speaker, one such organization is the United Nations Commission on Trade and Development, UNCTAD, which has noted that STI, science, technology and innovation, are key drivers of economic and social development, and that they constitute, and I quote:

“...essential ingredients in the industrialization and sustainable development of nations.”

However, UNCTAD has also noted that success is predicated on the integration of relevant policies into national development strategies combined with requisite institutional and organizational changes. The results have been increased productivity, improved firm competitiveness, enhanced job creation and faster growth. This Government is actively pursuing the incorporation of effective science and technology and innovation policies into the national planning process as a critical component of its economic diversification efforts.

Mr. Speaker, knowledge, information and creativity, and their commercialization provide the foundation upon which knowledge-based productivity is built. Further, as the President of the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers’ Association said—and that is the TTMA—it is noted that in a recent interview he said:

“We”—must—“leave oil and gas, before”—they—“leave us.”

7.10 p.m.

As such, Mr. Speaker, the Government recognized that the thrust towards STI must be informed by our indigenous strength and must be rooted in our local

context if the outcomes are to be meaningful and lasting. Simply, incorporating the ideas of others without adjusting them to our peculiar environment and our specific needs will not provide the outcomes we want as a Government nor provide our citizens with the improved standard of living that they have every right to aspire to. This requires collaboration, not only among Government Ministries but also with the private sector, academia and the citizens as a whole.

Mr. Speaker, responsibility for the science and technology portfolio which I have been entrusted also includes, information and communication technology, inclusive of telecommunications. ICT is more than a key component of the overarching STI portfolio. In fact, it is important to note that ICT constitutes the fourth of the seven pillars of this Government's policy framework for sustainable development.

Moreover, Mr. Speaker, ICT and, by extension, science and technology are intrinsically linked to Pillar 5—creating a more diversified knowledge-intensive economy. As such, ICT is deemed to be a critical success factor in achieving development objectives both as a core pillar and as a significant catalyst towards building innovative capacity and improving economic competitiveness.

Having said this, it can therefore be argued that science and technology and innovation are driving globalization and that Trinidad and Tobago, like its counterparts within the international community, is being impacted by it. In just this past decade, the world has already witnessed unprecedented and revolutionary strides in areas such as: biotechnology, genetics and informatics. For example, the human genome was sequenced in 2003, laying the foundation for many other scientific discoveries.

Mr. Speaker, Facebook, which the rest of the world interfaces at some point, believe it or not, was only launched in 2004. Imagine only in 2004. Can most of us in this esteemed Chamber recall life without our smartphones and the unparalleled access to information and sciences that they make available right at our fingertips. Some of us cannot even leave home without it. We feel like we are naked, we missing something. Just think about the increase in the usage and uptake of ICTs and access to information if we tap into this mobile revolution and reach our citizens, Mr. Speaker; just think about that for a moment.

So, Mr. Speaker, having provided the context, I now want to delve into some of the specific activities that are being undertaken or will be spearheaded by the Ministry of Science and Technology and through it its various agencies in pursuit of national development. Let us look at science and technology, Mr. Speaker.

The National Institute of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology, as I said earlier, is one of the agencies under my portfolio. The National Institute of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology (NIHERST), is one of the several state agencies that are fundamental to leveraging science and technology for the social and economic development of Trinidad and Tobago. NIHERST continues to make strides towards becoming a world-class science and technology innovation institute through a number of key initiatives within the framework of a five-year strategic plan, 2010—2015.

This plan, Mr. Speaker, reflects a comprehensive vision for the development of an indigenous science and technology culture with the potential to catalyze national innovation. In this regard, construction of a new state of the art national science centre is scheduled to begin later this month—as a matter of fact, in a week and a half—as the institute flagship. So, I want to tell my colleague from Tabaquite, today, Mr. Speaker—who spoke about a young genius, a young guy who has such a great mind and has such great scientific ideas—this institution will foster young people like him in Trinidad and Tobago so that we could compete with the best of the world as far as science and technology is concerned.

Mr. Speaker, established through an Act of Parliament in 1984, NIHERST is empowered to satisfy the needs of this country's burgeoning in science and technology landscape, through specialized training, policy coordination and research and development. NIHERST has been building and strengthening national capacity in science and technology, creativity and innovation and entrepreneurship. The institute has placed special emphasis on the nation's youth, who will become the skilled labour force and champions of tomorrow's modernized and competitive economy. The strategic plan which is closely aligned with Pillars 1 and 5 contains five key focus areas which include:

1. Research and intelligence gathering in support of economic diversification;
2. Promoting innovation and commercialization of technology in the economic poverty areas;
3. Building collaborative global relations;
4. Positioning NIHERST as a world-class STI institute; and
5. Fostering a culture of science, creativity and innovation.

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Among these key focus areas, some of the institutes significant achievements over the past fiscal year have included:

1. Elaboration of the national science and technology policy support which sought to coordinate and develop a national policy framework.
2. An educational programme on water conservation and rainwater harvesting, normally referred to as RWH, which took place over the period March—June 2012.

It was a very successful scientific programme and, Mr. Speaker, I recommend that you take a look-see at what was achieved by that RWH project. And I do invite the rest of the national community also so to do.

3. Mr. Speaker, the fore sighting exercises to determine, among other things, economic priority areas and job and skill for growth.
4. Cooperation agreement with India's National Institute of Science Technology and Development Studies and the National Council of Science Museums through which the two-month long exhibition titled, and I quote: "India: A Culture of Science" was made possible at the Divali Nagar from May 21 to June 20, 2012.

Cooperation agreement with the national aeronautics and space agency at NASA of the United States through which top students in science, technology, engineering and mathematics known as STEM—STEM is now big in the world and the United States is placing great emphasis on sort of reorienting their students into STEM because that is one of the areas where weaknesses are emerging in the US education system. So we are collaborating with NASA with respect to training students in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. This is done at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and they will be able to participate in agencies of international internship programme, that is NASA 12.

Mr. Speaker, if Trinidad and Tobago is to position itself as a significant player in the global economy, agencies and institutes such as NIHERST will be required to execute timely strategic initiatives. Some of the initiatives that are forthcoming include, among others:

1. The launch of this quarter of the Prime Minister's award for scientific ingenuity. This was formerly the Prime Minister's award for innovation and inventions.
2. The elaboration of a science, technology and innovation policy to support the knowledge city which will comprise a hub for educational excellence and entrepreneurship.

3. The intelligent island initiative—and my sister from Tobago will be proud to hear this, and my brother from Tobago West will also be proud to hear of this, as well as the people of Tobago would be happy to learn that NIHERST, through the intelligent island initiative—will be piloted in Tobago over a three-year period with the primary objectives of transforming Tobago into, quote: “Intelligent island through the formation of creative, knowledge-driven, strategic alliances among Government, business educational centres, health care institutions and other stakeholders.” I am sure you will be pleased to hear that my sister.
4. Hosting of the international conference on science and technology for economic diversification. Pursuant to the agreement already forged with India’s National Institute of Science, Technology and Development Studies.
5. Community centre design and innovation—an initiative that is aimed at developing the capabilities of secondary and tertiary education students in problem solving design and innovation, to meet real needs in local communities and the needs of disadvantaged persons.

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, let me turn to Information and Communication Technology (ICT). I have noted before, information and communication technology and the creation of a knowledge-intensive economy stand as key pillars of this Government’s vision to transform Trinidad and Tobago into a nation where all citizens have the opportunity to contribute and to accrue the benefits of sustainable socio-economic development. I equally note that the Minister of Finance and the Economy in his budget statement identified information and communication technology as one of the seven key priority, sectors for growth and investment that will receive focus, attention, during fiscal year 2012/2013. In this regard, we are pursuing various activities to address the development of this ICT sector.

I turn my attention to the Ministerial Steering Committee on ICT. Trinidad and Tobago’s successful digital development is premised on the strategic planning and direction from the highest level of government. In light of this, a cross-functional and highly collaborative Ministerial Steering Committee on ICT, which is chaired by myself as Minister of Science and Technology, has been established to drive major ICT plans, enterprise wide projects and e-services that constitute the national ICT agenda. The Ministerial Steering Committee also comprises: hon.

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Ministers of Education, Gender Youth and Child Development, Legal Affairs, Public Administration, Planning and Sustainable Development, People and Social Development, Trade, Industry and Investment, who also serves in a dual capacity as Minister in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy and Tertiary Education and Skills Training.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ministers represent a range of portfolios that impact all sectors of society. This deliberate strategic act is to ensure that technology is employed as a transformational tool to empower all citizens, from our youth to our senior citizens, to enable them to use ICTs in meaningful ways across the private and public sectors, across all communities whether urban, or rural, and across all classes whether wealthy, middle class or poor, to ensure everyone has interact learning and innovation using technology.

7.25 p.m.

While strategic oversight and guidance is provided by the ministerial committee, a management committee of permanent secretaries has also been assembled to serve as the advisory, execution and coordinating arm of the ministerial committee.

Madam Deputy Speaker, let us take a look at the e-Business Roundtable. I would like to emphasize that Government's collaborative effort cannot only be internally focused if the goals of the national ICT agenda and, by extension, the development agenda, are to be attained. If we are to truly address our concerns and leverage our strengths, consistent and continued consultation with all national stakeholders are critical.

One such example of the Government's successful engagement with other stakeholders is the e-Business Roundtable, a public/private partnership that seeks to obtain inputs from the business community on key ICT initiatives, while also championing digital development in the private sector. A "think tank" of leaders in the ICT industry, business sector, public sector and academia, the round table is intended to propel the country's economic diversification through the use of technology. In pursuing its mandate, the e-Business Roundtable has five key areas of focus:

1. e-business promotion and transformation;
2. e-business policy development;
3. human capital development;

4. enhancement of the national investment climate; and
5. development of online government.

Madam Deputy Speaker, since its inception, the e-Business Roundtable can be credited with numerous successes, including:

1. advising Government on the legislative agenda as a key component of the enabling environment required to support e-business and e-commerce;
2. advocacy to the business community to respond to various surveys of international organizations that can contribute to improving Trinidad and Tobago's international ICT and other rankings; and
3. the biennial hosting of the ICT business and innovation symposium, the premier ICT event of its kind in the Caribbean.

ICT business and innovation symposium is undoubtedly one of the round table's most prominent successful initiatives. The event brings together national, regional and international ICT experts, as well as experts from other sectors, to discuss the role of technology and innovation in transforming Trinidad and Tobago into a knowledge-intensive economy.

The symposium also supports the thrust to brand Trinidad and Tobago as a major ICT hub in the Caribbean region, thus positioning our nation as a serious destination for global ICT investment. The next ICT business and innovation symposium will be held from November 18—20, 2012 and I am looking forward to partnering with the round table on this most significant venture.

Madam Deputy Speaker, upon his appointment as Minister of Finance and the Economy in July of this year, the e-Business Roundtable was ably chaired by Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai. Let me take this opportunity to thank my colleague publicly for his sterling contribution to ICT development and the advancement of Trinidad and Tobago's private sector as a whole.

Let me turn my attention to Commonwealth Connects, Madam Deputy Speaker. Continuing the theme of partnering, I am compelled to point out that our national ICT objectives cannot be achieved in isolation. By its very nature, these technologies have been instrumental in breaking down barriers that once separated communities, regions and countries. In essence, Madam Deputy Speaker, ICT has made the world a global village, and like any village, we share common goals and must guard against common threats. Therefore, if Trinidad and Tobago is to achieve success domestically, it is vital that we pursue and maintain strong partnerships with fellow nation states, as well as international ICT organizations.

The Commonwealth Connects programme is one of the key international initiatives of which Trinidad and Tobago is a proactive and dedicated participant. Launched in 2006 at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Malta, the programme is the Commonwealth's attempt to comprehensively address ICT development and to leverage the potential of technology to support sustainable development objectives, including equitable growth and the empowerment of individuals.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago is one of the founding members of the programme, and since its inception has participated on the steering committee, a committee of five Commonwealth member states and other ICT stakeholders established to administer the programme. In October 2011, Trinidad and Tobago assumed chairmanship of the steering committee for a period of two years.

Since being appointed Minister of Science and Technology, I chaired my first meeting of the steering committee just last month. I returned from that meeting enthusiastic about the alignments between the efforts of the programme and our own ICT goals here at home. There is much scope for collaboration in the areas of cyber-security, ICT capacity building and universal access.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of Science and Technology is already seeking technical assistance and training under the aegis of the Commonwealth Connects cybercrime initiative, and we are doing this on behalf of the Ministry of National Security which has lead responsibility for cybercrime. This assistance will equip local stakeholders, such as the Judiciary, the legal fraternity and law enforcement with the skills necessary to prevent and investigate cybercrimes and to prosecute and adjudicate over cybercrimes. And, Madam Deputy Speaker, you know that identity theft is a big issue in the world today.

Dr. Moonilal: A serious matter in the world.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: A serious matter. Even locally in our banking system, there was a committee formed just recently, and myself and the hon. Minister of National Security attended that meeting, and it was shocking to learn that millions of dollars have been lost through cybercrime in Trinidad and Tobago. So we are going to pilot whatever initiatives we can obtain from the Commonwealth Connects to assist in that fight of cybercrime.

Further, Government will also work with the Commonwealth Connects to develop a sustainable model for computer refurbishment in Trinidad and Tobago. The successful implementation of a computer refurbishment programme in this

country will be a concerted attempt by Government to address the emerging issue of e-waste, which is a big issue, Madam Deputy Speaker. You could well imagine what it would be like in about five to 10 years when a lot of the computers and other e-systems we are using right now become obsolete. How do we dispose of it? Therefore, there is attention, as far as looking at legislation to govern e-waste; as far as the management of e-waste in Trinidad and Tobago.

Let me turn my attention to the National Information and Communication Technology Limited, iGovTT. Madam Deputy Speaker, iGovTT has a critical role to play in the advancement of the national ICT agenda. A state-owned enterprise, iGovTT is also the implementing arm of the Ministry of Science and Technology. Its primary responsibility is to ensure the efficient execution and administration of Government's enterprise-wide ICT projects and programmes which provide for the delivery of innovative and integrative ICT solutions and services. During fiscal 2012, Government's journey in building a sustainable knowledge-intensive economy has been marked by significant initiatives that have been undertaken by iGovTT on behalf of its line Ministry.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I now wish to outline some of the primary initiatives that have been undertaken by the company. With respect to the development of ICT infrastructure in fiscal 2012, the Government has greatly improved and strengthened its capacity to communicate and share information through the Government communication backbone project, GovNeTT. This ongoing project enables all concerned Ministries and departments to communicate and share information internally and externally. To date, 527 Government sites are connected to this network.

Another major initiative is the tconnect—tconnect, Madam Deputy Speaker, offers essential Government information and services through multiple service delivery channels to the public. You will recall that the Member for St. Augustine talked about some of the services they provide online to various parts of Trinidad and Tobago. I want to assure you that the time is coming when people who are living in all areas, particularly rural areas, will be able to access Government services through some form of e-system, whether it is a computer, a handset or what have you. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: iPod, iPad.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: Whatever the e-system is. These include the use of online application, like mobile phones, self-service kiosks, specially outfitted buses to rural areas and service centres, and the introduction of hotline 800-TTCN in fiscal 2012.

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Madam Deputy Speaker, the six service centres are located throughout the country in the following areas: Princes Town; St. James; Bon Accord, Tobago; Chaguanas; Arima; and Tunapuna. But I want to assure you, as we fully equip, as a Ministry of Science and Technology, we will be building out rapidly all of these services during the year 2012/2013.

In fiscal 2013, Madam Deputy Speaker, a tconnect high availability solution will be installed and deployed which will result in 99.99 per cent tconnect. That portal would be up-time and a solution replicated at a secondary location, which will minimize the possibility of any dropped service or service interruptions in that system. In other words, we would have a flawless econnect service system for Trinidad and Tobago, and all of that will be rolled out in 2013.

There are three tconnect buses to date. The buses have visited 99 sites throughout Trinidad. They are scheduled to visit Tobago during November 2012 and January 2013. So, Vernella, take note—I mean, Member for Tobago East, take note.

The Ministry of Science and Technology will always take advantage of the inherent benefits of cloud computing and mobile government to bring government services closer to our citizens. In this regard, my Ministry will launch, in the very near future, the tconnect contact centre, a facility where citizens can contact Government to make enquiries regarding government services, make appointments or applications, register and report complaints through landline telephone, mobile telephone, their computers at home, at work or at school, using the Internet email or even instant messaging. This is a Government-wide initiative and my Ministry will be working closely with the Ministries and agencies which are in close contact with our citizens to bring existing initiatives and bring on stream the concept of shared services.

7.40 p.m.

Fiscal 2012 witnessed the roll-out of the pilot initiative, Tender Notice Online. That is another important e-service. That is, all tenders put out by Government Ministries or agencies—all government tenders from Ministries, agencies and other state bodies can be managed and published online from a single location within that tconnect portal.

Additionally, the finalization of a tconnect-wide e-payment solution is close to reality with meaningful and active collaboration and partnership between the various responsible State agencies including the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago and the Bankers Association of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to announce that just last week, late last week, the Bankers Association of Trinidad and Tobago signed off on the proposal for an approach to facilitate phase one of the Government's e-payment solution. It is anticipated that the Inland Revenue Division and the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Investment will be the first Government agencies utilizing the e-payment system in 2012/2013.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the ttconnect portal has continued to support the deployment of Government's e-services where available, such as the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Investment. The TTBizLink is very popular. It is becoming more popular. I think my colleague, the Minister of Tourism, would be aware of that. I think that was put in place while he was there, or a large part of it—the TTBizLink initiative. Also, support is being provided for selected electronic forms that users can complete online. So no longer do you have to get a pen and a pencil and go to some location or some point of presence and fill out a form. That can be done electronically.

As stated previously cooperation with other States as a means of leveraging the development of ICT and e-Government services in Trinidad and Tobago is an integral part of the strategy adopted by Government. In this regard during fiscal 2012 a concerted effort to accelerate the development and the deployment of e-services and the requisite infrastructure have been pursued through a management agreement between iGovTT and the Inforcomm Development Authority, that is, the international IDA of Singapore.

The agreement provides for the assignment of consultants from IDA to iGovTT which is aimed at obtaining the requisite technical capacity and building capacity with the view of advancing the national ICT agenda.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of Science and Technology through iGovTT has also embarked on the development of a national ICT plan, dubbed SmarTT. National stakeholder consultation comprising face-to-face and online forums were held between February and July of this year with a wide cross section of society that included Government Ministries, academia, business and civil society groups. The ICT conference that was held in July 2012 marks the culmination of the consultative process.

This conference brought together nationals and regional ICT experts, who explored the role of ICT in the context of national development and in fostering a diversified economy which would result in economic and social transformation.

Madam Deputy Speaker, iGovTT is also assisting in the country's integration into the global information society through execution of eConnect and Learn

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programme—that is, eCAL—in the support of the lead Ministry, the Ministry of Education. It is projected that in fiscal 2013 collaboration will continue to take place as the Government pursues its objective in building an e-ready society and an ICT-savvy labour force through the ICT learning and training.

Finally, Madam Deputy Speaker, Telecommunications Authority: I want to thank my colleague, the Member for San Fernando West, for her efforts in TATT and the sterling work she did while being the Minister with that responsibility. Madam Deputy Speaker, while telecommunications is increasingly seen—

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, I do not know if I will take the full 30 minutes, but I want to get this information on our record since the Ministry of Science and Technology is a new Ministry in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Deputy Speaker, while telecommunications is increasingly seen to be a component of ICT owing to the ongoing technological convergence, in the local context there is still a need to address this area as one that is somewhat discrete, particularly, with respect to the development of the telecommunications sector.

In this regard, TATT which was established under the Telecommunications Act in 2001 has a critical mandate to fulfil, which comprises:

1. guiding the transformation of the telecommunications sector into a competitive environment.
2. monitoring and regulating the sector; and
3. present the anti-competitive practices.

Since its inception, TATT has been resoundingly successful in its endeavour to liberalize the telecommunications and broadcasting sectors, to ensure that citizens have increased choice and receive the highest quality of service, at the best possible prices.

TATT's efforts, to date, have paved the way for the establishment of two operational service providers in the mobile market—that is, Digicel and bmobile;

seven providers of fixed Internet to business and individuals, thirty-seven, free-to-air radio broadcasters; and nine free-to-air television broadcasters, among other achievements.

I wish not to stress on the outputs of liberalization but rather the outcomes of it. Trinidad and Tobago's mobile phone penetration has grown from 40.8 per cent in 2004 to 138.6 per cent in 2011. That is growth. The household penetration of fixed Internet has grown from 4.9 per cent in 2007 to 52.8 per cent in 2011. Again, that is significant growth.

In the World Economic Forum Global Information Technology Report in 2008/2009, Trinidad and Tobago was rated as 81st place out of 134 countries surveyed. Today, in the 2012 report, Trinidad and Tobago has propelled to 60th place out of the 142 countries surveyed. These statistics reveal that our citizens are indeed benefiting from the thrust to transform this country into a knowledge economy and that the world is taking notice of our tremendous progress.

While these significant achievements should be celebrated, we must guard against complacency. Madam Deputy Speaker, TATT is continuing in its ambitious programme to improve telecommunications and broadcasting development in Trinidad and Tobago. One key development for the broadcasting sector will be the finalization of the long-awaited broadcasting code. The code will seek to balance the rights of broadcasters to freedom of expression and the public's right to information, while also ensuring the right to privacy and respect for family life.

With respect to telecommunications development, the authority is considering the possibility of expanding and enriching competition in the mobile sector. If this is implemented, it would be necessary to open up the 700 megahertz spectrum to facilitate 4G services to the nation and the introduction of a third mobile operator in this fiscal year as well. TATT hopes to introduce the number portability among operators, thus allowing customers to retain their phone numbers even if service providers are changed. So that is a very significant input.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is noted that the Minister of Finance and the Economy in his budget speech mentioned that the Government has undertaken a comprehensive analysis of the current ICT infrastructure in Trinidad and Tobago as an initial step to close the broadband backbone gap by using a public/private partnership. The establishment of an Internet exchange point, the IXP, another important step in Trinidad and Tobago, is also forthcoming. This may result in lower Internet rates as local Internet traffic will be exchanged within the borders

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of this country for first time. Also, my Ministry will review the operation, governance and the marketability of Trinidad and Tobago country code top-level domain tt.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in summary, I would like to reiterate to this august House that the Government is fully committed to the tenets of creating a more diversified, knowledge-intensive and competitive economy that would benefit all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. It is clear that the Ministry of Science and Technology and its associated agencies will continue to play a pivotal role in enabling the further development and advancement of science and technology and, pointedly, information and communication technology in ways that promote innovation, competitiveness, entrepreneurship and creativity.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Government can boast of major wins during the fiscal 2012 which contributed to the strengthening of ICT and the telecommunications environment. I must therefore credit, not only the staff of the Ministry of Science and Technology, but also the dedicated work of staff at NIHERST, TATT and iGovTT in advancing science and technology and building a robust ICT sector as evidenced by the following achievements:

1. The elaboration of the draft national ICT plan, that is, SmarTT, which will set the strategic direction for ICT development in Trinidad and Tobago;
2. The advancement of the e-legislative agenda with the partial proclamation of the Electronic Transactions and Data Protection Acts, which respectively give legal effect to, among other things, electronic documents and electronic signatures and provide for the protection of personal privacy;
3. The roll-out of the pilot initiative that is, Tender Notices Online, which all Government tenders from Ministries, agencies and other state bodies can be managed and published online from a single location within the ttconnect portal;
4. The successful hosting of an exhibition titled, "India: A Culture of Science" and the cooperation agreements with India's National Institute of Science, Technology and Development Studies and the National Council of Science Museums which facilitated this exercise;
5. The Government-wide e-payment solution, which is close to completion owing to active collaboration and partnership between various Ministries, agencies and organizations, such as the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago and the Bankers Association of Trinidad and Tobago; and

6. Increased mobile phone penetration and growth of the household fixed Internet which are owed in large part to the country's liberalized telecommunications environment.

So moving forward into fiscal 2013, the Ministry of Science and Technology will continue to build on the momentum generated and will seek to:

- Bridge the digital divide through the Closing the Digital Gap programme, aptly called STAR.TT.
- Roll-out of six community-based ICT access centres in strategic locations throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

7.55 p.m.

These state-of-the-art centres will offer online education, ICT literacy and skills training free of charge to all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. We would establish a national science centre and launch the tconnect contact centre which will facilitate greater accessibility to Government services by citizens, and by extension, greater interaction with Government Ministries to ensure limited service interruption, and high-level availability will also be deployed.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I underscore that science and technology inclusive of information and communication technology is critical in achieving Government's objective of creating a more diversified, knowledge-intensive economy that will chart the way for economic diversification and sustainability, and indeed, a more prosperous Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Deputy Speaker, how much time do I have?

Madam Deputy Speaker: You have 12 minutes.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: Let me take part of that 12 minutes just to say a few brief things about my constituency. Toco/Sangre Grande is a constituency that was managed under the leadership of the People's National Movement for all the years since political inception, save and except 1986, when the NAR had a sweep in Trinidad and Tobago.

But, today, Madam Deputy Speaker, Toco/Sangre Grande is one of the constituencies that obtains the lowest rating in the Human Development Index. Any aspect of it and I challenge any one of you to look at it and you would see that for all the social development indices, Toco/Sangre Grande comes up low. In addition to that, it has very little industries, it is purely agrarian, with ecotourism and, Madam Deputy Speaker, the neglect—the atrocious neglect—of that constituency over the 50 years under the People's National Movement would make you sad.

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Madam Deputy Speaker, when I assumed the position of MP for Toco/Sangre Grande, I looked at the surmountable challenge, and I tell you, had it not been for the commitment of the People's Partnership Government and its commitment to serve the people and improve and develop this country, I would have turned around and walked and never looked back, and that is honesty. But, Madam Deputy Speaker, I stood with my colleagues and we began to transform Toco/Sangre Grande as a constituency.

Let me just say briefly the number of things that we were able to do in the first two years of our tenure. We looked at where the greatest needs were; higher education was almost non-existent. So what we did, Madam Deputy Speaker,—we realized that after students graduated from high school, they had to travel outside of the constituency to obtain higher education. I want to tell you, within the shortest possible time, we now have, and I thank my colleague, Minister Fazal Karim, for that, we now have COSTAATT as one of the campuses and we have 600 students enrolled. It opened in January this year, and it is likely that the enrolment will double by the end of this year.

We recognize that Toco/Sangre Grande is a constituency that is high and big in ecotourism, and it is the gateway to tourism destinations. You know we have one of the largest turtle nesting in Toco/Sangre Grande, Grand Riviere. My colleague, Minister Cadiz, was just up there last week. Again, it is one of the largest nesting areas. And Salybia, San Souci and Grand Riviere, right down the coast, we have a lot of turtles nesting.

In addition to that, Toco/Sangre Grande has one of the greatest rock formations you can find in this part of the world, and on that rock formation, it is great for lobster fishing. Therefore, on an annual basis, we see over 200,000 tourists, not local but from abroad, coming to Trinidad and Tobago to visit the nestings as well as for fishing and other ecotourism. So what we have sought to do is to build a visitor's centre and within six months, the People's Partnership Government built a visitor's centre in Valencia, fully equipped and is widely used today by people, not only from Trinidad and Tobago, not only from Toco/Sangre Grande, but all over the world. That is a great achievement for the People's Partnership Government. [*Desk thumping*]

When you look at employment, unemployment was very high because it is purely agrarian. We, through working in collaboration with CEPEP, URP and other short-term employment, the Sangre Grande people have received significant employment. When you look at infrastructural development, we refurbished the Toco Lighthouse which is now known as Keshorn Walcott Lighthouse. It is a

place of joy. People travel from all over Trinidad and Tobago to go there. There are even weddings there on site, picnics and a lot of photo opportunities at that Toco lighthouse.

We refurbished the community centres and there is some—I have a long list of them that have been refurbished and some to be refurbished. I got the assurance from my colleague. There are a total of 18 community centres that were dilapidated, falling down, and some of them you could not even enter them. Refurbishment or rebuilding of some of them has already been agreed to. All the recreation grounds would be done within the constituency. Building of pavilions, change rooms and toilets, and paved areas for jogging and also for riding bikes.

As far as the festivals, my office, the office of the MP, is responsible for organizing all the festivals. We had a very large emancipation celebration on Emancipation Day. We celebrated Eid-ul-Fitr, Ramleela is coming up, a big one in Toco/Sangre Grande. It is one of the largest in Trinidad and Tobago and I extend an invitation to all of you to come to the Ramleela in Sangre Grande. Divali celebrations, Christmas, Carnival and other festivities in Toco/Sangre Grande.

So what we have done, a constituency that literally was on the drag, almost no activity happening, we have reactivated life in Toco/Sangre Grande. As far as sports, we are mobilizing the young people and clubs; refurbishment of the Ojoe Road Recreation Ground which is the largest recreation ground in Toco/Sangre Grande. We have held two annual sports and family groups. The last one was held on August 26, 2012, in Valencia and we had well over 10,000 people attending, Madam Deputy Speaker. We give assistance to sports and recreation clubs.

The MP's office is open six days a week. There is a staff of seven there to serve the public. The MP is there two days a week, Tuesdays and Saturdays, meeting the people, and on other times, walking about the constituency. There is an average number of about 75 visitors on a normal day in the MP's office.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, as far as health, as you know, there is one hospital in Toco/Sangre Grande and it is in need of big improvement. I want to thank my colleague, the Member for San Juan/Barataria, for the plans for building a brand new 200-bed state-of-the-art hospital and the construction of an outpatient health centre.

As far as justice, the justice building will encompass four High Courts and four Magistrates' Courts, and we are discussing a night court, and the sod is to be turned in the very near future I am told by the Minister of Justice.

As far as agriculture, we have repair and refurbishing of nine fishing depots in the constituency, repaving and repair of agricultural access roads, and construction of agricultural ponds. A brand new library will be built in Toco; that has already been approved by Cabinet. We have fixed one new bridge which is a main access to the Toco area, and we have nine bridges and agreement has already begun for refurbishing.

Finally, Madam Deputy Speaker, we are collaborating with all my ministerial colleagues to build Toco/Sangre Grande as the place that would be comfortable for living for the citizens who have been deprived for over the last 50 years under that PNM administration.

So to end, when the Leader of the Opposition and some of his colleagues next to him said that they will retake Toco/Sangre Grande, I said to them that that is delusional, and that and a purple or a green donkey they will not see. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Food Production (Hon. Jairam Seemungal): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. I thank you for the opportunity to debate on this Financial Appropriation Bill 2013. At the onset, let me congratulate my colleague, Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai, the Minister of Finance and the Economy for his presentation of the 2013 budget statement with its theme “Stimulating Growth, Generating Prosperity” and in particular, the importance that he has given to the agricultural sector in this budget.

In sitting here over the last three days, I listened to the Members on the other side: the Member for Arouca/Maloney, the Member for La Brea and the Member for Diego Martin North/East, all having a piece to say on agriculture. But I will advise them if they can take out a pen and paper, they might be able to jot down some of the policies and plans that we have for the Ministry of Food Production over the next couple of years to resuscitate the industry once again.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Finance and the Economy, in his budget presentation, has set a national objective of the reduction of the food import bill in this country by 50 per cent or \$2 billion over the next two years. This places before the farmers of this country, a formidable challenge but one to which I am confident that I will be able to report to this House in two years that we have achieved.

I say this, Madam Deputy Speaker, because the Minister of Finance and the Economy and the Prime Minister have for the first time in the history of this

country, taken the farming community into their confidence. I am certain that this confidence that the Prime Minister and the People's Partnership Government have in the farming community of this country will bear lots of sweet fruits.

Dr. Moonilal: No pun intended!

Hon. J. Seemungal: Madam Deputy Speaker, I stand in this august House to say to the farming community that we will commit to them all the resources of the Ministry of Food Production to achieve this goal. For far too long, the Ministry has operated in a manner that has led the farmers to feel a sense of alienation. In many instances, many of the nation's farmers, through our consultations, have stated that for years they have felt comfort in the garden shop as opposed to the officers of the Ministry. This culture, I am proud to say over the last two years, has started changing within the Ministry of Food Production.

8.10 p.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the present food bill, the food import bill in this country, stands at \$4 billion. That is a sizeable market for agriculture produce in this country. It is a market for food producers existing in this country at a size of \$4 billion, but a lack of vision for agriculture that we have inherited from the PNM Government has prevented us from appreciating this opportunity to diversify the economy and at the same time addressing the nation's food security.

The failure to take advantage of the opportunity of this market that exists on our doorsteps does not speak to the competence of the farmer. It speaks only to the failure of the PNM Government and their agriculture legacy of neglect that has plagued this country for years, which is highlighted in their failure to satisfy this market that is right here in our land.

In his contribution in the budget of 2011, the Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs, in the other place stated, and I quote from the *Hansard*:

“Mr. President, we see the world. This People's Partnership see the world through different lenses. We see the world through different frame. We have given the population a spirit of hope, a spirit of possibility that we will resuscitate this sector, that we will create a level of trust and credibility which will ensure that more persons come into the sector.”

I will demonstrate in my contribution, how we have continued in this budget to pursue this objective.

Nationally, this People's Partnership Government has lauded and committed to shifting the dialogue on agriculture away from the discussion of food security to a much more all-embracing concept of food sovereignty. This was raised by the

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Member for Diego Martin North/East. This concept was placed in our budget statement of 2012, and I will attempt to show the Member for Diego Martin North/East and this honourable House how we intend on achieving this goal.

This requires a paradigm shift in this sector. Nationally, this Government, over the next two years, is going to continue to assist the farmers to move this country from a goal of food security to this higher and laudable objective of food sovereignty. I shall expand on this concept, which will underpin the twin objective of diversification of the economy and insulating us from the exploitation of international food suppliers.

First, allow me to explain to this honourable House how we have arrived at this position of vulnerability and economic depression. There is no section of the economy of this country that epitomizes political abuse in the most vulnerable kind than the agriculture sector. We have inherited an agriculture sector of which each and every key indicator of levels of production of the economy of each commodity was on a downward slide.

The flagship proposal of development of the agriculture sector within the PNM administration was encapsulated in their core land development project of the 1970s, where Crown land was brought under agriculture production. I am sure my colleague from Pointe-a-Pierre would remember this. The country was promised that these lands were given to farmers in small plots to achieve the goal of food security. These areas were known as Carlsen Field, Wallerfield, Turure and there were other sites similar to these, which comprise close to 12,000 acres of land.

We are supposed to have produced for this country, milk and meat to feed the nation. The import bill on milk and meat and the commodities of milk and meat alone in this country amounts to some \$1 billion, yes, \$1,000 million or one-quarter of our food import bill.

In the year 2000, according to the CSO Report, this country was producing some 10 million litres of milk. Under their watch in 2009, milk fell by 50 per cent. In fact, in the years 2007 to 2009, milk fell by one million litres per year. This is what we inherited. A big contributor to this was when they threatened the Waller Field farmers. Remember those Waller Field farmers by the highway from Arima to Manzanilla? Thousands of acres of land in this area, that is a major part of my constituency, were to be bulldozed to make way for a highway and a city, depriving these farmers of their way of life and forcing these farmers to go out of business, forcing these farmers to sell their animals, to sell their milking animals, highly productive animals—held them to ransom for years.

In 2012, just two years in coming into office, I am proud to say that the milk has started on the incline and Nestlé has reported some three million litres of milk in 2012. That picture of rural neglect of milk is the same when we look at meat. The import bill for meat is just over half of a billion dollars.

The local production of meat in 2007 was 166,000 kgs and by 2009, it fell to less than 39,000 kgs. Rice, an import bill of \$108 million, when this country, just a few years ago, was producing all the rice we can eat. Today this picture looks very, very, gloomy.

At the heart of the failed legacy of the PNM Government is that they have failed to give our farmers the feeling of land security. Land security! They refused to establish systems to have the renewal of expired leases expedited. We, on the other hand, have started just that. We are returning to the 30-year lease with a revised lease that we are reviewing right now, which would give security of tenure to the farmers, but at the same time monitor the systems and monitor their planting and monitor their production on their lands, and if they are unproductive then, with the Ministry, we will be dealing with that as well.

Madam Deputy Speaker, not only have they failed this country, the farmers on land, but they have failed in the sea as well. They have failed to provide the necessary support and infrastructure for handling and sale of the fisherfolks of this country. We reside in an island state and by definition some of our greatest resources are our coastlines, yet this country continues to have a palate that has a preference for salted and dried imported fish with preference to the availability of fresh fish. The food import bill on fish and fish products alone in this country amounts to some \$150 million.

Moneys that could have been earned by our fishermen in Toco, Matelot, Blanchisseuse, Point Fortin and La Brea have been spent on imported fish from Europe and other foreign countries, while our fishermen continue to suffer for the basic necessities of infrastructure that will allow them to ply their trade to their maximum. We, in this People's Partnership Government, have started to repair all the fishing facilities and within the next three years, we are going to upgrade all the fishing centres throughout Trinidad.

It is that visionless and heartless and merciless PNM Government that has failed to invest in our farmers in this country and to invest in food production, yet they were prepared to waste billions on urban development projects. Madam Deputy Speaker, I am sure you and other Members of this House could remember the amount they spent on CHOGM, the Financial Administrative Complex, the

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Brian Lara Stadium and the \$2 billion flag which we could not eat. Had they invested just a fraction of that money in our farmers and food production, we would not have been facing this food crisis that is on our doorstep today.

I am sure you would have listened attentively to the hon. Leader of the Opposition and Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West, and like many of the farmers in this country and many who are concerned about agriculture would have listened in alarm to note that the mentality that has led us to where we are in food production has not changed. You would have heard the Leader of the Opposition tell his honourable House that he intends to bring back the rapid rail project. God forbid that his government returns to power.

Just to place on record, I would quote the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West from the *Hansard*.

“...I wish to confirm what the PP”—People’s Partnership—“cannot do the PNM will do...On coming into office after the next election—...

—no matter how many Ministers fool themselves, no matter how many useless pre-budget or post budget rallies they have, the new PNM Government will commit itself to a speedy implementation of the rapid rail system.”

On top of this, all of them thumped their desk. They smiled with excitement. They looked happy that this rapid rail is the best policy that the alternate government has in plan for this country.

8.25 p.m.

May I remind you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that prior to May 24, 2010, many of our farmers, our farming association throughout central and other areas, were in uproar for this rapid rail which would have dispossessed thousand of acres of arable agricultural lands, and yet they come to this House and rant and rave about the bulldozing of land in Pineapple Smith and other areas, but they were going to displace thousands of acres of the best land in Trinidad.

I recall the Member for Caroni East, the Member for St Augustine and the Member for Chaguanas West were all in the campaign to ensure that these lands were not eroded. The Esmeralda Road, Mon Plaisir Road, Chin Chin, Ramgoolie Trace, Ragoonanan Road, Welcome Road, Orange Grove, South Aranguez, Carlson Field, their flagship project of the 1970s, were going to be replaced with a brand new spanking rapid rail project to take citizens from north to south of this country.

Never again will farmers and citizens of this country allow that Government to return to power, to bring this type of distress on the farming community of this country. [*Desk thumping*] Never again would they see the corridors of power in this country just for that type of policy. Never again would they come and sit in this House to lead this country down that type of road where farmers will be displaced, where the people of this country would require feeding and there is no food to eat. The world is crying out for food and that is the type of policies that they come to this House to bring. To bring policies that would bulldoze all these farmers and clear them off the land to put in a railway system to transport them from north to south, Madam Deputy Speaker. We are not going to allow that.

Mr. Sharma: “All the children who does drink milk.”

Hon. J. Seemungal: “No milk for dey children.” Please, do forgive me for being passionate on this matter. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Go right ahead, man.

Hon. J. Seemungal: But if any of them had gone through the farming communities and lived amongst farmers, and gone to school as farmers’ children like our Prime Minister from Penal, like the Member for Fyzabad, other Members on our side, they would know how it is to be living as a farmer in this country, and when you threaten farmers that you are going to bulldoze their land, the first opportunity they have to get back in power, it is something to be passionate about. [*Desk thumping*]

The citizens of this country will never, never again allow them to come back into power, Madam Deputy Speaker. [*Crosstalk*] We will never allow them to come back into power, if that is the type of policy that they have to create this rapid rail project back into the arable lands of the farmers of this country. Never again, and I say never again would they see power in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Thomas: Drink some water. [*Mrs. Thomas offers Hon. J. Seemungal a bottle of water*] [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

Miss Hospedales: Yes.

Hon. J. Seemungal: Having outlined the history and predicament—[*Hon. J. Seemungal drinks water from his bottle*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Give him some water there, boy.

Hon. Member: “Geh him some goat milk, eh.”

Hon. Member: “It ha’ no milk here.”

Hon. J. Seemungal: You see, Madam Deputy Speaker, when I went around on May 24 and I heard the cries of the farmers in my constituency, I saw the tears from their eyes, some of them could not even feed their children milk. They had to sell their animals, animals that were producing milk to feed their children, they had to sell them because they were being threatened to move out of that area for highways and rapid rails.

Dr. Gopeesingh: All in Cunupia.

Hon. J. Seemungal: Having outlined the history and predicament that the agriculture sector and, by extension, the country found itself in, I shall now develop the paradigm shift that I alluded to earlier in my speech.

It is only a Prime Minister who had been nurtured in the rural communities, who had been brought up among farmers, would appreciate the hardship—that this failed PNM administration policy in the agricultural sector—in these rural communities. A Prime Minister who can appoint a Minister of Finance and the Economy with a mandate to bring these people within the confidence of the Government, to both diversify the economy and to smash the dependency on foreign food by half within two years.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this budget will be recorded in our *Hansard* as one of the most enlightened and beneficial budgets ever in the history of this country, to the providers of food for the nation—that is, our farmers. It is only a Government that is people-centred, that can provide such an innovative budget that is designed to highlight and recognize the human capital that we in the Ministry of Food Production say is the greatest asset to the sector—that is, the farmers. [*Desk thumping*] Our farmers have given yeoman service to this country by preserving the foundation on which we will now thrust the food security of this nation.

Please permit me to outline some of the achievements that the Ministry of Food Production has done over the last two years. The Ministry of Food Production has provided the best incentive programme for our farmers in this country. [*Desk thumping*] We revised and took into account the reality of agriculture, the agricultural enterprises in a modern competitive environment, that seeks to improve productivity through adopting new technology and mechanization.

The incentive programme has been reconstructed to provide rebate in areas such as aquaculture, or on farm security. You heard the Minister of Finance and the Economy has removed VAT and duties from security systems; post-harvest

operation; agro-processes and marketing. In addition, we have provided for the very first time to new farmers \$30,000—up 50 percent—up to a value of \$30,000 to encourage young people to come into agriculture. [*Desk thumping*] This programme has cost the State \$19.1 million with 3,851 applicants benefiting.

In the area of credit, the Agricultural Development Bank for the very first time, under the watch of the People's Partnership Government, reduced the lending rate from 8—11 per cent, to 3—5 per cent, [*Desk thumping*] and we have also reduced the management fee from 2 per cent to 0.5 per cent. The new rebranding loan system will allow and attract young people and more entrepreneurs to come into the agriculture sector. [*Crosstalk*]

For the very first time we have provided for the Muslim farmers of this country a new programme called the Islamic Banking Window. [*Desk thumping*] We have also catered for our national school caterers' loan. I am sure the Minister of Education will be excited.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yes, NSDSL.

Hon. J. Seemungal: These are entrepreneurs who will be able to access loans at 3—5 per cent to upgrade their school feeding catering systems. [*Desk thumping*] It does not stop there. Right now, we are giving consideration to a new loan system which will cater for the livestock farmers. The livestock farmers have the most expensive infrastructure to invest in to start up their livestock farming.

The difference between a livestock farmer and a vegetable farmer is that the livestock farmer does not come into any income soon after his farm starts. So, we are giving consideration right now to a loan system whereby we will provide a loan and security to the livestock farmer, which will allow him to set up his infrastructure and give him a one-year moratorium on the farm. At the end of the first year, he will now start to pay back for his loan, and at the end of the second year, the bank will release the Government or the loan itself and then hold the farmer's investment for that loan system. In other words, Madam Deputy Speaker, we are allowing the farmer to grow, and then we are actually going to take investments from him.

Mr. Sharma: Well thought out.

Hon. J. Seemungal: We are also giving consideration to an agro-processors' loan to help these agro-processors. We are looking into a system whereby the bank will invest in setting up the small business which is in excess of that which NEDCO can provide, but setting up some small processing plants, and engage the lessees on a lease-to-own basis. This will help boost the younger processors to get into the business of processing.

During the last fiscal year, we have sold 294,000 cocoa seedlings; 7,400 coffee seedlings; 18,000 breadfruit seedlings; 150,000 citrus seedlings; 20,000 mango seedlings and 25,000 avocado seedlings.

Hon. Member: Very viable.

Hon. J. Seemungal: This we intend to double this year to ensure that we are reviving the food industry. [*Desk thumping*] With respect to agriculture access roads, we continue to provide roads throughout, in order to assist our farmers. We are now engaging the Minister of Local Government, because for many years the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Food Production continue to repair a lot of the local government roads. So, we are now engaging the Minister of Local Government to take over some of these local government agricultural access roads by way of maintenance.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we have repaired many of the fishing facilities, and works are being undertaking in Brickfield, Salybia, Otaheite, Grande Riviere and Point Radix. Tomorrow, my colleague, the Member for Point Fortin, will be opening the Fullerton/Icacos fishing facilities. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Oh Lord!

Hon Member: Very good.

Hon. J. Seemungal: So you are invited.

Hon. Member: “Paula, yuh going?”

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Will you be there?

Hon. J. Seemungal: Mr. Leader of Government Business, will you excuse her to attend and ensure that it is opened and—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: “We will give you ah helicopter.” [*Laughter*]

Hon. J. Seemungal: With respect to the water management and flood irrigation system, we have also constructed some 377 ponds, and we have facilitated demonstration irrigation systems on some 20 plots. With respect to our land distribution programme, we have distributed some 4,223, two-acre plots this year.

8.40 p.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker, with respect to training, the Youth Apprenticeship Programme, the Youth in Agriculture, this year we have trained over 40 persons.

With respect to the OJT, we have launched a new OJT programme this year, and, with respect to the URP programme, we have trained some 360 persons in the URP in the agriculture programme. These are some of the areas that the Ministry is performing over this year. There are many more but I want to look at the way forward. Where are we going from here? What is this paradigm shift that I referred to that we are going to undertake in order to move the agriculture sector forward?

Madam Deputy Speaker, as I turn my attention now to this paradigm shift, please allow me to refer to the goals that are set by the Minister of Finance and the Economy, that is, slashing our food import bill by \$2 billion. The Member for Diego Martin North/East referred to food sovereignty and where did it reach and what are we doing. We spoke about it last year in the 2012 budget, and what are we doing?

For their information, food sovereignty is not new to us. It has evolved out of the warm embrace by our Prime Minister for the farming community. Madam Deputy Speaker, it has been common to address as a goal for the agriculture sector, food security—food security stripped down to the bare bones. What this concept entails is that the rural communities produce food to feed the urban communities. Food security is the rural communities producing food to feed the urban communities.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the prospective of the People's Partnership Government and the hon. Prime Minister immediately recognize that food production should not be limited in such a way that we have sought to free food production from such a one-sided equation. We have sought to balance, by introducing into the equation, the reciprocal obligation to ensure that those who live in the rural communities in this country have access to equal opportunities as those who live in the urban areas such as social services and recreation and sharing of the country's wealth.

It is in this context that I define the concept of food sovereignty as a working definition. Food sovereignty, Madam Deputy Speaker, is a right of people to define their own agricultural and food policy, to protect and regulate their production and agricultural trade in order to achieve national objectives of food self-sufficiency and to eliminate dumping in their market.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this concept of food sovereignty sits and it supports and is supported by what I shall now develop as six pillars, the first of which is, food for our people. The People's Partnership represents people who recognize

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and put at the heart of its food policy the right of individual people, the right of all individuals, people and communities—including those who have been marginalized—at the centre of food production. That is why we say the focus on slashing the food import bill by \$2 billion is to produce food to feed our people. Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker, I refer to the paradigm shift of putting food first and putting people first.

In this regard we have embarked on several initiatives to feed our nation. One such initiative is illustrated by our aggressive approach towards bringing potential rice land under rice cultivation. Our rice import bill stands at \$108 million, \$108 million, Madam Deputy Speaker. We shall continue to develop this project in this fiscal year in which—and which will have significant impact on our rice import bill and which, I am certain, will exceed all projection. Let me explain how we are going to expand on this rice project.

The potential rice land available in this country is some 10,000 acres. Five thousand, five hundred acres came from former Caroni lands; 2,500 acres in Plum Mitan and Kernahan and some 2,500 acres in south Trinidad. Since 2010 we have brought some 1,500 acres of rice in cultivation. In this fiscal year we intend to bring another 5,000 acres of rice under cultivation. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Very good.

Hon. J. Seemungal: How are we going to do this, Madam Deputy Speaker? It is the first time that a government shall invest in land preparation for the first crop of these lands for farmers, whether these lands are private or leasehold.

The preparation of rice land is one of the most expensive expenditures that the rice farmer has to undertake. It entails bulldozers and tractors with specialized equipment to level these lands. Even the fifteen hundred acres of land that we have in cultivation are not fully prepared for the rice cultivation. They are required to be levelled by laser level and more sophisticated equipment. This cost, Madam Deputy Speaker, we feel, is a very expensive cost for the farmer to undertake, and even if we allow the farmer to undertake that type of preparation, we would have about 10 acres coming into production a year. This People's Partnership's caring Government intends to bring this 5,000 acres of land preparation and then deliver it to the farmers.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Very good.

Mr. Moonilal: Very good. And how much would we be able to save?

Hon. J. Seemungal: Madam Deputy Speaker, the focus is on producing food for our people, as rice is a staple of our diet. In addition to the preparation of land

for the rice farmers, we have embarked on an aggressive farmers' training exercise to bring the farmers in the rice land up to speed with the new cultural practices available. We have also imported high quality grains from Guyana and we are also engaging technical support from Brazil to assist in this rice production. Madam Deputy Speaker, the current consumption of rice in Trinidad is 33,000 pounds of which 99 per cent of it is imported.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Thirty-three thousand tonnes.

Hon. J. Seemungal: Thirty-three thousand tonnes of which 99 per cent is imported. By this initiative we will not only increase material available for the local livestock market, as well we are going to yield some 24,000 tonnes of paddy which will produce some 16,000 tonnes of rice. That is half of the rice that we import, which will at least slash the import bill by some \$50 million.

Madam Deputy Speaker, another of the initiatives that we will implement in this fiscal year that underscores the food for our people, involves the bringing of the Caroni lands that have been allocated into two-acre plots in alignment with human capital, so that would allow us to bring these lands into mutual productive use. We intend to focus a programme whereby these plots can be amalgamated so that they can allow us to exploit the economies of scale and thereby produce—

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. J. Seemungal: Thank you Member for Point Fortin, and others.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we intend by this programme in this fiscal year to bring some 5,000 acres of land into efficient production. In the last fiscal year we have brought some 800 acres of land under vegetable cultivation.

Fresh vegetables and dry goods in this country utilize over \$420 million in our food import bill. Madam Deputy Speaker, greenhouse technology is another initiative that this Government intends to undertake. We intend to amalgamate technologies of Jamaica, Belize and Barbados and to have training facilities and demonstration facilities that will encourage our farmers to engage in greenhouse technology.

The second pillar in the food sovereignty is value for food, value for our food providers. Madam Deputy Speaker, we intend to show our appreciation and support to all people of this country, regardless of creed and race, colour and religion, who are involved in food production.

Madam Deputy Speaker, one of our greatest areas of appreciation in this Government will be in the revolution of milk production. In this regard the Ministry of Food Production is going to pioneer two innovative projects, born out of the value and support for the animal farmers and husbandry. We have recognized that the greatest inhibition to the increase in animal production—and one of the farms lies in the Member for Point Fortin’s constituency, a very large livestock farm which we intend to bring under production as well.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Thank you very much.

Hon. J. Seemungal: Madam Deputy Speaker, we rely—

Miss Ramdial: “All you giving Point Fortin too much.”

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: “Yeah, but you not getting the seat still, eh.”

Hon. J. Seemungal: Madam Deputy Speaker, in this regard, it relates to one of the highest costs, and there is the availability of feed. The Minister of Finance and the Economy identified in his budget that the scarcity of corn grains is one of the major factors for the high cost of feed. Allow me to illustrate by example why it is necessary to partner with our Caricom colleagues in order to increase food production and food security.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West chastised this Government as to why we are going into Guyana to invest in land and into land production for agriculture. This country, for the poultry industry alone, imports some 100,000 tonnes of corn. The cost of this import amounts to some \$200 million. Just to grow corn to feed the poultry in this country requires some 50,000 acres. Fifty thousand acres is required to grow corn for the poultry industry alone, and that amounts to some \$200 million.

Madam Deputy Speaker, that is more than half of the land that Caroni (1975) Limited had available for farming. That is why we have to go into countries and partner with Guyana and Belize and other Caricom countries [*Desk thumping*] because we do not have the land; and corn production requires flat land and also mechanized operation. Madam Deputy Speaker, that is why, so maybe you can explain to the Member for Diego Martin West why we are required to go—and that is how we will fund it. It is \$200 million just to grow—50,000 acres of corn, that is the cost of 100,000 tonnes of corn and that is for the poultry. And that is an underestimate for poultry alone. We are not talking livestock.

8.55 p.m.

So, that is the reason why we are going into areas like Guyana and Belize and partnering with our Caricom countries, so that we see the value and the benefit of these large acreages that they make available and we can have farmers go there and farm it and then ship it back to Trinidad. The money goes from Trinidadian to Trinidadian from Guyana and the corn comes into this country, and that is how we intend to save.

Madam Deputy Speaker, with respect to the livestock feed, we have launched the Mon Jaloux feed centre with some 438 acres of land to bring under grass production. In this centre we are going to create the very unique feed for livestock which is called silage. This silage field has been developed all over the world and it is used to feed livestock. It is an alternate cheap feed for feeding livestock. We are also going to make available some 400 acres of land in the Aripo Livestock Station—those are government stations—and also some 300 acres of land in the El Carmen demonstration station, so that we can produce grass in bales, store it and make it available to the livestock farmers when and if necessary and also make a continuous supply of supplement feed for our livestock.

Not only is this Government prepared to reduce the cost of production, we also wish to engage livestock farmers into a new engineered method of livestock production. Madam Deputy Speaker, the three major failed projects under the PNM administration are the Carlsen Field Station, the Carlsen Field Livestock Project, the Wallerfield Livestock Project and the Turure Livestock Project, comprised of some 10,000 acres of land. These lands are divided into 20-acre holdings. The technocrats of the Ministry have started working on a model that will help these livestock farmers to increase production on their holdings and bring in value for money to the farmers.

Madam Deputy Speaker, they have outlined a scheme whereby five acres of these 20 acres will be brought under, fruit production, five acres into aquaculture, where water is available, five acres into forage, and five acres into intensive livestock production. This model that they have created has an estimated earning value to the farmer of some \$30,000 per month. This model encapsulates the main revenue earner of the farmer by way of milk production, with an estimated 30 heads of dairy animals providing some \$17,000 per month. The remainder comes from the sale of manure and another expensive commodity, the sale of compost. Madam Deputy Speaker, we intend to encourage these farmers to venture into

compost making. An average 50-pound bag of compost attracts some US \$18 per bag. The by-product of his orchard and the by-product of cleaning in and around his farm will be used as the main material to make this compost material.

Where are we going to put all this food and fruits that we are going to bring into production? Madam Deputy Speaker, it is necessary for me now to illustrate how we are going to utilize the existing markets that are available to bring food production up and to create a market that is available to farmers. Madam Deputy Speaker, there are two state-sponsored markets that are available and accessible to farmers. The first programme I speak of is the school feeding programme.

The food we give to our children to eat in our school in the school feeding programme has a consequence of culturing their palates. This is the food that they will demand when they become adults. We must start teaching our children to eat locally produced foods. [*Desk thumping*] I have examined an estimate in the usage of agriproducts by the National Schools Dietary Services Limited and the demand is startling. We intend as a Government to foster a programme whereby we localize and develop this market wherein this programme can be accessed by the agriculture producers of this country.

Madam Deputy Speaker, please permit me to outline just a few of the commodities which the school feeding programme accesses: cabbage, 500,000 pounds per year; pumpkin, 600,000 pounds per year; pimento, three million pimentos; celery, 1.8 million bundles of celery; oranges, 1.5 million oranges; portugals, 1.5 million portugals; watermelon, 1.5 million pounds. That is what the school feeding programme takes in.

In discussion with the members of the executive, the chairman and the Minister of Education and the school feeding programme, we intend to work to partner with them through the Ministry of Food Production and through NAMDEVCO to make available one of our packing houses that will be used to satisfy this market. This will satisfy the demand of this programme by engaging farmers on a contractual basis to supply the need of this programme. Madam Deputy Speaker, it was felt for years that farmers could not have accessed this market and we intend to make a packing house available for the school feeding programme to satisfy this market.

Another market that is State-sponsored is the military. Madam Deputy Speaker, could you imagine our soldiers are being fed in large by foreign supplies of meat and vegetables and fruits? This is no fault of the military and the soldiers nor the Minister of National Security. It really relies on a ready supply of the food

and where it is available. In my consultation with Brigadier Maharaj and the Minister of National Security, we in the Ministry of Food Production will be making one of NAMDEVCO's packing houses available to this market. Let me just outline, Madam Deputy Speaker, a couple of the commodities which are utilized by the military.

On a yearly basis: cucumbers, some 100,000 pounds; grapefruit, some 50,000 kg; bodi, some 72,000 kg; bananas, some 60,000, and I can go on and on. So these are markets that are available.

Dr. Gopeesingh: That is per month?

Hon. J. Seemungal: That is per year. These are markets that are available that can satisfy the needs of our farming community and we in the Ministry of Food Production, for the first time, will be partnering with the Ministry of National Security and the Ministry of Education to make this market readily available to the farmers of this country.

Hon. Member: As of tomorrow.

Hon. J. Seemungal: As of tomorrow. That is the synergy we are creating in this Government, where the various Ministries help each other and hold their hands and walk them through for the benefit of the farmers of the country. We are also going to partner with the Ministry of Health and ensure that the sick people of this country eat healthy local food, Madam Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

A third market that is available as well—because, if you do not find a market, you would not encourage farmers to grow more. Farmers want some security of market so that they can produce more. A third market that is available, Madam Deputy Speaker, is the Exporters Association of Trinidad and Tobago. By this union we seek to exploit the market created by our West Indian diaspora. I must place on *Hansard* my profound gratitude to the members of the Agricultural Exporters Association of Trinidad and Tobago. Preliminary research has indicated that this potentially lucrative market will allow our local food producers to enjoy the price of their commodities, as that will result in an increased profit margin and permit them to enjoy a better standard of living.

Madam Deputy Speaker, please do permit me to outline just a few of the commodities that are available on a monthly basis by the exporters association: pumpkin, 500,000 pounds; hot pepper, 50,000 pounds, pawpaw, 50,000 pounds; melongene, 10,000; “shado beni”, any amount Trinidad can produce; long beans, 25,000 pounds. These are markets that are available and again, through

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NAMDEVCO, one of our packing houses will be made available to facilitate these markets. So, as we produce more foods, we are going to create the market system that will lend us the avenue whereby our farmers can produce food in a secure and a more efficient and effective manner.

The fourth limb that I will examine is putting controls locally. Madam Deputy Speaker, may I now proceed to develop the fourth limb, this fourth limb of our paradigm shift, as I have indicated earlier. The Ministry of Food Production does not intend to take control over our farmers like the previous regime. We are happy to have our farmers take control of their own destination.

We intend to stand side-by-side with the farmers to support them to ensure that the population has access to sure food supplies. In this regard, and in furtherance to the security net, we intend to implement strategies to stabilize our marketplace. To this end, let me just explain this for one minute. Even while we set up NAMDEVCO and all these various markets through the Ministry of National Security, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and they enter into contract relationships with farmers, farmers still have access to go to the wholesale market and sell their produce which may be much higher in value than that of the packaging house.

For example, the contractors are very happy to produce tomatoes, for instance, at \$5 a pound, but in the wholesale market you can go there and you may get it at \$10, \$15 a pound. This is what is called price gouging, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mrs. Gopie-Scoon: Would you give way?

Hon. J. Seemungal: I only have a few minutes again. [*Laughter*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, to this end NAMDEVCO is considering a new strategy whereby they would place in each of the wholesale markets a NAMDEVCO outlet, thereby making the food available at a similar price to that for which it is purchased. This would allow the vendors an alternate supply of food. You can either choose to buy it for the cheaper price, or choose to buy it wherever. So we are not going to put any fixed prices on food, but NAMDEVCO, through their system, will then make an alternate supply of food to the farmers.

Through this system, NAMDEVCO will be packaging food commodities and making it also available to the restaurants and hoteliers in package boxes, and even the Parliament. We will encourage local processors to set up local processing outlets and try to diversify in the next few years the outlets of NAMDEVCO itself.

Madam Deputy Speaker, NAMDEVCO will also be involved in certifying farmers for the export trade. The citrus industry is another industry we intend to exploit in this country. In the Cumuto area, that area is well known for citrus. They have over 3,000 acres of land owned by some 700 farmers. We intend to work actively with these farmers to revive these citrus estates and bring citrus back in that area to its prestige.

In the Todds Road area there are some 1,100 acres of land. We intend during this year to ensure that these farmers, who have access to the leases of these lands, bring these lands into active citrus cultivation. That will help slash the food import bill by some \$120 million in juices.

Madam Deputy Speaker, another area which we intend to explore is agrotourism and this we are going to explore in collaboration with the Minister of Tourism. There are three stations within the Ministry of Food Production that lend themselves naturally to agro-tourism, the Marper demonstration station which has a history of cocoa. That station has over 1,200 original gene stock material of cocoa. It is the only station in the entire world where so many different varieties of cocoa are made available. Cocoa.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Where?

Hon. J. Seemungal: In Marper; Marper in Plum Mitan. The Minister of Tourism has undertaken that he will prepare a programme that will make the station available to agro-tourism. As a matter of fact, in that station, it has one of the old cocoa houses still available in a tapia house, that is, so we can make also a cocoa museum in that station.

The La Pastora station is one of the most beautiful sites that we have. The station lends itself to a trail over the tip of the Northern Range and back down into the station. It also lends itself for fruit afforestation, so the people, the farmers up in Toco and Grande Riviere and Salybia and all these areas, can then be introduced to fruit afforestation. The farmers who are living on the hills of Diego Martin and all these areas that were prone to landslides recently, we can then rehabilitate these areas with fruits, and make fruit available to the local processors of this country.

9.10 p.m.

We also intend, Madam Deputy Speaker, to revive the “cascadu” industry in this country. “Cascadu” is fast becoming extinct in this country. If you travel from Port of Spain to Guayaguayare, you may not see any “cascadu” available.

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In August of this year, we released some 2,000 “cascadu” into the wild and we intend, through the Sugarcane Feeds Centre, to release some 100,000 “cascadu” into the wild every single year. This industry supports some 5,000 families in Trinidad, so these areas are avenues of creating employment.

Cassava: we have developed the technology and farmers have developed the technology to produce cassava at the rate of 30,000 pounds per acre. That is from the old rate of 15,000 pounds per acre.

Sweet potato is another area which we are going to exploit and, over the next year, produce over one million pounds of sweet potato.

Honey is another area which we are going to explore, introducing it to farmers in rural communities such as Matelot, Grande Riviere, the middle of the Northern Range, Point Fortin, Icacos. These are areas that honey would lend itself naturally to, the forested areas. We intend to partner with these farmers and create a starter box in which they can start this honey industry.

Madam Deputy Speaker, honey in Trinidad is one of the best in the world. In the European Union contest a couple years ago, Trinidad won the honey competition twice—not once, twice—and then we were thrown out because our honey did not meet the international standard. Right now, we are working with Brazil and BAPA to introduce a lab to test our honey to ensure that it is cleared so that it can then be marketed in the European Union.

Aquaculture is another area which we intend to spend some time with, but before I close, permit me to touch on one little matter that has been a little troubling to me.

It is the first time I am seeing people against a policy of saving money. It is a policy whereby we are slashing taxes and we are seeing people in an uproar over slashing taxes. We are seeing people in an uproar over ensuring that the poor save some money so that they could put in their pockets and their Christmas bag.

By removing the VAT on all food items, this would allow the poor people of La Horquetta, Talparo, Mundo Nuevo, Todd’s Road, Tamana and Tabaquite to save some money and in their Christmas basket they can put it against toys or other food for children during Christmas.

Madam Deputy Speaker, just to outline a few of these products that will be available for the lower taxes on VAT: breakfast cereal—they prefer children do not eat breakfast cereal. Only people in the urban areas must eat cereal. Country people must not eat cereal at all.

A box of 375 grams will save \$2.87; oats cereal, a saving of \$1.56; canned baked beans, 90 cents; pepper sauce, \$1.04 saving on VAT; sausage—

I remember when I went to ECIAF, we had sausage every single day, three times a day. Madam Deputy Speaker, the poor children cannot access these, but we are now making it available, making the taxes lower so that they can purchase some.

Sausage, \$1.17; pancake mix:—I am hearing my colleagues from Point Fortin—we cannot eat pancake mix, only people from town must eat that. Country people in Talparo cannot eat that; people in Tamana cannot eat that—nuts and jam. In a small grocery list with about 15 items, a housewife can save some \$25 a week; \$100 a month; \$1,200 a year. Do you know how many toys you can buy for happy children with \$1,200 a year? This is the first time I am seeing people who are against saving for poor people.

Allow me to thank my constituents of La Horquetta/Talparo, who have been keeping me alive for the last two years so that I can represent them in this Parliament and represent the poor people in the rural communities and ensure that the rapid rail system does not ever come back in this country ever again; and that that heartless PNM administration never sees the halls of power in this country.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank you.

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Nizam Baksh): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to stand before this honourable House to support this Bill and to congratulate Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai, Minister of Finance and the Economy, on his maiden budget presentation, which was delivered with aplomb, eloquence and stature.

I also take this opportunity to commend the hon. Prime Minister for her vision, leadership capabilities and commitment to improving the quality of life of all the citizens of our beautiful Trinidad and Tobago.

It would be remiss of me, Madam Deputy Speaker, if I do not congratulate all Members of the Government Benches who spoke earlier, especially the charge that was led by our dear friend, the Member for Tobago West, when he led a destructive path into the PNM's THA.

For fiscal 2013, the Ministry of Public Utilities is seeking to continue to build upon strategies outlined in the *Medium-Term Policy Framework, 2011—2014*. The strategic priorities within the *Medium-Term Policy Framework* seeks to address important initiatives namely: economic growth, job creation,

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competitiveness and innovation, poverty reduction and human capital development. The equitable and efficient provision of utility services to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago is a prerequisite for achieving these noble goals. Ensuring that these services are provided in the most effective and efficient manner is the mission of the Ministry of Public Utilities.

This is the third budget presented by the People's Partnership Government to the citizenry of this blessed country. It is essentially a continuation of the Government's policy, which seeks to improve the quality of life of the people of Trinidad and Tobago in every sphere of existence. The Ministry of Public Utilities is just one cog in the delivery wheel of Government, which supports the programmes and projects of all the other Ministries.

In the 2012 budgetary allocations, the Ministry of Public Utilities was allocated \$3.1 million for recurrent expenditure in the *Public Sector Investment Programme*. These programmes and projects are geared towards improving and increasing the availability of those utilities to which the citizenry of Trinidad and Tobago is entitled.

I propose, in my contribution, to discuss matters under the portfolio of the Ministry of Public Utilities, along with the following topics:

Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission, T&TEC;
the Telecommunication Services of Trinidad and Tobago, TSTT;
the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Services, TTPost;
the Regulated Industries Commission, RIC;
the Ministry of Public Utilities, MPU;
the Electrical Inspectorate Division, EID;
the National Social Development Programme, NSDP;
the Utilities Assistance Programme, the UAP; and
the Government Printery.

All these efforts are being taken here to share information with the members of the national community.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission: the electricity sector continues to be an engine in the socio-economic development of Trinidad and Tobago. T&TEC will continue to support the

Government in its developmental thrust and has embarked upon several projects aimed at improving the quality of life of all our citizens, encouraging business investments, ensuring quick restoration of electricity supply in disaster situations and promoting the use of renewable energy sources. I would first state the achievements made for fiscal 2012 and then I would proceed with the plans for the next fiscal year 2013.

T&TEC bulk power purchase projects: the bulk power transmission projects undertaken by T&TEC involve the construction and upgrading of substations, tower lines and cable circuits that are used to move power from the generating stations to the load centres where it is required. These developments allow for a more reliable supply to existing customers and also cater for energy demands for new residential, commercial and industrial customers.

Transmission development projects are undertaken for 20—30-year planning horizons and, as such, the present transmission developments are geared to meeting the country's electricity demands for up to 2030 and beyond.

Completed transmission projects: as at August 2012, eight substations have been completed at Edward Street, Wallerfield, Union, Reform, Debe/Brighton, Macoya and Mount Hope and the Bamboo substation was upgraded. Six tower lines have been completed at Bamboo/Mount Hope, San Raphael/Wallerfield, Pinto Road/Wallerfield, Reform/Debe, Debe/Union and Bamboo/Sea Lots. One cable circuit has been completed at Brechin Castle/Reform. Of these, the Debe substation was completed in June 2011 and the Bamboo/Sea Lots overhead line was completed in February 2012.

9.25 p.m.

In addition, works on Sea Lots, gateway cable circuit, the gateway substation, the UTT substation at the UTT Wallerfield were ongoing at the end of fiscal 2012.

I wish to advise that the individual projects which are part of a transmission development master plan and comprise the construction of 12 substations and over 100 kilometres of transmission and sub-transmission lines, the gestation period for these individual projects ranges from two to five years. As of August 2012, upgrades of the Point Cumana, Laventille and Rio Claro distribution substations were also completed.

Upgrade works on the San Juan, Diego Martin, St. Augustine, O'Meara M5000, Syne Village and Tabaquite distribution substations also commenced or continued during fiscal 2012.

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Works at a new substation at Charlieville also continued, and land was made available by the Government for the establishment of a substation at Felicity during the last fiscal year. These projects all impact on the quality and reliability of electricity supply to customers.

Telecommunications and fibre-optic systems: as at August 2012, a total of 700 kilometres of fibre-optic cable were installed and operational. A further 60 kilometres are expected to be installed and operational by December 2012.

The Minister of Finance and the Economy, in his budgetary presentation, made mention of the infrastructure to move power from the TGU to the national grid. Madam Deputy Speaker, to better serve the growing needs of customers and given the pending decommissioning of the near obsolete Port of Spain power station, the commission must undertake increasing amounts of power from the 720 megawatts Trinidad Generation Unlimited (TGU) power plant into the national grid. To do this, additional transmission infrastructure is being developed. There is a whole list of projects that we are going to embark upon.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to take a look at Tobago. At this point in time we are experiencing some problems in Tobago with regard to the supply of electricity. This is mainly at the Cove Power Plant. I want to point out the waste and mismanagement under the PNM regime. Cove Power Plant was commissioned in 2009 and is now experiencing frequent outages. This plant was outfitted with four Wartsila OE generators made in Finland with new technology which was never tested and proven, and for which the PNM used taxpayers' money to the extent of 700 million.

Hon. Member: Wow!

Hon. N. Baksh: T&TEC is experiencing problems with manufacturers' designs of the Wartsila OE generators, whilst Tobagonians are being used as guinea pigs in this process. [*Crosstalk*] The PNM expended 700 million for that waste and mismanagement.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Tobagonians must know why they are experiencing frequent outages and who should be held culpable for that. T&TEC is looking at two options to improve and provide a reliable supply of electricity to Tobagonians. One is to install an additional cable from Trinidad to Tobago, and two, to install an additional generator at the Cove network there, and not a Wartsila generator.

At this point in time a survey will be undertaken to determine which one of the options is more viable. I also want to look at some of the problems in both Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Deputy Speaker, the electricity problem gets worse

in both Trinidad and Tobago with the purchase of some transformers. Transformers have a normal lifespan of 25 to 30 years. The PNM purchased a brand called Crompton Greaves for \$12 million and Eljin brand from Korea for \$18 million. These lasted for only two years, only two years, whilst the PT Unindo came from Jakarta at a cost of \$6 million and lasted six months.

Madam Deputy Speaker, taxpayers' money "gone down the drain" with the purchase of substandard equipment by the PNM, no wonder T&T cannot have a reliable supply of electricity. This Government now has to find money to buy back new equipment so that the nation can have a reliable supply of electricity.

The commission's disaster preparedness capabilities were tested recently at the declared disaster zone in Diego Martin. I am happy to report that, despite the magnitude of the disaster, T&TEC was able to restore an electricity supply to the majority of customers within the shortest space of time. This restoration involved the construction of new lines due to entire sections of the commission's infrastructure being lost to landslides.

I want to just reflect on some of the achievements by T&TEC:

- The National Illumination programme; this is delivery People's Partnership style; streetlights for the period October 2011 to August 2012.
- We delivered 2,524 street lights at a cost of \$4,747,000; 219 streetlights have been upgraded at a cost of \$293,000.
- Six hundred and twenty-seven intermediate poles for street lighting have been installed at a cost of \$3,861,534.
- Parks and recreational grounds; 25 recreational grounds have been illuminated. As we speak, additional grounds are being eliminated all over the country.
- Eight public spaces have been illuminated; 32 police posts were illuminated. Also, the grounds of three regional health authorities were illuminated at a cost of \$180,046.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the illumination projects directly support the health initiatives and crime plans advocated by my colleagues, the Minister of Health and the Minister of National Security. The PP Government is delivering like no other Government did and doing it throughout the length and breadth of this country.

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In fiscal 2013, T&TEC plans to embark upon projects that will further enhance the quality of life of citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Bulk power projects; under its bulk power transmission projects requirements, the commission intends to continue work on the following projects:

- Establishing the gateway substation at Wrightson Road, Port of Spain.
- Upgrading of the Pinto Road substation.
- Upgrading of the St. James substation and establishing the Sea Lots gateway transmission line to transfer additional power from the TGU power station to the national grid.

Construction work will commence starting with the Gandhi Village substation, an expansion of the Union Estate substation. In fiscal 2013, the commission intends to install 3,700 new streetlights, upgrade 455 streetlights, install 330 immediate poles and illuminate 29 parks and recreational grounds, nine regional health authorities' facilities, eight public spaces and 16 police stations. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Sharma: Are these with solar lights or electricity?

Mr. N. Baksh: Electricity, T&TEC.

Mr. Sharma: Pay attention kids!

Hon. N. Baksh: Telecommunications Services of Trinidad and Tobago, TSTT. Madam Deputy Speaker, TSTT is the country's largest provider of communications solutions to residential and commercial markets in Trinidad and Tobago.

Its leading-edge products are designed around its Internet protocol-based core infrastructure, and marketed under its Blink and Bmobile brands. TSTT continues to strengthen its position as the nation's leading provider of telecommunications services throughout fiscal 2012. During this time, in an increasingly competitive environment, the company maintains its leading market share with its cornerstone lines of business, namely mobile, broadband and fixed voice. This resulted in significant growth rate in its subscriber base for new lines of business.

The impact gave rise to an overall creditable performance by the company. Madam Deputy Speaker, TSTT identified and implemented greater innovation to its product offerings in customer services. Its new lines of business—Blink Entertainment and Blink Vigilance—saw double-digit customer growth of 25 per

cent and 50 per cent, respectively. In the mobile sphere, under the bmobile brand the company spearheaded the diversification of smartphone and tablet devices with the introduction of iPhone and Android-based devices.

In order to better complement the customer experience with these smart devices, based on WiMax technology, TSTT also introduced the first of its kind “My Hotspot 4G services.” [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Sharma: Hotspot!

Hon. N. Baksh: Another improvement on its customer service was the launch of Blink Telepresence. This was also the first of its kind in the English-speaking Caribbean. It offers a high resolution, immersive collaborative technology that allows users to virtually meet in a conference-type environment successfully across the globe. As it did in the previous year, TSTT also maintained high scores in its annual Voice of the Customer satisfaction survey.

9.40 p.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is important to note that TSTT is a self-funded enterprise. As such, it does not receive funding from the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Nevertheless, TSTT plans to embark upon a number of projects for fiscal 2013. These projects include the deployment of a supplemental broadband access network.

For fiscal 2013, TSTT will complete its deployment of 50 bzones, a supplemental broadband access network strategically aimed at critical high-traffic areas within Trinidad and Tobago for its customers. What this means is that for the areas throughout Trinidad and Tobago where people congregate—Maracas Bay, Ariapita Avenue, City Gate, PTSC, San Fernando, Queen’s Park Oval, Mayaro Town Centre, Point Fortin Promenade, Penal Market, Pigeon Point, Scarborough and Charlotteville—they will now be able to enjoy high-speed data services, surf the Internet, send and receive emails and stream live news, music and video on mobile devices.

Launch of DBV-T—Digital Video Broadcasting-Terrestrial: The launch of the DBV-TV wireless subscription television service in Trinidad to 70 per cent of customers in both urban and rural areas provided an alternative source of subscription TV.

GSM—Global System for Mobile—coverage improvement: improved voice coverage throughout Trinidad and Tobago to 90 per cent of the population, reaching more rural customers with more mobile services.

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Deploy and launch of a 4G (HSPA)—High Speed Packet Access—mobile network: TSTT will complete the replacement of its existing mobile network and launch its 4G (HSPA+) mobile network in Trinidad and Tobago during fiscal 2013. During this network transition, citizens will from time to time experience some degree of service disruption. I want to thank the public for its patience and understanding during this phase, and to advise that this upgrade will bring Trinidad and Tobago one step closer in closing the digital divide, while supporting the national ICT objective for citizens through:

- (1) a network that provides higher mobile data speed; and
- (2) a network that is future ready.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would now speak briefly on the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation (TTPost). TTPost is the organization in Trinidad and Tobago charged with the mandate to deliver quality postal services to every person residing in this country. It is the designated operator of postal services in Trinidad and Tobago. TTPost has attained a number of achievements during fiscal year 2012. For fiscal 2012, although they received a meagre sum of 4.35 million, the following projects were embarked upon: transport fleet upgrade—critical to the efficient functioning of the core postal operations; satisfying on-time mail clearance in accordance with current on-time service standards; two 4 x 4 vehicles and five panel vans have been procured; additional minor refurbishment works at eight sites throughout the network, as well as installation of additional post boxes to satisfy demand were also completed.

The corporation has embarked on a project to implement a postal code system in Trinidad and Tobago, as well as adherence to S42 Addressing Standards in accordance with the Universal Postal Union requirements. Trinidad and Tobago is one of nine countries, the world over, to be so certified, and we are proud of that achievement.

For fiscal 2013, TTPost proposes to embark on the following projects:

- relicensing and support of the financial management information system;
- transport fleet upgrade—a further overhaul of the existing derelict fleet, this time with the acquisition of 10 more vehicles;
- construction of five retail and delivery offices and extension of the national mail centre;

- minor refurbishment of 11 existing retail and delivery offices throughout the country; and
- real-time track and trace system to support the corporation's ability to retain critical business contracts.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Minister, would you give way?

Hon. N. Baksh: Sure.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Thank you. Could you please give me the justification for the closure of the TTPost office in Cedros?

Hon. N. Baksh: I do not have that information offhand, but I could obtain it and pass it on to you, if that is okay.

- acquisition of two unmarked vehicles, dedicated to surveillance and other security functions throughout the network;
- CCTV installation and burglar proofing at the national mail centre and satellite offices will further strengthen the infrastructure of the corporation.

I am pleased to advise that with the completion of the vesting exercise during the new fiscal year, TTPost shall embark on plans which will render the corporation less dependent on the Treasury. The vesting exercise will provide the fillip for the raising of capital for satisfying such needs as:

- more efficient administering of the Universal Service Obligation, that is the (USO), as stipulated in the agreement signed between this country and the Universal Postal Union, a United Nations specialized agency which deems universal service as a right, a core responsibility;
- investment by the designated operator, TTPost, in non-core services to boost its revenue streams and to offset losses incurred by the fulfilment of the costly and less attractive Universal Service Obligation; and
- the acquisition and protection of new devices such as its website containing precise addresses and six-digit postal codes for every household in the country.

At the last MORI poll report, TTPost was rated as providing the highest level of satisfaction of public service to the population in Trinidad and Tobago, and we should be proud of this service. Our mission is to keep this excellent track record,

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and we will take whatever steps are necessary to ensure continuity. There is an international conference being held in Doha at this moment, and two days ago TTPost got an award for quality of service improvement at the UPU in Doha conference.

Mr. Sharma: Congratulations!

Hon. N. Baksh: Thank you, Sir. We are going to do better the next time.

The Regulated Industries Commission (RIC) from the utility sector: in keeping with Government's policy plans to promote the development of Trinidad and Tobago, the utility sector has continued to explore more efficient, user-responsive and resourceful ways of meeting the demand for quality utility services. Utility services are critical because of their importance in the national economy, and the direct way they impact on virtually every company or household in the country. In this context, this Government has continued:

- to ensure access to utility services, at reasonable cost, for every household in the country—I think the Member for Arouca/Maloney raised some concerns with regard to this.
- to ensure a more equitable distribution of utility services in the country; and
- to promote balanced development of utility services throughout the country.

As we know, we depend upon the Regulated Industries Commission to ensure that the foregoing objectives are achieved. The Regulated Industries Commission is charged with the mandate for the regulation of the electricity and water sectors, including, the regulation of prices, customer service standards and performance monitoring. The role of the RIC is to:

- regulate the unit prices of T&TEC and WASA;
- set all tariffs for T&TEC and WASA through participating in a final determination;
- ensure that quality and reliability of utilities services are provided;
- consider the social impact of all decisions; and
- monitor the service providers' performances while acting as a body which can receive, investigate and address the concerns of customers

based on reports of poor quality of service from the respective agencies.

The Ministry of Public Utilities: the following are the divisions and services under the purview of the Ministry of Public Utilities:

Electrical Inspectorate Division
 Government Printery
 National Social Development Programme
 Utilities Assistance Programme

The Electrical Inspectorate Division (EID) has the following responsibilities:

- inspect and certify, upon approval, all electrical installations—domestic, commercial and industrial—in Trinidad and Tobago before connection or reconnection to the supply system;
- issue wireman's licences, projectionist's—cinema operators—licences according to certain basic minimum qualifications, age and years of practical experience;
- investigate fires with a view to determining if the cause is electrical;
- investigate incidents of electrical shock and electrocutions; and
- conduct generator inspections;

In response to the serious staff shortage, I have recently given the final approval of 21 inspectors on contract in the electrical inspectorate unit. Despite these challenges, the EID has been able to achieve the following notable objectives for fiscal 2012:

- the number of inspections carried out—37,415; this is upward 3,000 per month which is quite a lot;
- the number of fire investigations completed, 48;
- 995 wireman licences were issued and renewed; and
- the EID provided advice to 40,903 members of the public consisting of property owners, electricians, contractors and others in need of information which impacted upon the inspection of their electrical installation;

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In addition in fiscal 2013, the Electrical Inspectorate Division proposes to undertake the following initiatives with the aim of providing improved services to the national community:

- the decentralization of the services of the EID into regions, with Tobago being a separate region and Trinidad being divided into four regions namely: east, north-west, central and south regions;
- provide continuous training of all inspectors with respect to inspection of electrical installations;
- computerizing the records of the EID; and
- reducing the waiting time for inspections of new installations from three to four weeks to one week.

That is action People's Partnership style. [*Desk thumping*]

The Government Printery: we all know it is the Government Printery that provides the printing and binding services for most of the government agencies. The Government Printery is a manufacturing entity that provides printing and binding services to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. These services provided by the Government Printery are essential to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

The printery's accomplishments for fiscal 2012: the achievements of the Government Printery during fiscal 2012 include: a total of 49 persons from the Government Printery have been trained. Of this, 29 have been trained in offset, eight in Adobe design CS5, and two have been trained in A+. A+ is a type of certification which shows competency as a computer technician. This training programme is expected to continue into 2013.

9.55 p.m.

The process for the relocation of the Government Printery has begun and is due for completion in fiscal 2013. Madam Deputy Speaker, the Government Printery proposes to complete the relocation exercise in the shortest possible time. The objective is to have the Government Printery's new location prepared and outfitted to meet the required standards of a modern printing establishment and replace some unserviceable and outdated equipment.

The project would result in the provision of a new and safe working environment that would meet OSH standards; improved facilities for the promotion of increased productivity; an ability to house all operations under one roof—warehousing and plants; a reduction in the risk of accidents due to modernized machinery and equipment; user-friendly surroundings, well organized

and inclusive of high standards of accommodation; improved efficiency and timely output of jobs; and upgraded computer network. When the above is completed we would have a printery that will be transformed into a more efficient, productive and modernized agency.

Most of the budgetary documentation we have before us today, as well as for previous presentations in this honourable House, were prepared by the staff of the Government Printery. They had to go beyond the call of duty to get these documents completed. This shows the level of dedication and commitment of the staff to the extent that, even though they function in antiquated accommodation, they still sought to produce with excellence. In this regard, I want to thank the Government Printer, and his staff, for a job well done and to assure them of my fullest commitment for their relocation.

The National Social Development Programme: The National Social Development Programme (NSDP) is a Government-funded programme designed to deliver or improve the supply of utilities and attendant services supplies to low-income and vulnerable individuals and communities throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

Since its inception, the NSDP has partnered with the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA), the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission (T&TEC) and the Electrical Inspectorate Division to provide safe, reliable and economical supplies of water and electricity to areas without sustained utility supplies and services. The NSDP office has also partnered with electrical contractors and hardware suppliers in the national community to provide assistance to individual households and community organizations. The programme retains its collaborative efforts with partnering agencies, services of electrical contractors and suppliers, subsequently providing work such as wiring and rewiring of houses; electrifying of residential communities; and illumination of parks and recreational grounds.

A total of 82 water projects has been completed. This has redounded to the benefit of 13,501 persons. Sixteen electrification projects have been completed and this has benefited 70 households; 976 house-wiring projects have been completed to the benefit of 2,915 households; 167 sanitary-plumbing-assistance projects have been completed and some 197 households have been affected positively.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to make the point—[*Interruption*—2012, the last fiscal year. I want to make the point because some members of the Opposition have been claiming that work is only done in certain areas of the country. I have a report here which I can read.

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I just want to highlight some of those areas in the PNM constituencies and give a report on just one or two items only. This is in regards to house wiring and rewiring: Diego Martin North/East, 37 applications, 23 completed; Diego Martin West, 14 applications, seven completed; La Brea, 13 applications, six completed; Laventille East/Morvant, 48 applications, 31 completed; Laventille West, 23 applications received, 19 completed. I can go on and on, but what I am showing here, really, is that there is a balanced distribution. [*Interruption*] I have to go through the list, I would show you it afterwards. This is just to show that there is equity in the distribution here.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to make an important announcement here that the Ministry of Public Utilities is now having an arrangement with Habitat for Humanity that every new house that they build, the NSDP will be wiring those houses for them. They build two and three bedroom low-cost houses for low-income families and so. This is the part where we would make this contribution in that regard.

The Utilities Assistance Programme: The Utilities Assistance Programme (UAP), which commenced in December 2010, provides financial assistance to low-income customers of both the Water and Sewerage Authority and the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission by way of subsidies. This seeks to ensure their continued access to basic utilities, water and electricity. [*Interruption*] And we continue to do a lot more. In order to qualify, one must be in receipt of either a senior citizen's pension—formerly known as the old-age pension—a disability grant or any other public assistance from the Ministry of the People and Social Development. I use this opportunity to share this information so that people, and all Members here, could take advantage of it.

Following the announcement by the Prime Minister on January 24, 2012, the UAP was expanded on July 01, 2012 to offer a 100 per cent increase in the programme benefit. In the case of WASA—I can tell you the amounts here—customers classified as A2, that is, persons with an external water supply, will now receive a credit of \$140 per year, up from the previous \$70 per year; A3 and A4 classified customers, that is, persons with an internal water supply, non-metered and metered, will now receive a credit of \$200 per year, up from \$100. In the case of T&TEC, qualifying customers whose electricity consumption is 400 Kilowatts and less, now receive a subsidy of \$114 per bill or a maximum of \$684 per year, up from \$57 per bill or a maximum of \$342 per year.

Madam Deputy Speaker, for the period October 2011 to June 30, 2012, 348 new beneficiaries were added to the programme. This brings the total

beneficiaries from the UAP to 10,757 as of July 2012. I am sure that in 2013 this is going to grow as we inform the national community of the benefits.

TSTT service portals: Madam Deputy Speaker, TSTT would be introducing service portals for wireless and broadband services where you would be able to change your packages in the comfort of your homes. No more lining up at TSTT offices will be necessary once these services become available.

T&TEC bill payment—this is a nice one too. At this time, T&TEC has introduced a credit card bill payment system where you can pay your bills using the simplest of systems to pay your light bill. No more lining up to pay bills is necessary for these customers. We will be encouraging our customers to utilize this service. I understand that this transaction could be easily completed within two minutes, within a 24-hour system at home, at work or even if you are travelling overseas. This is the kind of thing we want to put in place to ensure easy access to the services. What we are doing here is utilizing technology to improve our services.

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

Motion made: That the hon. Minister's speaking time be extended by a further 15 minutes. [*Hon. E. McLeod*]

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. N. Baksh: Thank you very much, Members, that time is adequate. Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to express my utmost appreciation to all the hard-working members of staff of the various agencies—public utilities that fall under my purview—for their commitment to duty and worthwhile contribution towards national development. Their persistent support and dedication to nation building has resulted in the achievements of the Ministry despite the presence of hindrances we have encountered in the past fiscal year. We, the People's Partnership Government, are dedicated towards appreciation of the quality of life of the people. We do look forward to the execution of these projects which would lead to the attainment of these goals and improvement in the lives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I just want to take the opportunity to, at least, look at some activities within my own constituency of Naparima, which I had the opportunity of representing for the last 10 years, or a little more. While we were in Opposition, it was a daring task to get things done and I want to thank the

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constituents for their patience over those years. I could tell you that over the last two years we have been making a difference in the quality of life of the constituents which have changed considerably for the better.

In the past years, most of the persons who have visited the office, their requests were, basically, for public utilities—water, lights and roads of course. These are the challenges that, I am sure, every Member of Parliament would experience in their constituencies. What has happened over the last two years is that we have done a fair bit of work with regards to water and electricity.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the former Minister of Public Utilities, and his representation under the NSDP, for satisfying those demands in the constituency for water and electricity.

Madam Deputy Speaker, landslips: the terrain of several areas within the Naparima constituency seems to make it one that is most susceptible to landslips. Following several tours and visits which I arranged with the former Minister of Works and Infrastructure, hon. Jack Warner and, indeed, the current Minister, Sen. The Hon. Emmanuel George, dozens of landslips in the Realize Road, St. Croix Road, Jaipaulsingh Road, Papourie Road and Iere Village Branch Road, to name a few, were arrested. I thank them, sincerely, for those works that have been completed.

In some instances, Madam Deputy Speaker, for example Jaipaulsingh Road and Realize Road, these were cut off completely. I am happy to report that most of the serious landslips have been checked. There are many recently occurring landslips that I am seeking to address that are threatening the houses of several families. There seems to be a vein across from Mount Steward to Ire Village and St. Croix Road and Jaipaulsingh Road, Realize Road, where it is noted for landslips. This is something, as soon as there is heavy rain and torrential showers, you would start to see landslips developing, and it is really a challenge to deal with those. I am sure that with the assistance of the Minister of Works and Infrastructure, and others, we would do something to rectify those, especially those that are challenging the houses in those areas.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I also want to identify a few other projects that have been completed in Naparima and which have improved the lives of the constituents—the establishment of water projects in the following sites: Maharaj Avenue in Cleghorn Village; Chapel Street, Mt. Stewart Village; Sahai Trace, St. Croix Road; Douglin Street, Mt. Stewart Village; Papourie Road, Upper Barrackpore and Hope Road in Manahambre. Madam Deputy Speaker, you would know some of those names that I have called.

10.10 p.m.

Some of these never had water for over a hundred years and for the first time in their life they are experiencing a water supply. And I am in the process of preparing an additional list for submission to the Minister of the Environment and Water Resources.

Infrastructure upgrade and community development: Upgrade of lighting of various grounds in the following areas: installation of lights at the Green Arrow Recreation Ground, Mt. Stewart Village in Princes Town; installation of lights on the Malgretoute Recreation Ground, installation of lights on the Ben Lomond Recreation Ground; and for fiscal 2013, I have made requests to the Ministry of Sport for the upgrade of the Kumar Recreation Ground in Williamsville and the Inverness Recreation Ground in Borde Narve, and this is listed to start soon.

I want to, again, thank the former Minister of Works and Infrastructure for work done in the Congo Hill and Pierre Trace in Barrackpore—rehabilitation of road and construction of box drains. The Realize Road, GP Road, Barrackpore; Papourie Road, Barrackpore; La Paille Road, Crystal View in Manahambre and Reserve Road in Harmony Hall. These are all roads that have been completely repaved, box drains and the full works with it, and I want to again thank the former Minister there, hon. Jack Warner—when he says “done”, it is done.

Under the National Commission for Self Help: Garth Road, where a bridge was constructed allowing access to residents; Rajie Trace, Mt. Stewart Village where a landslip was restored and assistance given to two residents to save their homes from landslips; construction of a box drain and repairs to roof of a church building, Malgretoute Village; box drain and road repairs at Derrick Avenue, St. Charles Village; retaining wall to landslip at Baboolal Trace, Iere Village, Branch Road; Taitaree Trace, Kanhai Road North for the construction of a bridge; retaining wall in Jaipaulsingh, 1st Branch Road.

Under the URP: a retaining wall at St. Croix Road, Lengua; box drain at St. Charles Village, Manahambre; cleaning of drains, community rehabilitation projects, box drain again at Iere Village.

Skills development at the Naparima Constituency Office: we have embarked on training the people in the community, and we have conducted cosmetology courses, food preparation, cake and pastry making, balloon decoration, jewellery class, soap making, drapery designs and other courses as well.

Madam Deputy Speaker, one of the central areas where my constituents now seek assistance is the matter of housing. I have noted two areas—one in Cedar

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Hill and the other at Ben Lomond, Reform Village where the Estate Management Business Development Company has started infrastructure for the development of housing settlements. I would like to make representation and ask my colleague to expedite these projects and distribute building lots so that citizens could construct their own houses.

I want to indicate that Habitat for Humanity is an international organization with a local arm, and as I said before, they are building two and three bedroom homes, low cost housing, where people who are unable to put out cash contribute sweat capital. What we do is utilize the members of the community-based organizations (CBOs) and faith-based organizations in those communities to join and help those people to construct those houses. In the constituency of Naparima, they are assisting in 50 houses in celebration of our 50th anniversary, and this is a remarkable contribution they are going to make here.

Madam Deputy Speaker, these are really exciting times for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and I want to thank them for all their support and to guarantee them that the People's Partnership is going to deliver at its fullest. Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Minister of Transport (Hon. Chandresh Sharma): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. I think it is instructive that we revisit the last two and a half years for the simple reason that when a government comes into being in Trinidad and Tobago—unlike the PNM—it comes for five years, five solid years, and there will be no elections after two or three years.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to remind Members to keep focused. I remember in 1991 when I was first elected to the House, in 1995 I went to attend a CPA conference in Sri Lanka. We left here on a Tuesday and got to Sri Lanka on Friday, midday. The team leader then was Senator Russell Huggins and the other members were Member of Parliament Desmond Allum and Neil Jaggassar, Clerk of the House. So, we got there Friday in Sri Lanka and we went for an early dinner, and after dinner we thought we would have an early night because there was a safari tour the next morning, and sometime soon after, Senator Russell Huggins called me and said, “Sharma, Sharma, they call elections in Trinidad. I say, Russell you shouldn't be drinking you on government business. He say, I serious”—that was in 1995—the rest is history.

I started by saying it is instructive that we revisit the last two and a half years, because what is critical for any government is to remain focused and remain committed to the principles it agreed to. Since the elections of this new People's

Partnership Government, let us look at what has happened. There has been a global effect; that is the first point I want to make. When Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar became Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago one of the early calls she signaled was to go out there and assist the people on the day of the installation of Prime Minister. One would remember that very clearly.

Second to that, she also made a call inviting all the people of Trinidad and Tobago to get involved in the governance of Trinidad and Tobago, which was very instructive because it gave people in the country a first opportunity to really enjoy governance, to be part of the governance of the country, and this has borne very good fruits. Because the country was flooded soon after, she instructed Minister Jack Warner, the then Minister of Local Government and others to make sure that every home that was affected by the floods—the families they were attended to, they were taken to dry grounds, that they were fed, they were given warm clothing, but more than that—that the process to return them to their homes started almost immediately. And we were able to break the global record by making sure within days that all families that were affected were returned to their homes, and process of the fixing back their homes, repairing it, making sure those whose personal possessions were destroyed by the water were returned.

That has never happened in any part of the world in the shortness of time. And that is the kind of governance that we see. When I listen to my friends opposite, I am reminded of speaking on the last occasion when I advised Members opposite that they must not be messengers of hate. Every single Opposition Member who spoke in this budget debate was really a messenger of hate, they were bad news. They want to see nothing good in this country, and that is how they have governed the country during their period. It was always divide and rule.

When you look at the resources—in fact, one of our very experienced writers in this country, I think it is Lennox Grant, he wrote after I spoke in a particular budget debate that he was hearing, after a long time having studied in Canada, about geopolitical racism, where the PNM in government only treated with constituencies under their watch. But they went further—when they went to Opposition constituencies, they would look at the electoral patterns and where the PNM obtained votes, those were the small geopolitical areas that obtained attention.

When you look at what obtains under this Government—and let us look at the statistics—the Minister of Works and Infrastructure then, Jack Warner, has done work in every single electoral district in Trinidad and in Tobago, every single one

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in every single constituency. Madam Deputy Speaker, I have had the privilege of being the longest serving Member on this side currently, so I know the history. Institutional memory lives with me.

When the Member for Diego Martin North/East was Minister of Works—Paula, sit down please—[*Laughter*—there were many constituencies he never visited, especially Opposition constituencies. Then came Minister Franklin Khan, the same pattern. When you look at the then Minister of Works and Infrastructure, every single constituency in this country, not one time, not two times, as many as three, four and five times. That is the governance that Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar leads.

When you look at the then Minister of Local Government—visited every single electoral district—for the first time in local government history work was taking place at the same time in every single electoral district. And you just heard from the Member for Naparima indicating work under the NSDP, and other projects in every single community—and we must pay tribute to Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar.

But it went further; the global committee began to look at small Trinidad and Tobago under this new leadership of Kamla Persad-Bissessar. And *TIME* magazine, one of the most read magazines in the world, voted her as one of the 10 top female leaders in the world. It did not stop there. It started to influence elections elsewhere, and in Australia we saw the first female Prime Minister emerging. We saw the same thing in Argentina.

Dr. Moonilal: Brazil.

Hon. C. Sharma: In Brazil—thank you for listening—in Jamaica, Costa Rica. So immediately you started to see the global effect of it, and this is the governance that we are lending this part of the world. We did not stop there, Madam Deputy Speaker. While Trinidad and Tobago is part of the global community in terms of the economic struggles, what you found was that Trinidad and Tobago was able to maintain its economic space, so while many countries were having tremendous economic fights, small Trinidad and Tobago under the finance management of Minister Winston Dookeran, was able to stay alive and float, and has done very well.

In fact, the Central Bank indicated in a publication that we were growing. The Central Bank said:

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Trinidad and Tobago economy will expand modestly this year as oil and gas production on the Caribbean island—meaning Trinidad and Tobago—recover.

This is the Central Bank—fiercely independent. What did the IMF have to say? The IMF says:

Trinidad and Tobago turning the corner. Very instructive for small Trinidad and Tobago, good governance managing a very good team.

The Partnership Government, five players at that time. One has since gone on its own, but it shows when we come together for the good of the country this is the kind of result, and this is the lesson that the PNM must learn, and any others who wish to consider political careers down the road, you cannot rule a country with divide and rule. You cannot practice racism as obtained under the PNM. It is instructive for our young population.

Today, this country captures global attention. Our hotels are filled. All aircraft coming into this country full. If you go on a website now trying to get a flight out of Port of Spain or coming into Port of Spain it is not immediate.

10.25 p.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker, let us look at what the IMF had to say. This is May 03, 2012:

A broad turnaround in the non-energy sector beginning in the second half of 2011 is fuelling the rebound of the Caribbean Community's largest economy.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Speaker, I was making the point that this is one of the major conclusions coming out of the March 28, 2012, Article 4 consultation on Trinidad and Tobago by the International Monetary Fund.

The IMF executive board report on the consultation issued recently stated that the economy of Trinidad and Tobago is turning the corner and growth is expected to resume in 2012. We must all be very, very proud of this Government. We must be very, very proud of this country. [*Desk thumping*] The IMF said that real economic activity was expected to increase by 1.7 per cent in 2012 as the non-energy sector picked up momentum.

When we look at what this Government has been able to achieve, I do not

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think any other government has been able to do this. We were able to treat with the Clico matter, as was indicated. We were able to pump in this short period of time \$33 billion—19 because of the Clico matter. When the PNM ran away from it, “hide behind the bushes, we came brave”. We pumped \$19 billion; \$7 billion another place and \$7 billion in a cash flow for the banks, totalling \$33 billion. What did this do?

Many speakers have indicated and the statistics are here to be seen. The most number of houses sold in the last 20 years in this country was last year and the early part of this year; the most number of cars—I think the Member for Tabaquite was able to produce the statistics. So the country is in a very good place, under very good leadership. What we all must do, and this must be a collective call, we must do everything in our power to make sure that this Government continues for at least 10 or 15 years, for the benefit of the country, for the benefit of the Caribbean and for the global community to consider and continue to see leadership at work.

This is governance, because in the whole world today there is a financial crisis. Many of the writers and thinkers are saying, “Well, we have the intelligence in all the countries; we have the research, what is missing?” What they are pointing at is leadership that cares. Under Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar we are able to develop a culture of caring in every part of this country. [*Laughter*] This is why I said that the PNM—and the nervous laugh from the Member for Arouca/Maloney suggest that element of hate. Do it again, do it again for the TV. “You hear it?” [*Laughter*] It shows you that they have developed over the years, and they have to move from that mode. They have to move from their culture of corruption, their culture of hate, their culture of division. It really takes an effort, but you must do it if you have to survive. This country is for all of us.

When the PNM spoke, every single one of them wanted to climb over each other, being messengers of doom and failure. You heard Members fighting to move a dead body from one point to another point. That reminded me of a police officer. In the early days there was an accident—this would interest you, Member for Laventille West. They did not have motor cars then, they had donkey carts. So the donkey got knocked down and died. It happened on Abercromby Street. When the police officer came on the scene, he dragged the donkey to Prince Street because he could not spell Abercromby. [*Laughter*] So you have to be careful that you do not claim geographic space to make your point, and have a murder. [*Laughter*]

We are doing everything. We are working night and day, going to every part of this country, and we share the beauty of this country. We share the achievements. You saw for the first time, marking our 50th anniversary of independence, where the Prime Minister caused a flag to be delivered to every single child. In every single home there is a flag of Trinidad and Tobago. [Interruption] “You doh live in a home? You doh have a flag?” Are you not ashamed? I will focus on you, Sir. [Laughter] Every child has a Trinidad and Tobago pin. [Crosstalk]

You see, Mr. Speaker, I was making the point, here is a Member of Parliament on her last term, who does not have a flag of Trinidad and Tobago. [Laughter] Does not have a flag—it tells you something, and yet in two and half years, every single home with a flag of Trinidad and Tobago. The country belongs to all of us—every child wearing a pin for the first time. “Yuh pin looks very nice, Sir.” [Laughter] Even the PNM Members, except the Member for Laventille West, are ashamed to wear their pin. They do not wear the pin because they cannot identify, because the Prime Minister suggested that we all identify with the country.

When our gold winner, Keshorn—what is his last name?—[Laughter] Walcott—I know him on a first-name basis, that is the point I want to make.

I know Keshorn on a first-name basis; they are caught up with his title. The point is that we went with him to every part of this country because he is a celebration for all of Trinidad and Tobago. Under the PNM they would not have done that. They would not do it. Look how they treated with Hasely Crawford. He was treated under the previous government, not the PNM Government.

Mr. Speaker, for us to continue to have peace and growth in this country, it is what the Prime Minister called for in May 2010, inviting the entire country, whether you are a church member, taxi driver, business associate, CBO, faith-based organization, wherever you are, doubles vendor, shark and bake vendor, get involved in the governance of the country, feel part of the country. Wherever you go this peace obtains, this love and care, this culture of care obtains. We must continue. The benefit of it is that today we can read a budget of the size we have read, making sure that every single home would be treated with. [Desk thumping] Let me continue reading.

The IMF said that real economic activity was expected to increase by 1.7 per cent in 2012, as the non-energy sector picked up momentum with the Government investment and the restructuring of Clico liabilities. Is that instructive? When the PNM had opportunity to treat with Clico, the former Finance Minister, she ran, walked, however she got there—I saw a video that looked like her in a—I

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remember my “aajee” used to wear a duster—with a duster collecting her money. [Laughter] That is how the PNM treats with issues. It is always about the PNM first, second, third and last, never about the country. [Desk thumping] This was expected to be further supported by the energy sector resuming normal operations later in the year. We are returning the country to normalcy. Under the PNM that did not obtain.

The executive director stated that they welcomed the signs of economic recovery following a prolonged slowdown. This is the IMF talking. The IMF is looking at Trinidad and Tobago under the governance of Kamla Persad-Bissessar as a teaching opportunity for all other countries that may be facing it; and your first resource in any country always remains your people, bring them together. This Parliament is a good example.

Under the PNM, every single project done under UDeCoTT was cost overrun. Today you heard that in just a few projects, more than \$2 billion. Under the watch of the Minister of Housing, Dr. Moonilal, this is the first project done by the Government under budget. I think under your supervision too, Sir. It may not be my place to congratulate you, but again it shows a coming together; very good facilities, well organized in the shortest of time.

However, it cautioned that the immediate challenges are to support the recovery and to address remaining financial similar challenges, and we treated with the HCU matter immediately. So all those persons who were very upset about their Clico investments are feeling safe again in this country, under the watch of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

I already said what the Central Bank said. The bank projects economic growth of 1.5 per cent in 2012 and an annual inflation of 5 per cent. Oil and gas production should return to 2010 levels after plans to complete upgrades. You heard the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, who has strong connections in the energy sector, who seemed very foreign reading a script today. But the point is that the upgrade is to add value. That Member criticized it and said that we are losing money. So they prefer to run it with the “run down ting” and make no money. This Government’s approach is different, do the upgrades and earn more. We are about adding value at all levels, and the global financial experts agree on that approach, by the way.

Trinidad and Tobago’s Energy and Energy Affairs Minister, speaking on February 06, the second month of this year, at the Trinidad and Tobago Energy Conference in Port of Spain, said that oil output in 2011 averaged 92,000 barrels

per day. With the new approach, you will see new findings. Ramnarine said 15 exploration wells will be drilled in the country in 2012, and the capital expenditure in the energy sector is expected to total as much as \$3 billion. It shows the confidence of the foreign investors; they are coming here to pump money because this country is stable; it has good governance. That is the first thing the investors look at: where are we going? Who is in government? Are they stable? Will they be in government? Will they hold the fort? How is the security there?

Well, when they hear that Jack Warner is Minister of National Security, and you have Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar, and Kevin Ramnarine as Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, and others. Of course, transport would play an important role. I am sure when they heard the Minister of Transport [*Desk thumping*] they initially may have thought of two billion, but now they are coming with \$3 billion. But I will come to that in a bit.

Budget 2012 is good news for every schoolchild, more computers, computer labs. You heard the PNM. When they wake up, their prayer is that the country must fail, the People's Partnership must fail. They do not want those computers to work at all; that is their prayer. The Member for Laventille West perhaps wants a murder in Laventille, so that it would be in the newspapers. "We doh want no murder nowhere in Trinidad, nowhere in Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] We want no murder nowhere in the world." We want all our children to be happy. We do not want any road accidents. We want to make sure that food is available for every single person, and we are a caring Government.

10.40 p.m.

Under the Ministry of the People and Social Development we are taking care of the vagrants, we identify with them, they are citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, and our Minister goes and meets them on the street. "He doh invite them to Hyatt", he goes and meets them on the street. That is important. That is instructive. We know the numbers. We know what they suffer from. We make sure doctors are there to take care of them.

Hon. Member: We bring the Minister of Health, "doh" forget that.

Hon. C. Sharma: The Minister of Health is getting into the business now. [*Laughter*] But again it shows collective responsibility which is important. Before, the PNM would have their distance. In fact, some Ministers would not talk to their colleagues because they found themselves being senior, giving themselves title. We "doh" operate so, Mr. Speaker. We are about the business of the people. Every single member of the Government has to deliver. You would

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have seen, based on our expenditure, moneys that were given to us. Value for money is the mantra. We have spent the taxpayers' money as they intended to be spent; value for money.

Today we are able to deliver contracts with minimal cost overruns. We are not yet perfect. Under the PNM nothing within budget, always 100, two, three, four, 500 per cent cost overrun. Projects one, two, three years, you heard it from Tobago, Scarborough hospital, most expensive hospital in the world—by international standards—for hospital beds. That is how the PNM spends money, every project in Port of Spain, cost overrun.

Mr. Speaker, business ranking by the financial institutions, global, doing business in Trinidad and Tobago—this is from the *Financial Times*, has ranked Trinidad and Tobago as follows: second in terms of best cost-effectiveness. Very instructive. This is the *Financial Times*. You know the PNM will buy all these magazines and throw them away, [Laughter] so that we would not have this information. “Dat is how the PNM does operate.”

Second in terms of best cost-effectiveness; third most attractive country in the Caribbean and Central America for foreign direct investment. Let me read that again—PNM Members. Third most attractive country in the Caribbean and Central America for foreign direct investment. This is the Government of Kamla Persad-Bissessar making Trinidad and Tobago the third most attractive country for business. [Desk thumping] It tells you how well your governance is working. It tells you how your people are responding, and in spite of PNM going on every opportunity that they have—they “doh” have much by the way, trying to say things are bad in this country.

Mr. Speaker, the *Financial Times*—fifth in the CCA for best economic potential. A governance of two and a half years old, this is what we have brought this country to—an enormous opportunity for our citizens, for investors. Today, our unemployment, under 5 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, with my new responsibility as Minister of Transport, what does that mean for the country? What is my responsibility, and what would the country expect to see? Nothing in this country, like every other country, can happen without transport, it is impossible. Whether you are coming to the Parliament, you are going to the hospital, you are going to the bank, transportation plays an important role. We import a lot of goods, our ports play an important role. The ships have to come to bring the goods. It has to be transported from the ports to the business houses.

Business people have to come, our airports have to be on top, and at this time, if you look, recently, in the last year, 10, whatever period you look at, everybody is complaining about the traffic. But why is there so much traffic suddenly? It is because economic activity is the first call. Everywhere you go, people are going to shop, they are going to work, they are going to do business—economic activity. The country is a golden opportunity.

Certainly we have to do more roads, we have to find other methods, and we are going to be working on that. But that is the first point I want to make, that the economic activity is encouraging us at all levels. So, we have to treat with the traffic situation. Well, we certainly have to build more roads, which is taking place, but we are going to be introducing at the Ministry of Transport, for the first time, park and ride facilities. This is a global approach to reducing traffic.

There are many cars coming into Port of Spain with one person, only the driver. Can we make it attractive where that driver can park his vehicle, if he is coming from south, somewhere in San Fernando or if he is coming from somewhere in Arima or whichever part of the country, and put him in an air-conditioned bus and bring him into Port of Spain and drop him to his place of work. And the short answer is, yes. So we would be exploring that.

Our water taxi—and it would be very interesting to hear this bit of information, Mr. Speaker. When the water taxi was started in 2008, it was a political ploy by the PNM, and I cannot understand how the PNM Members can be so boldfaced to see all this corruption, and all this wastage, and sit down there and pretend and hide—pretend to be tired and close their eyes. They would not open their eyes to the reality.

Under the PNM in order to launch the water taxi service in December of 2008, they bought four second-hand vessels. I am sure the Member for Chaguanas West—he would have had this information before me—must be very disturbed, as every citizen in this country is required to be. And young Members of Parliament on the Government Benches, since you all will be the leaders of this country you must listen carefully, and take notes, never make these errors.

They bought the first boat for \$11,655,000, this is in 2008 “eh”—write down the figures because I want you to add it. They bought the second boat for the same sum, another \$11,655,000. They bought the third one for same sum—all corrupt deals—for \$11,655,000. Mr. Speaker, you would be very disturbed to hear that as a taxpayer—the money that you have worked so hard for.

Under the PNM they bought a boat called the MV *Su* and Mr. Warner has told us how they arrived at this name. We should really S-U-E now. The boat was

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S-U, we should S-U-E now. They also bought this boat for 2.678 million euros which is equivalent to \$22,959,363. Having bought MV Su for \$22 million they spent \$55.141 million on the MV *Su* which took it to a value of \$78 million. This has not sailed one day. Trinidad and Tobago, your PNM Government—that must never come back—bought one boat for \$22 million, spent \$55 million on it, and it has been in Chaguaramas dock since 2009—\$77 million, MV *Su*.

A total of \$22.61 million was expended on each of the first three boats, that is \$66 million plus \$33 million, close to \$100 million. These vessels sailed for a short while in 2009. Of course, these vessels were taken out of service. Mr. Speaker, so these boats totalled close to \$200 million. The boats were put up for sale in 2010—2009 they were taken off, we started to look for sale. The offers we have had—the first boat bought for \$11 million, spent 22, that is \$33 million. We had an offer of US \$550,000. And the second one an offer of \$400,000, and the worst of all—MV *Su*—we have had an offer of US \$50,000.

Hon. Member: Only?

Hon. C. Sharma: How shameful can the PNM be? What a total waste of time. What a curse this PNM has been on the taxpayers of this country. Again, PNM Members, you can hide and pretend to be sleeping, the country is waking, and this should wake them up. Never again must you be given [*Crosstalk*] that opportunity to steal the taxpayers' money. To misdirect public funds like you have done. Never again. Every single thing that you have touched has been a disaster.

Hon. Member: Oh gosh!

Hon. C. Sharma: The country has not benefited from your rule—[*Interruption*]—I am glad “you wake up”, thank you. Just for you to understand because I know you are a good Christian. MV *Su*—you know how they got the name—was bought for \$22 million, we spent 55—add with me. Twenty-two and 55—\$77 million. “It eh sail one day”.

Hon. Member: Shame!

Hon. C. Sharma: Are you not ashamed? We put it up for sale. We have an offer of \$50,000—go back and sleep. Sleep. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, this kind of thing must never be allowed, and I speak as a proud Member of this Government. The day the electorate finds us doing similar, take us to task.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Right now. [*Laughter*]

Hon. C. Sharma: We taking you.

Hon. Member: She just got up.

Hon. Member: “You see she get up.”

Hon. C. Sharma: I am glad you wake up.

Hon. Member: She is talking in her sleep.

Hon. C. Sharma: Mr. Speaker, the water taxi was a political statement by the PNM. When they run out of ideas they come with anything. They “doh” worry about cost, as you have seen—\$200 million, we subsidized the water taxi. There are 4,000 seats on the water taxi. We sell an average of 1,500 per day because there was no system. So, 1,500 seats sold on a daily basis out of your ability to carry 4,000 means that you are subsidizing like close to \$200. So, on an annual basis you are subsidizing the water taxi by about \$50 million. That is how the PNM does it. We certainly have to revisit that because we cannot continue. You do not do the country a service when you pump \$50 million for 1,500 passengers. If you say one person or two per car, you remove 700 cars, but not everybody was going to drive to Port of Spain. So you use three people to an average to a car, then you have only removed 500 cars. This PNM, they seem to be blight, Sir. Anything they touch, spoils. They must not be allowed to touch the coffers of this country again. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, there was a time if you call the police station they did not have cars. On the rare occasion if they had cars, they did not have officers or they did not have enough officers because the way it works, if you call the station and they have three police officers for one car, they “cyar” leave because two officers have to come in the car, and two have to stay in the station.

Under this administration, that has changed. You call the police, and before you know it the police coming by you. Of course, if they go by the PNM they might go for other reasons because other people called.

10.55 p.m.

What have we done? Under VMCOTT, we were able to repair police vehicles on a daily basis, so, today, any part of this country you go, whether you are in Cedros, Laventille, Toco, there is a police vehicle. You drive anytime on the highway to south, to north, to any part of the country, police highway vehicles are on the road with two officers. You call any station, police officers are able to respond because now we are able to repair the cars. We have changed the system, and all we did was say, “listen, your job is to fix car, make sure every police station has the cars”. We keep adding cars and we keep adding police officers.

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Recently, when the Cabinet agreed that we would expand the police by engaging 5,000 SRPs, and when the Member for Diego Martin West spoke, he said, 31,000 people went to join, so the employment must be higher. What he does not understand, the Government has changed, Sir. When people feel comfortable—there was a time when nobody wanted to join the police service because it was favouritism; to be promoted you had to know someone. That does not obtain again. So, today people are willing to join the police service, and as an SRP they can be employed elsewhere and still have an opportunity to serve. They want to come out. The fact that 31,000 people went to apply, it shows confidence in the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] It shows confidence in the Prime Minister; it shows confidence in the Minister of National Security because Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar said in 2010, “join with us, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in the governance of Trinidad and Tobago”. That is why you had 31,000 applicants, and we want to congratulate them.

Today, there will be a car at a police station; there will be a car on the highway; there will be a car to respond to any call. So, that treats with VMCOTT. Today, we have made sure that VMCOTT must have mechanics and we continue to recruit.

You would have heard from the Member for Tobago West, the cry to repair the airport. In two-and-a-half years he also indicated the work that was already done under the previous Minister, Mr. Warner. He also indicated that the Member for Chaguanas East and Minister of Tourism and the Minister of Transport, we went to Tobago and met with all the stakeholders on two occasions, and immediately he started to put a programme of work.

Mr. Speaker, when an aircraft comes in with tourists in Tobago, 400 tourists plus, the accommodation at the airport at any given time is 155 passengers that can be treated with inside the airport. It means to say X number has to stand on the outside whether rain or sun. We are quickly changing that, by simply understanding the importance of tourism, because the PNM used the people of Tobago and would give them a little bit of money and leave them on their own. We said no, that is not the way to do it. We will make sure that if somebody gets sick in Tobago, there is a hospital; you arrive in Tobago airport, you are treated with. [*Desk thumping*] We want to make sure of that and every other facility.

So, we have identified the work to be done and we have started the process of making sure that all the rules of engagement are observed. The Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago will be implementing a slate of projects over the period 2013—2015, expected to cost \$160 million. This will include security, cameras,

engineering, maintenance, and all the requirements to make sure—under this administration, our airports have continued to maintain the highest grade by the international standards. If you go to Piarco International Airport, Sir, it continues to be an airport that attracts persons from all over the world. They are very impressed when they come to small Trinidad and Tobago, that they can meet an airport. So, not only building an airport, it is the maintenance. You can be in the airport and within—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Fyzabad and Minister of Transport 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. C. Sharma: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much colleagues. I am very glad to see all of you awake and listening. *[Laughter]*

Hon. Member: Attentively.

Hon. C. Sharma: Mr. Speaker, there was a time in this country when citizens were unable to travel, maybe they did not have motor cars; today a citizen can travel any part of this country, and if you are wearing a school uniform, you travel for free.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Always, under the PNM.

Hon. C. Sharma: Living close to St. Ann's must have some effects sometimes, Sir. *[Laughter]* Mr. Speaker —

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order, 36(5). *[Laughter]*

Mr. Speaker: The problem that you have—just take your seat. The problem that you are having is that you keep engaging in crosstalk when you have already spoken. I appealed to you on several occasions, remain silent. I think you were having a nap just now; I think you better go back into that state *[Laughter]* because, really and so on, by getting involved in the crosstalk you are causing the Member to respond to you, and then you rise on a point of order. It does not make sense. Hon. Member, continue!

Hon. C. Sharma: Mr. Speaker, I was making the point, today our elderly pensioners can also travel free. What it does, it allows all our citizens at any given time to explore any part of this country at nominal cost, because it is important that our citizens have access to all of Trinidad and Tobago at all times. *[Mrs. Mc Intosh leaves Chamber]*

Hon. Member: Three more to go. *[Laughter]*

Hon. C. Sharma: In addition, they can also travel on our boats going to Tobago. We understand the importance of public transport. There was a time when it was felt that public transport was for poor citizens—no longer so, Mr. Speaker. Public transport is for every citizen who wishes to use it.

Today, Members of Parliament—I take the bus from San Fernando sometimes; I take the water taxi, and in the bus or in the water taxi, I will meet others coming to work in Port of Spain; senior bankers, lawyers, coming into Port of Spain for whatever reason. It makes the point that public transport is capturing its international requirements where you can feel comfortable to take the public transport and get to wherever. As a result, we are also maintaining environment-friendly approaches and our intention is to convert our fleet to either CNG or to engage the newest trends that may be available. At the Ministry we keep engaging the best minds, tell us what is happening elsewhere.

Argentina found itself similar to Trinidad and Tobago years ago, both Argentina and Italy, and within the shortest period of time they were able to convert to CNG, and today they are the global leaders in that technology. We are treating with them to find out our own approach.

Already the Minister of Finance and the Economy has indicated, and I must take this opportunity to congratulate both the previous Minister of Finance and the current Minister of Finance and the Economy. Again, it shows you teamwork; one came, built and moved on to another place; another came in and continues building. As I am building from the good works of the former Minister of Transport, Minister Devant Maharaj, and you would have heard from the current Minister of Local Government, the excellent platform he met there. [Laughter] Makes his work so easy, it is almost like he is on automatic pilot.

Mr. Indarsingh: Seamless transition.

Hon. C. Sharma: I want to thank those who caused me to leave that platform, the very distinguished Deputy Speaker, Member for Princes Town and the Member for Couva South, and because of his good work there, he has moved to the Ministry of Finance and the Economy. [Laughter] He was at the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprises Development, he could not have gone there directly, he had to come to local government first. [Laughter]

So, public transport—[Interruption]—the Government understands the importance of it and has made an allocation of \$82 million for continuing improvement works in public transport throughout Trinidad and Tobago. Again,

the twin island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago under Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar, when we read a budget, we read a budget for Trinidad and Tobago, every sector. [*Interruption*] Well, these documents were printed, at cost to the taxpayers, for all Members of Parliament; it is unfortunate that the Members opposite do not read them.

Mr. Speaker, at our airports, coming out of 9/11 and the international learning best practices, is that all our airports must be almost accessible 24 hours, not just for flights, but for emergencies as well, and because Trinidad and Tobago is the leading country in the Caribbean and in this part of Latin America, more and more countries are asking us, in the event of an emergency or an aircraft requiring an emergency landing, where is the best place in the Caribbean so to do? It is in Trinidad. It is in Tobago. We have to make sure that we upgrade our airports continuously, to make sure that there is power.

New York airport, JFK, for instance, has to have reserve power at all times to treat with any aircraft coming in there with any kind of emergency. Trinidad and Tobago is moving in that direction, and again, our Airports Authority boards is making sure that we subscribe to all those standards, and the Government has seen it fit to make sure that moneys are made available to obtain it. You would have seen in the renaming of the ANR Robinson International Airport, it is now declared by all standards an international airport; it means that it has to have all the facilities of an international airport.

Mr. Speaker, the twin island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the best connection is the sea and, as a result our boats must always be back and forth: goods have to be taken to Tobago, passengers have to be taken to Tobago, and we make sure every time we read a budget, funds continue to be injected. The sum of \$5 million would be made available to develop sea transport in Tobago. This sum will enable the THA to construct jetties at Cove and Plymouth; also, construction works at Scarborough and Charlotteville will continue. So, we are making sure as we develop Trinidad, Tobago is not left out in every aspect of it.

Again, along with the airport development, the public transport development in Tobago continues, and in Charlotteville we soon will be erecting a structure to make sure that the buses are serviced and the operators of the buses, so when they run late there is a facility at which they can overnight. And the Tobago facilities, as well, VMCOTT continues, so that the vehicles that require to be serviced in Tobago—public transport buses, the police vehicles—would have a place.

For a long time under the PNM, police vehicles will stay there for simple little things, brakes pad, and the cars would rotten away, something that cost \$60—\$70.

We do not allow that under this Government. We understand the importance of taxpayers' money; we understand the importance of having the ambulances that work; the fire service vehicles that work; the police vehicles that work; all the vehicles that are in public service, and every one of our Ministries where there are vehicles, they are maintained, making sure they do the Government's work at all times.

11.10 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, under this Government, every single contractor has been treated with. I want to repeat that. Every single contractor has been treated with. There is no contractor in this country who can claim he has not gotten work, if not from the Government, from the private sector, because when we engage contractors they sometimes have to subcontract. They will not always have the facility or the quantum of trucks that may be required.

How much money did we pump into that, Sir?—\$7 billion between VAT and what contractors were owed. This money was owed under the PNM watch. They failed to pay it. When we went to the electorate, we said we would treat with VAT returns, we would treat with contractors' moneys—the total, \$7 billion. This is why you have traffic everywhere you go, because every contractor's truck is on the road working; every single one. We paid \$7 billion. The banks were complaining about a cash flow, we pumped \$7 billion. As I indicated earlier, that is a total of \$33 billion. No Government, in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, has come after an election, so soon after, and pumped so much money in the shortest possible time. [*Desk thumping*] No Government.

Dr. Gopeesingh: That is what you inherited, to pay.

Hon. C. Sharma: Thank you for the explanation. Trinidad and Tobago is in very good hands. As I made the point earlier, Mr. Speaker, Government is about continuity. Government is making sure that goods and services must be available to every person regardless of where they are, and the Government's best display of that is to make sure you put the country to work, that you fund projects, you find moneys where necessary. We recently qualified under the IDB—Tim, how is it called, lender status?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yes. No. We are lending to them.

Hon. C. Sharma: We have gain lending status—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: To both IMF and IDB.

Hon. C. Sharma: To both the IMF and the IDB. Again, where in the world a Government coming in two and a half years later, taking over from a Government

that wasted all the money, owing moneys left, right and centre. We were able to pay out those and impress the international agencies to arrive at that.

Dr. Gopeesingh: We are not borrowing from them.

Hon. C. Sharma: It is a pity when Members opposite do not read, do not learn and do not understand. And then the scary part of it is, they run the risk of thinking they could get into Government.

Mr. Speaker, the question on citizens' comfort as it relates to transport—upgrade of priority transit mall facilities, every one of them. So when a passenger goes to our transit malls, whether in San Juan, Curepe, Tunapuna or elsewhere, they must feel welcome. The washroom facilities must be there. There must be seating accommodation. There must be a tuck shop, convenience shops, if they wish to get something to drink while they wait for the bus. It can take place and we are making sure that happens. So you visit any single one of them, you will see it is well done. We are making sure the flag of Trinidad and Tobago is there. The photograph of our President, His Excellency is there. The photograph of our Prime Minister is there, because it is important that they understand this is our country. All our schools are treated similarly.

Mr. Speaker, the last point I wish to raise, the national helicopter service for years was losing money. Under this administration, in two-an-a-half years, we have turned that around. When we meet with the boards, we tell them they are fiercely independent to do what is right and you have no independence to do what is wrong. Should you do anything that is wrong and break any law, the police will be meeting with you. That is important.

Most of the other boards in previous administrations were not directed properly. They made enormous errors that cost the taxpayers billions of dollars. We have changed that culture. I say, this is our country; you want to serve, come and serve. And we did not do like the PNM did ; one member in 10 or 12 Boards, lending themselves, borrowing themselves, borrowing from here, buying there, not at all. Every board, you serve one place.

Today, national helicopters are looking to purchase additional helicopters because there are business opportunities. They are looking to fly throughout the Caribbean now, in the oil industry largely. Of course, at Camden in Couva will be upgraded to make sure that they can treat with the new traffic that will be coming there. We are expecting to purchase a helicopter there estimated to cost \$64 million that will be earning revenue. Again one of the things we are saying to all of our boards—Prime Minister said to us recently, she wants to make sure that

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every Ministry that could do revenue generating projects must bring it to the Cabinet for consideration. That is why we can talk park and ride. That is why we can talk about open ship registry that will be revenue generating, a transit authority that will be revenue generating and revenue saving at the same time.

The Port Authority as we all know over the years had become almost like a party group of the PNM.

Dr. Moonilal: Yes, yes.

Hon. C. Sharma: The wage bill there at the last count was \$234 million. Mr. Speaker, would you believe the overtime there, Sir, is \$92 million? So the PNM cultivated a culture, because if you are paying \$92 million on an annual basis, it is only fair that the workers do everything to earn that \$92 million. But the ports are becoming competitive all over the world. There is an opportunity here for port expansion, because the Panama Canal will cause us to see an additional 300—400 ships calling on our ports. Now, when they come here, they cannot stay very long but when they come here they will be buying fuel, they will be buying food, they will be buying water and they will be bringing goods—enormous opportunities, which should also lead to ship repair opportunity as well. So again, generating revenue, creating jobs.

Soon, UTT will be offering a bachelor's degree in maritime services. This country is really a fantastic country under this governance. So, we will be treating with that in our ports, and we are engaging the unions, we are engaging all the workers, we are saying that you are partners, this port belongs to you public transport, this belongs to you; airport this belongs to you. We are citizens of this country, let us work together—so they are feeling part of it. Before, there was a disconnect, there was no communication, they were treated almost as things. We are saying no, no, no; you are partners with us. You are partners with the Government. You are representing and acting on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, your sons and daughters—and when we make money in these institutions, when we do not waste money in these institutions, we can send more children to study medicine. We can build more schools. We can provide more computers and the list goes on. Ours is about providing goods and services to more and more people. [*Turns to Miss Hospedales and Miss Thomas*] Can you talk a little softer please? You are disturbing me.

Mr. Speaker, one of the critical areas in any port is the cranes which are in high demand all over the world. Panama Canal for instance on this area. Again, we are making sure that our cranes—and we are training our people, because

these cranes are rather very expensive. We are making sure that every facility that is under the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, in any Ministry, that we train more and more people to take active part in the maintenance, in preventing accidents, in reducing accidents. You would see in all our institutions a reduction in accidents. You will see best international practices under the Minister of Labour. High priority area is workers safety. We are always very concerned. We do not wait for something to happen and say, you know we should have done A, B or C. We may learn from it, but we are making sure that we minimize those things by presenting the best opportunity and we are treating with our employees wherever they are, in every section at the Ministry and elsewhere, because this is the policy of the Government. It is not that one Ministry will do it differently. Every Ministry is obligated to always look after the interest of those who serve in that particular place.

Mr. Speaker, I find it very, very interesting to be in this year's debate because we are in midterm of our five-year contract with the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We are extremely satisfied that we are delivering as we promised. The social contract we engaged, entered into with the people in 2010, when the Government Manifesto became Government policy, we implemented it. We said that there would be fairness to all. There would be opportunities for all. Today, any child in any part of this country has an opportunity to obtain education straight up to the university level. When he does well as the country saw, scholarships, postgraduate work—today, job opportunities anywhere. Today you would see in the newspapers for the last 20-plus months, something you never saw before, ads appearing daily about tenders, bids, job opportunities. It is not a secret Government. It is an open Government, as transparent as it can be.

You will see never before in the history of any country in the world has a government been able to settle so many industrial matters, and we must congratulate, of course, the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprises Development. [*Desk thumping*] Nowhere in the country—and this information is important, that the schools must become aware of and all our partners elsewhere, more than 40 matters settled in the shortest of time. Even at public transport, one day they strike—the bus workers—within hours of that strike the matters were dealt with, and they met with the Minister 7.00 a.m. or 4.00 a.m.

Mr. McLeod: We met at 4.00 p.m. and finished at 5.00 a.m.

Hon. C. Sharma: We met at 4.00 p.m., at 5.00 a.m. the matter was resolved. This is at global, high level, and again, what are we doing differently? We are

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leveling with the people. We are saying, we are in this together, this is our country, let us develop it.

I want to extend an invitation to all the few persons, whether 1,000, 10,000, whatever number that may be supporters of the PNM, to get involved in the governance. I am not suggesting that you leave the PNM, but take a look and see what your Government is doing, whether you live in Laventille or in Fyzabad. Whether you live in Cedros or Moruga, we are treating with you. Your child is attending school there, that child is getting a computer. That child has an opportunity to win a scholarship. You are seeking employment in any one of the Government agencies, it is open. You are looking for a loan to go into business, it is available to you. You have to have an operation in the hospital, any one of our hospitals, it is available. We are ahead of the game.

I want to thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and to congratulate all those who have spoken in this budget. Thank you.

Mrs. Nela Khan (*Princes Town*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity at this time of the evening or the night to participate in this debate of the Appropriation Bill 2012/2013. Mr. Speaker, I want to commend my colleague, the Minister of Finance and the Economy, on his sterling presentation and well thought out budget presentation and to also give full support to the fiscal measures and other associated policies and prescriptions outlined in his budget presentation which could simply be called the people's budget.

11.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, so much has been said in this debate on both sides of the House. Allow me, Mr. Speaker, to talk about my constituency a bit, the constituency of Princes Town. This thriving constituency sits between the constituencies of Naparima, Tabaquite, Moruga/Tableland and Mayaro, all of whom experience many problems as regards rural neglect by the past regime. When I say, rural neglect, Mr. Speaker, rural neglect to the max, which, to me, is a wrongdoing inflicted on innocent people, all for the sake of only political partisan. I remember those days—very dark and gloomy days. I sat in another house in Princes Town at that time, and I remember all the many issues that faced us during those dark, gloomy days.

Rural development is a basis for economic development, and information is an important ingredient in the development process. The hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, and the entire People's Partnership Government recognize the need for development of our people and, as a result, immediately directed our focus on the development of the citizens and

the development of Trinidad and Tobago. Today, Mr. Speaker, the people of the constituency of Princes Town can boast of the many developments that have started under this Government and with many more to come.

Agricultural access roads: something that we have not seen in Princes Town for a long, long time. As you know, the south is known as the food basket of this nation, and Princes Town contributes to a big portion of agricultural growth and development. We work hand in hand with all the Ministries, moreso the many delivery Ministries for the further growth and development within the constituency of Princes Town. Agricultural access roads, Mr. Speaker, a justified initiative to assist farmers in their plight, who endure hardship in reaping their produce from their gardens. I heard the Minister of State in the Ministry of Food Production outline the many advancements to farmers in making life easier for them as we proceed as the People Partnership Government.

Some of the agricultural roads that have been completed thus far—a total of 12. I know I heard my colleague from Naparima outline the list as well, and I am very, very happy that the Member for Naparima can stand up in this Parliament today and boast about some of the many roads and the achievements of the People's Partnership Government, and I, too, can say the very said thing, Mr. Speaker. These include: Arch Trace; Mogan Trace; Cipriani Trace, Mohoganie Trace, Julien Trace, Bromage Road, Niamath Trace, Maurice Gobin Trace, Morgan Trace, Junior Trace off Watts Road, and, of course, Morgan Trace and its environs. Mr. Speaker, that takes care of agricultural access roads, with many more to come.

Construction of bridges: again, to assist farmers and residents who endure hardship in reaping their produce from their gardens; a total of 10 bridges have been completed: the Fairfield Road Bridge—the community where I was born and raised; Old Piparo Road; Stafford Road; Neckchuddy Road; Mantacool Road; Mairo 6th Avenue; Gafoor Extension Trace; Halls Trace; Pascal Road; Gransaul Trace; Pancho Trace, and many others.

Mr. Speaker, I want to turn your attention to landslips, the eyesore that once plagued the constituency. Many works were started. Many have been completed and, to date, there are many on a listing of proposals—many more to come. Mr. Speaker, I know my colleague from Moruga/Tableland feels the same way as myself and, of course, the Member for Naparima. We are plagued in those constituencies by landslips: St. Julien Road, the restoration of 20 landslips out of 32; Naparima Road, out of 38 landslips we have done thus far, five; Buen Intento Road, three landslips; Sisters Road; the M1 Taska Road; Jeffers Road and

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Brothers Road. A total of 31 landslips have been stabilized out of a total of 129. The infrastructural development work has started with much more to come.

Mr. Speaker, I want to turn your attention to box drains in the constituency of Princes Town. We have completed 29 box drains at the level of local government, at the level of the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure and at the level of the URP: Naparima/Mayaro Road; Buen Intento Road; Sisters Road; Gransaul Trace; Old Piparo Road; Hosinee Trace; Thomas Ross Road; Torrib Tabaquire Road; Neckchuddy Road; Busy Corner; Guaracara Recreation Ground—that is the surroundings of the Guaracara Recreation Ground—Suedath Avenue; Craignish Village; Cyril Mohan Trace; Paradise Avenue; Eckles Village, Williamsville; Maurice Gobin Park, Williamsville; Robert Village, Tableland; Yankee Dan Road in Williamsville; School Trace; Gangaram Road; Daily Road; Samad Trace; Khans Avenue; La Gloria Settlement; Tableland 1st Branch and Gaffoor Extension.

Mr. Speaker, where under the past regime we could have experienced such production at this level? Only under the People's Partnership Government I am saying that we were able to achieve all of these. Mr. Speaker, I do not know what would have happened if the People's Partnership was not elected to office, you know, but I do not even want to imagine what would have happened.

Mr. Indarsingh: Do not contemplate that.

Mrs. N. Khan: Mr. Speaker, the former Minister of Works and Infrastructure, in his visit, along with the Minister of State in the very said Ministry, the Member for Oropouche West, were both horrified by the sight of the destruction which is now the remnant of the Piparo volcano that happened some years ago. It was horrible; it was horrendous. I could see the cringe on both Ministers' faces when they visited, and I want to quote the then Minister of Works and Infrastructure when he said: "MP Khan, this is the worst I have seen in the history of Trinidad and Tobago." I repeat: "This is the worst I have seen in the history of Trinidad and Tobago."

Mr. Speaker, he gave me, as the Member of Parliament, and the people, the assurance that within six months we would have the roadway and drainage restored so as to bring back life and stability to the people of Piparo and its environs. Mr. Speaker, in less than six months, so said, so done, under the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure. I thanked the hon. Minister at that time, who is now the Minister of National Security.

A number of 25 roads have been paved at the levels of the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure and at the Ministry of Local Government. I commend the former Minister of Local Government, my dear colleague, the hon. Member for Fyzabad, and then the Minister of State in the very said Ministry who I worked alongside with, the Member for Couva North. The hard work continues under the new Minister of Local Government, the Member for Tabaquite, and I commend the Member for his commitment and dedication to local government. Local government is in the safe hands with the Member for Tabaquite.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take your attention to some road paving as well. Like I say, it was a combined effort of the Ministry of Local Government and, of course, the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure: Old Piparo Road; Hosinee Trace; Thomas Ross Road; Charlotte Street; Bonanza Street; Cyril Mohan Street; St. Julien Road, which is on the Naparima/Mayaro Road; Piparo Link Road; Mairo 6th Avenue, Tableland; Mairo 3rd Avenue; Mairo 9th Avenue; Farmer Trace; Mc Clean Street; La Gloria Settlement; Sancho Branch Road; Khan Avenue, 1 and 2, and many, many others; again, Mr. Speaker, which is of course in the pipeline to come.

Mr. Speaker, of course we continue with the construction of footpaths as well. In the constituency of Princes Town we have constructed so far, three footpaths which carry a measurement of 150 metres on the Naparima/Mayaro Road; Hardbargain and, of course, in Sisters Road.

A bus service: people in this rural area can now depend on a government bus service. The newest route to join the fleet, Mr. Speaker, is the route from Sisters Road, Hardbargain, that takes passengers straight into San Fernando. I want to thank the then Minister of Transport for his initiative in affording us the privilege in Princes Town to have a bus service in those rural areas.

The consideration of community centres, as well, Mr. Speaker—the opening of Sisters Road Community Centre by the then Minister of Community Development and the La Gloria Community Centres as well, all under the People's Partnership Government. The completion of seven water projects thus far—we have quite a few more in the pipeline as well which are going to come very soon. They are the 6th Avenue Tableland; Piparo Extension Road; Piparo Junction Road; Mairo 6th Avenue.

I held consultation and dialogue with the Minister of State in the Ministry and soon to come are water projects in Glenroy Settlement; Nivet Trace; Jagdeo Trace; Nohar Trace; Burial Ground Trace; Mc Sween Trace; Bhagwantee Trace;

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Jadoo Trace, and many others. And would you believe in this day and age, Mr. Speaker, we are talking about communities over—I heard one of my colleagues say 100 years, which I would want to say as well—maybe close to 100 years that have not seen pipe borne water. Today, I want to commend the People’s Partnership Government, as we proceed to make life easier for the people of this country, the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Recreation grounds: George Village, Tableland Recreation Ground, nearing its completion. I want to thank the Minister of Sport as well. Sancho Road, as well, Mr. Speaker, and the Tableland Recreation Ground—nearing their completion. And, of course, you would have heard the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara in his contribution when he reiterated all the efforts to start the multi-facility at Yolande Pompey Recreation Ground, a long outstanding project, Mr. Speaker, and the Minister has given the assurance that, of course, we will be starting that as well pretty soon.

Housing: the start of the construction of 500 homes under the Ministry of Housing in the Fairfield area to cater for the housing needs of the many applicants who so qualify for housing. It is a community, Mr. Speaker, where I was born and raised, and I remember working those said lands on which those houses are being constructed today. So, Mr. Speaker, it is 500 homes and I know there are more to come, as said by the Minister of Housing.

The social needs of the people of Princes Town, more so the underprivileged, are also high on the front burner. Applicants for food cards and grants who so qualify and other social matters: wheelchairs, house grants, NSDP projects, electricity to homes, water to individual homes, self-help projects, and many more.

Training under the URP in the field of agriculture: I know my colleagues in agriculture, both the Minister in the Ministry of Food Production and, of course, my other colleague, would be happy to know this. We have trained more than 100 persons in the field of agriculture in the constituency of Princes Town, who will not just be able to work alongside the farmers, but, of course, will be able to help themselves as farmers as well.

The women’s training programme: to assist women in their quest to become marketable in a lifelong skill; the setting-up for the first time, an office of on-the-job training in Princes Town, and I want to thank the then Minister of Science and Tertiary Education, and I also want to say to this Parliament today that the youths are making full use of that particular office under the Ministry of Science and Tertiary Education. After two years, Mr. Speaker, all of this delivery has been

given, not just to Princes Town, but across Trinidad and Tobago. What should we expect for the next two-and-a-half years, we can well imagine.

11.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, sports and other games continue to make waves in the constituency of Princes Town. Three weeks ago we closed off a seven-a-side football competition within the constituency of Princes Town, where 15 teams played the game, where prizes were distributed to three of the teams. The cricket games continue, other games continue as well. Growth and development continue. It might be coming slow, but I am asking to have some patience, as we move along in the future development, not just of Princes Town, but of Trinidad and Tobago, as well.

Mr. Speaker, URP and CEPEP continue to be a driving component in the enhancement and development of the constituency. Success and progress in developing countries lie in the development of the rural communities. I say this, Mr. Speaker, and my colleagues will attest to the fact that—you know long ago—and it is something you do not really see in this day and age. I really wish that the communities can bring back these things together.

You had community effort by villagers years ago. It has changed. Some things have changed. We agree that some things have changed. I say this and I want to make an example. When you have a wake in the village, I do not know if you remember the days when the whole community will come together to lend support to the families. When there is a wedding in the village, you see the community coming together to lend support, to build the tent, to lay the chairs out together. When there is “a prayers”, whether it is a “jugg”, whether it is a Koranic reading, whatever prayer meeting you see the communities coming together.

Today, for some reason, we do not have any such community efforts by villagers coming together. I want to say in this Chamber tonight, in this august House, that Princes Town can boast of those efforts, combined efforts of communities as we move on to serve our people.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank my constituents. They have been the live wire and the driving force behind my representation. I want to commend all my colleagues tonight who have made their sterling contributions in this House as regards to the Bill before us. Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much.

The Minister of Public Administration (Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan):
Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute in this debate on the Appropriation (Financial Year 2013) Bill, 2012.

Appropriation Bill, 2012
[HON C. SEEPERSAD-BACHAN]

Tuesday, October 09, 2012.

Mr. Speaker, let me take the opportunity to congratulate the Minister of Finance and the Economy on his maiden budget presentation. He has demonstrated his understanding of the national and global context, and proposed measures that would continue the good work pursued by his predecessor, to strengthen our economy with a view to the long-term health and development of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Minister of Finance and the Economy referred to two concepts in his budget presentation. The first concept is “value for money”, which was referred to twice in his presentation; firstly in the context of improving the Human Development Index and secondly, from the perspective of balancing our budget and as part of the financial reform process.

The second concept referred to is the “ease of doing business’ which is crucial to improving the competitiveness of our country, according to the World Bank’s 2012, Ease of Doing Business rankings. Trinidad and Tobago stands in the 68th position out of 183 countries. Although this is an improvement of 13 places since the Government took office in May 2010, we are still not satisfied with our global competitiveness as alluded to by the Minister of Finance and the Economy. His point is that we are nowhere near where we should be if we are to attract further investments and accelerate the transformation of this economy.

He cited the World Bank Report, which showed that our country underperformed in the area of business facilitation. Key areas of concern include: starting a business, registering property, getting credit, dealing with construction permits, trading across borders, protecting investors, paying taxes, enforcing contracts and resolving insolvency.

As Minister of Public Administration, I must admit that the public sector is responsible for several of these services that need to be improved if we are to become more competitive. In fact, the public service is deemed to be a major contributor to improving the ease of doing business in this country. There remains a large untapped potential, unexploited within the public service that can lead to significant improvements in this area.

There are two other critical measures that follow from the emphasis on value for money and ease of doing business. These are productivity and accountability. The Minister made the link between productivity and international competitiveness and their impact on our ability to generate sustainable wealth. If we look at the public service closely, we would recognize that it is indeed a business. Think about it. The public service creates, provides and distributes

goods and services. The people of this country pay the public service—that is the Government—to run their business for them. Even if there is no direct financial cost there is an opportunity cost for acquiring or accessing the public service.

When a citizen leaves Tabaquite or Rio Claro or Las Cuevas or—as the last speaker, the Deputy Speaker—Princes Town, Toco, Siparia and Moruga and have to come to Port of Spain to apply for any public service including scholarships, there is a cost in terms of the time that is spent and which in some way could have led to some other productive activity.

Mr. Speaker, we recognize the need to look at public administration across the entire public service as a business, with a mandate for improving the ease of doing business, improving our competitiveness, reducing actual costs, reducing opportunity cost and ensuring that—regardless of race, creed, colour or geography—our citizens, including the public officers themselves, can get the best possible service in the shortest possible time, at the lowest possible cost and at the highest possible quality.

In my view, if the public service is responsible for producing and providing goods and services, it must be held accountable. In other words, with responsibility comes accountability. If you agree with me that the public service is a business that could benefit from the business approach and profit from business orientation, then you must also agree with me that this is everybody's business.

Mr. Sharma: Good point, good point.

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: We are all shareholders of this business. It is to our advantage to grow the business. It is to our advantage to make the business more efficient, more reliable, more customer focused, more citizen centric, more transparent, more productive and much more accountable. The business of Government is the governance of business and not just in the private sector but in the public sector.

What are our strategies for transformation? For there to be successful transformation, there must be increased collaboration across Ministries and departments in order to deliver integrated services. There must be highly trained and motivated staff with the right training tools and rewarding roles. We must have—and I do not want to just say, “efficient”, because a lot of the time we talk about efficiency. We have to speak to more effective service delivery through multi-channel capabilities, including our one-stop-shops and the “no-wrong-door” approach as we heard from the Minister of the People and Social Development.

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Mr. Speaker, in June of 2011 the Green Paper on transforming the civil service through renewal and modernization was launched by the former Minister of Public Administration, former Sen. Nan Ramgoolam. Since then we have reviewed and looked at this paper and done some further analysis. In order to serve our 21st Century citizen, public service must build effective collaboration across Ministries and agencies, as I just stated, in addition to collaboration with the business and civil society. Therefore, we have expanded the Green Paper to include renewal and modernization of the entire public service. This involves, as we move towards that White Paper, consultation with focused groups and open discussions.

Mr. Speaker, in the issue of moving forward in the human resource architecture, I really want now to turn to a project that we have been working on over the last fiscal year. It is called, Modernizing the Human Resource Architecture for the Public Service.

You know, what was very interesting to me is that when we looked at the public service of Trinidad and Tobago, one of the first things that we heard is how archaic this architecture is. It is important to note that we are dealing with an architecture that was established in the 1960s, as you, Mr. Speaker, would know. One of the things that came out of all our focus groups is how archaic the systems are, that do not allow for the effective management of the resources, how bottom heavy is the public service. We now know today the amount of conflicts we have in the public service between contract and established employees and the lack of the required competencies and accountabilities.

We have heard a lot about inadequate performance management. When we hear about the length of time for appointments through the Service Commission Department, the large number of contract positions with terms and conditions have yet to be determined. Those terms and conditions I am saying, is not just a year old, in terms of, for determination, but sometimes 10 years old.

Mr. Speaker, this was very, very alarming for me when I came in. Therefore, the first thing that we did, was to say, let us look at what should be an architecture for a modern public service, a 21st Century public service. In order to do so, what we did was we decided to have focus groups and with those focus groups, it was very interesting to hear some of the things that came out of those focus groups.

Mr. Speaker, you would be surprised to know that we held this series of focus group sessions which were held in Trinidad and Tobago from March to May 2012. The following statements I make here represent some of the positions

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presented by civil servants. Interestingly, this is one comment that we heard: “The public service is not a healthy working environment—”

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Housing, Land and Marine Affairs (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to tomorrow, Wednesday, October 10, 2012 at 10.00 a.m. and we will continue the debate on the Appropriation Bill before us. I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 11.53 p.m.